

Theater of the Oppressed as a Rhizome

Acting for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Today

by

Mariana Leal Ferreira and Dominique Devine

The spread of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed across the Americas and the rest of the world can be understood in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome, whose nomadic habit of growth and propagation mirrors the power of Theater of the Oppressed to reproduce itself in more than 70 countries worldwide. The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome is now deeply rooted in academia and has sprouted in classrooms and in the streets, bringing together students, scholars, administrators, policy makers, and community activists in the pursuit of social justice and human rights. An examination of its use as a pedagogical tool calls attention to its potential for creating a world in which human rights are appreciated and protected. Its use is particularly timely today given the worldwide attention to the rights of the indigenous peoples represented by the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.

La difusión del Teatro del oprimido de Augusto Boal a través las Américas y el resto del mundo puede verse en términos de la metáfora del rizoma utilizada por Deleuze y Guattari, donde el hábito de crecimiento nomádico y propagación refleja el poder de dicho método de reproducirse en más de 70 países alrededor del mundo. El rizoma del Teatro del oprimido se ha enraizado profundamente en el ámbito académico y florecido en aulas y calles, uniendo estudiantes, investigadores, administradores, responsables políticos y activistas comunitarios interesados en la justicia social y los derechos humanos. Un análisis de su uso como herramienta pedagógica muestra su potencial para crear un mundo que reconozca y proteja los derechos humanos. Esto resulta de particular relevancia hoy día dada la atención mundial conferida a los derechos de los pueblos indígenas a partir de la Declaración de las Naciones Unidas sobre los derechos de los pueblos indígenas de 2007.

Keywords: *Theater of the Oppressed, Indigenous peoples, Augusto Boal, Popular education, Human rights*

Mariana Leal Ferreira is a medical anthropologist using art and community-based partnerships to eliminate health disparities in South and North America. She is currently an associate professor of anthropology at San Francisco State University in California, where she co-directs the Global Peace, Human Rights, and Social Justice Program. Dominique Devine is a graduate student at San Francisco State University. She has studied conflict and peacekeeping and is currently researching issues in women's health. They thank their colleagues at SFSU for their insights and support. The writing of this article was made possible by grants P20 MD000544 and 1R13MD005792-01 from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The ideas expressed here do not necessarily represent the views or official position of the NIH.

LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 183, Vol. 39 No. 2, March 2012 11-26
DOI: 10.1177/0094582X11427888
© 2012 Latin American Perspectives

Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even non-sign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. . . . It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows.

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

A series of plays in the tradition of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed on indigenous peoples' rights in contemporary North and South America—their histories of genocide, capital punishment and incarceration, disease and starvation, and the struggle to repatriate their ancestors' remains—calls attention to what indigenous peoples are doing today to fight for justice and self-determination. We suggest here that arts-based performances encourage decolonizing points of view. The power of Theater of the Oppressed lies in its ability to reach out to broad audiences that rarely have access to human rights education. Our argument is that, spreading like a rhizome, Theater of the Oppressed can produce viable pollen and hybridize with other forms of community and academic knowledge to facilitate public discussion of the protection of indigenous peoples' rights. The topic is especially timely given the recent adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms the minimum human rights standards necessary for the "survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world," among them self-determination, protection from discrimination and genocide, and the right to the land and resources that are essential to their identity, health, and livelihood.

The new millennium has seen growing interest in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of the rhizome in popular education (Douglas-Jones and Sariola, 2009; Gough, 2006). The metaphor of the rhizome involves a decentered, nonhierarchical system that favors a nomadic system of growth and propagation. Theater of the Oppressed workshops and laboratories are dispersed by natural and man-made causes alike. The countries of exile of Augusto Boal, Paulo Freire, and other popular educators during the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–1985), including Argentina, Chile, France, Portugal, and several African countries, do not follow the linear trajectory of academic knowledge, nor do the more recent popular offshoots of the revolutionary theater movement follow a predictable plot. The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome has "multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 21). We seek to engender a cartography of Theater of the Oppressed multiplicities connected to other dramatic possibilities, focusing on the North and South American plateaus. Brazil is the mother-plateau as the site of the first tuber, Boal's Center for Theater of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, whose rhizomatic qualities enabled this revolutionary theater movement to spread first underground and then into the streets.

The literature on the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the propagation and growth of Theater of the Oppressed is scant. Rather than a linear historical trajectory, we want to map an assemblage of distant, radiant tuber-points that "establishes connections between certain multiplicities"

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 23). The potential of Theater of the Oppressed has been seen as a “rehearsal of revolution” (Boal, 1985 [1974]: 141). Here our goal is to map spurts of writing, directing, and performing in academia and, in particular, at San Francisco State University (SFSU), where we work. We have found inspiration in traces of Theater of the Oppressed in social networks such as Facebook, as well as in more traditional national and international symposia and conferences. It is always “in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*.” While the tree “imposes the verb ‘to be’, the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction ‘and . . . and . . . and . . .’ ” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 25).

The protagonists of our plays—Wanderley Guarani, an Amazonian prophet and warrior who liberated his people from military dictatorship (in *Firewater*); Antonio da Silva, a seven-year-old *nordestino* who offered himself as a sacrifice to save his sisters (in *The Madness of Hunger*); IronHawk, an Apache warrior (in *IronHawk on Death Row*); Mollie Ruud, a Yurok woman who devoted her life to defending the fishing rights of her people (in *Diabetes Jackpot*); and Pecwan Sky Girl, a medicine woman who fought for the repatriation of ancestral human remains (in *May Your Body Lay Naked on Mother Earth*)—have set the stage for ever-expanding Theater of the Oppressed experiences at SFSU in the past decade. They have helped us weave deeper connections between the life experiences of faculty, staff, and students and the university’s core values of equity and social justice. The five plays, all based on historical facts, were written by Mariana Ferreira to raise awareness about the rights of indigenous peoples in the Americas, and all five have been stage-read and/or performed in public places by Dominique Devine and students and colleagues at SFSU and at the University of California, Berkeley.¹

When Theater of the Oppressed insinuates itself into the classroom or out into the streets, human rights education becomes an inspiring and powerful experience. Inviting students and community members to perform our plays on indigenous peoples’ rights or to write and perform their own allows for alternative scenarios and the real possibility of peaceful endings. Drama promotes critical thinking. The discussion and dissemination of these plays enables students and others to reflect upon and formulate their own ideas of a just world. Theater of the Oppressed has the power to spark strong student activism and promote social change in provocative ways (Albarello, 2007; Chung, 2011; Van der Horn-Gibson and Marín, 2008; Johnson, 2005; McLennan and Smith, 2007; Solorzano, 1989; Thompson, 1997). Playwriting and acting enhance the imagination, triggering feelings that might otherwise remain dormant in academic or public settings.

Throughout the centuries, theater has shown its power to change public and community perception of social problems (Bartlett, 2005; Bradley, 2006; Brecht, 1964 [1930]; 1977; Kuhn, Brecht, and Giles, 2003; Styan, 1981) However, as Boal (1993 [1975]: 142) explains, “we are used to plays in which the characters make the revolution on stage and the spectators in their seats feel themselves to be triumphant revolutionaries.” Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 5) would agree: insofar as theater assumes the form of a root-tree, “to which our modernity pays willing allegiance,” there is no possibility for dialogue. “It is not a method for the people” (8). What is theater without discussion? While

Boal himself did not expect theater itself to be revolutionary, he said that Theater of the Oppressed presented a radical opportunity for social change. It was certainly a "*rehearsal of revolution*" (1985 [1974]: 141, italics in the original) because it invited the audience to participate on stage in the theatrical action, to intervene and propose alternative solutions to oppression that could change the history of their lives. In this respect, the audience—transformed into "spect-actors" rather than mere spectators (Boal, 1985 [1974])—experienced the "connection and heterogeneity" of the rhizome by taking part in the play as actors. Here we are far from the elitist, bourgeois form of theater that Brecht (1964 [1930]; 1977) also condemned.

THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED IN LATIN AMERICA AND WORLDWIDE

Given the rapid multiplication of workshops dedicated to popular education in schools, prisons, and community centers, as well as its subterranean, revolutionary independent growth, the Theater of the Oppressed rhizome obviously does not depend on the government or corporate-sanctioned initiatives that practitioners call "superficial tracing." What we want to do here is produce a map, which differs from the tracing in that "it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12).

Theater of the Oppressed emerged in Brazil in the early 1970s and first extended its multiple entryways throughout Brazil and then to Africa, with laboratories sprouting in Mozambique, the Ivory Coast, and Angola, whose governments at the time were less repressive to revolutionary movements and the creative arts than Brazil's military junta. Most of these organizations focused both on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 2006a [1970]) and on Theater of the Oppressed (Boal, 1985 [1974]), instruments for critical-historical reflection, social interaction, and pedagogical practice.

The fall of the Brazilian military dictatorship in 1985 and open democratic elections that same year sparked an explosion of uncensored Theater of the Oppressed initiatives in Brazil and elsewhere in South America. As rhizome buds often do, Theater of the Oppressed emerged from the relative darkness of its exclusive subterranean subsistence into the limelight and the essence of its novel, open democratic character. The Centro de Teatro do Oprimido (Theater of the Oppressed Center), founded in 1986 in Rio de Janeiro, soon became a well-known research center for the development of its methods and teachings. The center's initial goal was to revise, experiment with, analyze, and systematize the exercises, games, and techniques of Boal's methodology. To this day, Theater of the Oppressed labs and seminars are producing theatrical spectacles and artistic projects based on the aesthetics of the oppressed (Boal, 2006 [1975]). Most of these projects relate to education, mental health, the prison system, and the civil rights and human rights movements, aiming at social change via community dialogue and aesthetic, artistic pathways. The center's mission is to strengthen citizenship and social justice as a democratic way of transforming society. Its mission statement

incites to social action directed at the affirmation and protection of oppressed peoples as protagonists of their own lives. Its values are spelled out very clearly: Life + Ethics + Solidarity + Aesthetics + Dialogue (Centro de Teatro do Oprimido, 2009).

Starting in the late 1980s, the Brazilian government, through its Ministry of Education and Culture, lifted the military censorship on Theater of the Oppressed by lending support to community-based performing arts. "Fábricas de teatro popular" (popular theater factories) dedicated to social transformation mushroomed across the country, in classrooms and in the streets, as the fruiting bodies of Theater of the Oppressed's rhizomatic growth. According to the Fábrica de Teatro Popular-Nordeste (2008), the strategy has always been to "create networks of multipliers and popular groups that will use Theater of the Oppressed methodology" with the goal of "diffusing and proliferating popular theater across the country." Theater of the Oppressed factories or workshops in Brazil "develop their activities in communities and universities, in the countryside and in the city. They also encompass activities for persons with disabilities, and thus broaden the possibilities of expression for diverse social groups, helping to find alternative solutions to everyday problems." Today there are dozens of Master's theses and doctoral dissertations in Brazil on Theater of the Oppressed workshops and the use of theater as a pedagogical tool.

Mapping the growth of popular theater outside of Brazil is no easy task. In South America, countries that underwent military dictatorships like Brazil's, including Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay, seem to have developed Theater of the Oppressed activity earlier and more intensely. Boal, who was arrested and tortured by the military in Brazil in 1971 because of his revolutionary theater movement, spent the first five years of his exile in Argentina. Popular community theater sprang up all over Argentina with the end of military rule in 1983 (Borba, 2007). Decades later, in January 2010, Argentina organized the First Latin American Theater of the Oppressed Conference, which included dozens of local, national, and international Theater of the Oppressed workshops. The event was sponsored by the Red Latinoamericana de Teatro del Oprimido Sur, a popular network whose goal is to bring forum theater and other Theater of the Oppressed techniques to marginalized communities and educational centers in the province of Jujuy, Argentina, and beyond.

Amantes del Teatro del Oprimido Chile (Lovers of Theater of the Oppressed Chile) has a Facebook page visited by hundreds of Latin American supporters. As a fast-growing rhizome, the Theater of the Oppressed Facebook page links interested people around the world. From this site we learn, for instance, that in November 2010 Theater of the Oppressed flourished in Bañado Sur, Paraguay, among members of the youth organization 1811, whose goal was to use Theater of the Oppressed to "infiltrate into the local community to find tangible alternatives to demonstrate and denounce the local reality" (Ecos del Paraguay, 2010). And in Peru the blog Foro-Red Paulo Freire-Peru chimes in with discussion of liberating education in Peru, Latin America, and the world. These are but a handful of Theater of the Oppressed buds sprouting along what is now a worldwide rhizomatic network of participatory education via popular theater.

Boal's eight-year exile in France in the 1980s, after his forced stays in Argentina and Portugal, produced a number of Theater of the Oppressed laboratories in Europe. In Berlin the NGO Sabisa employs creative media and the performing arts in projects for social transformation and community cultural development. Sabisa partners around the globe use Theater of the Oppressed in its various modalities (forum theater, image theater, invisible theater, legislative theater) as a pedagogical tool to inspire social change.²

THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN BRAZIL

Our focus here on the human rights aspect of Theater of the Oppressed stems primarily from Mariana Ferreira's experience as a schoolteacher and a practical nurse in indigenous areas of Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s and as a medical anthropologist and human rights educator in the Americas (Ferreira and Lang, 2006). In the Americas, more than 90 percent of the original population—at least 20 million people—were summarily exterminated after the European invasion in the late 1400s. It is not difficult to imagine how different the fate of these communities would have been had their basic human rights been respected from the start (Ferreira, 2004; 2002; Ferreira and Suhrbier, 2002; Nelson, 2008).

From the beginning, Ferreira's work in both health and education was oriented by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006a [1970]) provided substantial insights for young revolutionary educators developing a system of popular education in Brazilian indigenous schools during the military dictatorship. The networking of Theater of the Oppressed, considered subversive by the government, proved invaluable to her practice.

Freire's work, helping people see themselves as historical actors capable of organizing on their own and creating social change, had inspired Augusto Boal to invent Theater of the Oppressed in the late 1960s. Freire developed his philosophy of popular education among the illiterate poor of the Brazilian Northeast. Starting in the late 1940s, he emphasized peasants' ability to generate knowledge collectively, using "generative words" such as "land," "water," and "food" that broadly conveyed their life conditions and worldviews. Military dictators strongly opposed this system of popular education, and both Freire and Boal were forced into exile. Popular educators connected with nongovernmental and indigenous organizations and academic institutions such as the Comissão Pró-Índio de São Paulo (Pro-Indian Commission of São Paulo) and the University of São Paulo defied the military ban on Freire's and Boal's ideas and carried out revolutionary educational programs in spite of strong retaliation. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was still only in draft form, and rights-based meetings were either banned or heavily censored by the military.

Following Freire's critical pedagogy, Ferreira and her indigenous students in central Brazil posited that learning was an act of culture and freedom through *conscientização*. Freire (2007 [1973]) defined critical consciousness as the ability to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and take

collective action against it. The activities and publications produced by Xavante, Kayabi, Suyá, and Juruna students in the Xingu Indigenous Park reflected this consciousness, which was understood to have the power to transform reality (see, e.g., Ferreira, 1992; 1994; 1997). In order to evade repression by the military, the students sometimes wrote and performed plays and wrote short stories using pseudonyms. The 1988 Constitution helped empower the organized indigenous movement in the country, reflecting a worldwide trend. In the original draft of the UN Declaration, which had been put together in 1985 by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (the world's largest human rights forum), the right to cultural diversity, to quality education and health care, and to occupation of ancestral territories was a major theme, but the concrete implementation of such rights was far from the reality. Indigenous peoples around the world still experience poverty, ill health, and racial discrimination. They are united in their suffering, but they are also united in working toward having their rights respected. The UN Declaration reflects more than 30 years of hard work on the part of the peoples themselves to develop this important international instrument of human rights protection.

In the Xingu Indigenous Park, Freire's emphasis on dialogue and on working together to transform the world materialized in plays, short stories, memoirs, drawings, photographs, and maps published collectively in numerous newsletters, first-readers, atlases, and history books used in indigenous schools where Ferreira lived and worked in the 1980s. Most young teachers and nurses working on indigenous reservations throughout Brazil viewed education as an effort to liberate people rather than as yet another instrument for dominating them. Freire's insistence on situating educational activity in the lived experience of the community had opened up a series of possibilities for the way education was conducted in Brazilian schools, including indigenous ones. Thus Theater of the Oppressed closely mirrored the dialogical aspects of Freire's critical pedagogies of hope (2006b [1992]), the heart (2000 [1997]), and freedom (1998 [1984]).

Students from 17 distinct indigenous nations, speaking 17 different languages, attended the Diauarum School in the Xingu Park, where Ferreira taught mathematics and Portuguese in the 1980s. In 1981 she and her students put together several original plays at the school. *Fishing on the Xingu River* conveyed the daily practices of local communities that relied heavily on fishing for survival. The idea was for communities to share techniques for catching a variety of freshwater fish in the Amazon basin. To this end, games were quickly developed to introduce these practices to immigrant villagers such as the Panará, relocated from far away by the military. Similar activities were developed for hunting techniques for large animals such as the tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*), which were published widely in Portuguese and indigenous languages.

At the Diauarum School, in the true spirit of mostly Freire's and Boal's pedagogy of liberation, Ferreira was experimenting with new forms of popular education and interactive theater. The oppression was the forced dislocation of indigenous peoples from their original lands, rich in timber and gold, and their confinement in poverty on diminutive reservations. The pedagogical aim was to provide students with the resources (literacy, mathematics, history, and

map-making skills) that would foster their autonomous growth and decision-making power. UN documents showed that, along with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, Brazil followed the policies developed by the United States in the 1800s to deal with “native populations”: encapsulation on reservations, confinement in boarding schools, and no attention to economic development. The comparison was fruitful especially because it offered the students, many of whom were community leaders, the opportunity to recognize that similar types of oppression led to comparable outcomes: indigenous peoples worldwide face high rates of degenerative diseases, including cancer and diabetes, as well as a number of social ailments, such as depression and drug addiction (Ferreira and Lang, 2006). The practice of forum theater allowed students from different ethnic groups to offer alternative solutions to urgent problems.

As Boal predicted, Theater of the Oppressed helped reveal the more subtle forms of oppression, such as the military’s perverse system of privilege and compensation. *Fishing on the Xingu River* helped reveal problems such as the water pollution caused by cattle raising, mining, and logging. The school’s many publications, including the newsletter *Memórias do Xingu* (Xingu Memories), were initially printed on an alcohol-run mimeograph and featured student essays on land, sustainable farming, and intertribal gatherings. It is apparent now that the Freirian-Boalian Theater of the Oppressed rhizome helped connect communities that had not initially found common ground in their oppression. It showed them that they had antagonists in common, and thus they became protagonists in the same rehearsal for revolution—liberation from military rule.

The students practiced all possible forms of interaction, looking for subterranean nomadic intertribal connections where there seemed to be none and impersonating their common antagonists—loggers, gold miners, the military, and government officials. While the Gê-speaking Kayapó and Suyá peoples usually proposed more aggressive strategies to deal with rights violations, Theater of the Oppressed games revealed that the Tupi-speaking Kayabi and Juruna peoples had developed peaceful tactics that were often very effective. Whereas Theater of the Oppressed was the medium, what was the message? Here again, conscientização insinuated itself into community-oriented activities, enabling local indigenous peoples to exercise their constitutional and human-rights-based sovereign powers.

BOAL’S LEGACY: THEATER AND SOCIAL ACTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Ferreira has used Theater of the Oppressed in more than 30 years of community-based participatory work with indigenous peoples in Brazil and in the United States and also in the classroom, in cultural centers, and in the streets to raise awareness about human rights and engage communities in social action (see, e.g., Ferreira 1982; 1983; 1994; 1999; 2001; 2002; 2004; n.d.; Prandini and Ferreira, 2001; Ferreira and Suhrbier, 2002; Scheper-Hughes and Ferreira, 2003). Devine has practiced Theater of the Oppressed in her course work at SFSU and taken the movement into the streets of San Francisco. Following Boal, our goal is to engage others in a theatrical rehearsal of real-life

human rights issues using the Theater of the Oppressed rhizome to relate directly to indigenous peoples in the Americas today.

We draw on multiple fragments of indigenous narratives in South and North America whose radicle (embryonic root) assembles a line of flight from traditional historical narratives that identify an illusionary “we” from individual recollections of an “I” (Ferreira, 1997). The plays we have presented facilitate the dissemination of the UN Declaration throughout the world, following the principles spelled out by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 7–12). We posit that bringing theater and critical thinking into the research and advocacy mix has the power to generate new attitudes and respect for others and protect the human rights of indigenous peoples worldwide.

In the past two decades, the intersection between Theater of the Oppressed and the social sciences and humanities has been bolstered by studies showing how theatrical productions in the classroom with high levels of audience participation have brought about social and political change (Albarello, 2007; Downey, 2005; Johnson, 2005; McLennan and Smith, 2007; Thompson, 1997). With a few notable exceptions, anthropology has been slow to document and publish Theater of the Oppressed experiences in the classroom and in the public arena aimed at promoting an understanding of and tolerance for social and cultural diversity (Ferreira 2004; 2002; Prandini and Ferreira, 2011).³

Theater of the Oppressed has become an effective tool for teaching critical thinking, social change, and human rights in classrooms and clinical settings across the globe. Most recently, it has been used across disciplines including political science, sociology, education, and psychiatry to deal with a wide array of revolutionary issues: promoting sexual and reproductive rights (Thompson, 1997), protecting youth at risk (McLennan and Smith, 2007), deconstructing race and racism (Van der Horn-Gibson and Marín, 2008), and treating psychiatric disabilities (Faigin and Stein, 2010). The movement is growing steadily: liberatory educators, activists, artists, and community organizers from all over the world have come together since 1995 for the annual International Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed Conference, whose main goal is to challenge oppressive systems by promoting critical thinking and social justice. The conference is based on the ideologies and works of Freire and Boal, who used pedagogy and theater to overcome social systems of oppression.

Today there are dozens of organizations sprouting in the United States, according to the radicle principles of the rhizome, that are encouraging theater for social justice and human rights in the classroom and in public arenas. The goal in most cases is to raise awareness about civil and human rights and engage communities in revolutionary action. The Brecht Forum’s New York Marxist School, founded in 1975, has used Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed to create social change. For the Theater of the Oppressed Laboratory in New York, the new goal of popular education is to create mechanisms of collective power over the structures of society. In Seattle, Washington, the Duwamish tribe has developed an innovative dinner-theater project to raise public consciousness of its history and current-day struggles and to promote the cultural, social, political, and economic survival of Seattle’s First People. In Woodburn, Oregon, Voz Hispana Causa Chavista is working to build political power in the local Latino community through leadership development and

new-voter organizing. Nearby, in Portland, the Partnership for Safety and Justice (formerly the Western Prison Project) is using theater to address issues of violence and racism. The Forum Theater Project for Violence Intervention has gone directly into communities affected by violence and by racism in the criminal justice system and worked with them to develop a script based on the life experiences of individuals and families. The project has partnered with Act for Action—Theater for All, an organization devoted to the use of theater for education and social justice (Harris, 2006). Broadly speaking, all of these initiatives draw upon Boal's (1985 [1974]) views on tragedy, justice, and equality.

THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY CLASSROOM

In anthropology courses at SFSU, the area of educational research can be understood as a rhizome space when Theater of the Oppressed is used as a pedagogical tool. Imagining knowledge production as a rhizome plateau of sorts is particularly generative in postcolonial educational inquiry (Gough, 2006) because it allows for critical connections to be made and novel "networks of analogies" to be formed (Foucault, 2001 [1966]). We are joined in our efforts by other social scientists and educators who have recently used Theater of the Oppressed as a pedagogical tool (Albarelo, 2007; Bartlett, 2005; Johnson, 2005). In particular, we are interested in encouraging students and instructors to include the critical language of social justice and equity in the humanities and the social and biological sciences and take action toward the protection of human rights of all peoples. In this respect, Theater of the Oppressed "rhizomes affirm what is excluded from western thought and reintroduce reality as dynamic, heterogeneous, and nondichotomous; they implicate rather than replicate; they propagate, displace, join, circle back, fold" (O'Riley, 2003: 23). It is this propagation of a critical discourse that we are most concerned with, one capable of reinventing and transforming reality.

Since 2007, under the direction of Theater of the Oppressed practitioner Jiwon Chung, we have employed Boal's methodology in graduate and undergraduate courses in anthropological theory and human rights. We have examined social issues such as health care, unemployment, homelessness, war, violence, and poverty from students' firsthand experiences through skits, games, and exercises based on Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1998 [1992]). The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome presents itself as an effective poststructuralist interpretive metaphor because of its chaotically complex network of fragments or stems interconnecting the life trajectories of the minority, underserved, working-class students at SFSU. In addition, we have used a number of Ferreira's plays about indigenous peoples' rights to discuss the UN Declaration and other critical instruments of human rights protection.

In several of our courses, including "Foundations of Anthropological History," "Anthropology and Human Rights," and "Endangered Cultures," we formed interactive "play groups" that functioned throughout the school year as nodal networks, inviting students to take a stance and engage in action

against oppression that directly affected them and those around them. In the process, all students wrote and performed their own plays and instantly became “spect-actors” rather than mere spectators of one another’s actions. As a result, their life trajectories became intimately associated; “the rhizome is so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one. It has no center, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite. The space of conjecture is a rhizome space” (Eco, 1984: 164).

Since the summer of 2007, hundreds of SFSU students working under the guidance of Ferreira and Theater of the Oppressed practitioners Jiwon Chung, Dominique Devine, Eva Langman, and Nathan Embretson have helped unleash the power of Deleuze and Guattari’s all-inclusive “and . . . and . . . and. . . .” We have written, directed, and performed numerous Theater of the Oppressed plays on campus, in the streets of the broader San Francisco Bay area, and at national conferences in the United States and abroad. Devine’s play *Realizing the Dream* explained the demise of the Neanderthals from the historical viewpoint of the anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942). The daughter of a Vietnam War veteran, she has used Theater of the Oppressed to reflect on her father’s and her own traumatic memories of violence in times of war and peace.

Several SFSU students have commented on their experiences in using Theater of the Oppressed in the classroom to address human rights. Krystale Triggs, an anthropology major and human rights advocate, said, “Personally, Theater of the Oppressed makes me realize where I stand in an established system of power. In understanding my place, I can further challenge myself and stand on higher grounds, empowering others.” Margaret Decuir concurred:

Theater of the Oppressed really helped me learn about human rights violations by fleshing them out and making them real. Performing and observing real people enacting something as serious as homelessness, veteran’s mental health or any other topic really helped me grasp the concept and feel more strongly about taking a stand against oppression and violence. Theater of the Oppressed is wonderful and should be used in all schools across the world.

Nicole Marchand, who took “Anthropology and Human Rights” (a class that organizes the annual SFSU Human Rights Summit) in spring 2008, said, “Theater of the Oppressed in the classroom creates solidarity, makes class more intimate and connected, and makes us think on the spot about critical human rights issues. You have to be sensitive to all sides in a Theater of the Oppressed game and must think through all solutions thoroughly, whether you agree with them or not.” Roshan Pourabdollah, a graduate student in human rights education at the University of San Francisco, agreed:

As a student and educator, I’m truly thankful for my exposure to Theater of the Oppressed during my time at SFSU. I’ve been able to take the pedagogical tools learned in “Anthropology and Human Rights” and transfer them to the classroom and community at large. The experience of being a “spect-actor” exposed me to new ways of deconstructing complex issues and imagining positive solutions. Theater of the Oppressed is fun, uncomfortable, exciting, and mind-blowing all at once, and a tool I know I’ll use in many years to come.

Nathan Embretson, a video maker and an SFSU graduate, became a Theater of the Oppressed advocate after his experience using theater in the anthropology classroom to raise awareness about the rights of indigenous peoples:

Coming from a privileged background, I never had to think deeply about these issues. Using Theater of the Oppressed techniques such as opposite thought and forum theater allowed me to tap that human experience and see the issue in a more holistic way. This is the power that Theater of the Oppressed brings to the classroom experience. It allows access to realities that we don't confront in daily life, and provides a platform to discover tools to fight against injustice.

Using Theater of the Oppressed in the classroom has opened up multiple opportunities for students and faculty to understand the rights of indigenous peoples and to expand their human rights and social justice work. At the 15th annual International Theater of the Oppressed Conference in Minneapolis in May 2009, Nathan Embretson and Mariana Ferreira presented the workshop "The Color Red: Fighting with Flowers and Fruits in Xavante Territory, Central Brazil" (Ferreira, 2004). Using forum theater, the Joker (played by Embretson) briefly outlined the dramatic conditions of life faced by indigenous peoples in central Brazil today. Participants then rehearsed several possible solutions to the conflict between the Xavante people and large landowners in the state of Mato Grosso. "Living sculptures" brought alive the perceptions of "spect-actors" about the Xavante's theory of environmental justice, based on an economy of gift exchange and the circulation of wealth for all people (Mauss, 1990 [1950]).

The characters in the plays we have used in the classroom suffer a wide array of human rights abuses and take concrete action to defend their entitlement to ancestral lands, food, water, and cultural diversity in order to create a better world for themselves and their communities. Our goal in presenting these plays has been to prepare practitioners to take action according to the principles of the UN Declaration. The plays have offered "spect-actors" a way to see the world as it is, while the Declaration points to an ideal world in which human rights are respected. The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome has bridged the gap between present and future by challenging practitioners to rehearse for revolution, posing critical questions: What might be some of the different possible outcomes if the Declaration became a legally binding document, a convention? What were its strengths and weaknesses? How applicable was it to the particular cases of human rights abuses presented in the plays? The objective has been to address these questions.

FINAL THOUGHTS: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' THEATER TODAY

The games and techniques we have employed in the classroom are part of what Boal ((1985 [1974]: 142) calls "rehearsal" or "people's theater" rather than spectacle or bourgeois theater:

The rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality. Forum theater, as well as these other forms of a people's theater, instead of taking something away from

the spectator, evoke in him a desire to practice in reality the act he has rehearsed in the theater. The practice of these theatrical forms creates a sort of uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfillment through real action.

The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome does just that: through its multiple entryways, multiplicities, and fertile networking system, it evokes in its practitioners the desire to engage in real human rights action to dismantle oppression.

Now that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has been adopted, the challenge is to get it implemented by states, UN bodies, and societies and then work toward a convention. The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome is a very powerful movement for raising awareness of the declaration because it helps people understand the document in detail and in practice, relying on embodied skills, other ways of knowing, and multiple forms of social interaction. Because the Theater of the Oppressed rhizome insists on insinuating itself even into places where it is not invited, it surprises us with its generous array of games and exercises that empower individuals and communities to recognize that what they think, say, feel, and do really matters. Its ability to propagate and grow gives it the opportunity to be very productive, leaving in its budding track a range of materials for popular education such as the plays and theories mentioned here. It encourages “spect-actors” to stand up, engage in action, and discuss ways to protect the human rights of indigenous peoples to equality and nondiscrimination, respecting the specificities of each community.

NOTES

1. The texts are available at <http://humanrights.sfsu.edu/Theater.html>. One of the plays, *Diabetes Jackpot*, was first performed at the 107th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco in November 2008, and Dominique Devine stage-read it and organized two workshops based on it at the 17th International Creative Drama in Education Congress in Istanbul, Turkey, on September 3, 2010. *The Madness of Hunger*, adapted with permission from Scheper-Hughes (1992), was stage-read by SFSU students directed by Debby Kajiyama at the 105th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Jose, CA, in November 2006. *May Your Body Lay Naked on Mother Earth* (co-authored with Eva Langman), was stage-read in 2008 at the 107th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in the panel “Radical Theater as Cultural Intervention: Exploring Art and Politics in Anthropology.” *IronHawk* was stage-read in 2007 at the 106th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in the session “Anthropologists in the Global Arena: Dialogues for Change” and at the 5th annual SFSU Human Rights Summit in 2008. Finally, *Firewater* was stage-read at the 3d annual SFSU Human Rights Summit in 2006.

2. <http://www.sabisa.de/sabisa>. Sabisa partners include the Aarohan Theater in Kathmandu, Nepal; the Amani Peoples’ Theater in Nairobi, Kenya; the Community Arts Project and the Mother Tongue Project in Cape Town, South Africa; DOMINO—Citizen Involvement in the Limelight in Halle/Merseburg, Germany; Ellis and Bheki in Durban, South Africa; the GRIPS Theater, the Regional Association for Play and Theater, the Forumtheater Rabenschwarz, World Community Services/Weltfriedensdienst, and Hier geblieben! in Berlin, Germany; InterACT in Graz, Austria; Kamoto Community Arts in Lusaka, Zambia; Forumtheater Inszene in Cologne, Germany; the Themba HIV/AIDS Project in Johannesburg, South Africa; the University of Malawi Department of Fine and Performing Arts in Zomba, Malawi; and Young People for Change in Durban, South Africa.

3. It is encouraging that at least one anthropology textbook, *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective*, includes a passing reference to Boal in its chapter on "Art" (Ferraro, 2007: 374). Ferraro's limited view of "liberation theater," however, refers superficially to Boal's forum theater technique without naming or explaining this important piece of the Theater of the Oppressed repertory and without locating the emergence of Theater of the Oppressed in its Brazilian sociopolitical context.

REFERENCES

- Albarello, Juan Gabriel Gomez
2007 "Games on power (and the lack thereof): Theater of the Oppressed in the political science classroom." Paper written for the Fourth APSA Conference on Teaching and Learning, Charlotte, NC, February 9–11.
- Bartlett, Lesley
2005 "Dialogue, knowledge, and teacher-student relations: Freirean pedagogy in theory and practice." *Comparative Education Review* 49: 344–364.
- Boal, Augusto
1985 (1974) *Theater of the Oppressed*. Boston: Theater Communications Group.
1998 (1992) *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. New York: Routledge.
2006 (1975) *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*. New York: Routledge.
- Borba, Juliano
2007 "Festas da memória: o teatro comunitário na Argentina." MS, Graduate Program in Art Theory, University of Buenos Aires.
- Bradley, Laura
2006 *Brecht and Political Theater. The Mother on Stage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brecht, Bertolt
1964 (1930) *The Modern Theater is the Epic Theater*. London: Methuen.
1977 *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Centro de Teatro do Oprimido
2009 "Mission, vision, and values." <http://ctorio.org.br/novosite/quem-somos/perfil-organizacional/> (accessed July 30, 2011).
- Chung, Jiwon
2011 "Theater of the Oppressed as a martial art," in T. Emert and E. Friedman (eds.), *In Come Closer: Critical Conversations about Theater of the Oppressed and Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari
1987 *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Douglas-Jones, Rachel and Salla Sariola
2009 "Rhizome yourself: experiencing Deleuze and Guattari from theory to practice." *Rhizomes* 19 (Summer). <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue19/sariola.html>.
- Downey, Allison
2005 "The transformative power of drama: bringing literature and social justice to life." *The English Journal* 95 (1): 33–38.
- Eco, Umberto
1984 *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ecos del Paraguay
2010 "Teatro del Oprimido llega al Bañado Sur." <http://www.ecosdelparaguay.com/2010/11/teatro-del-oprimido-llega-al-banado-sur.html>.
- Fábrica de Teatro Popular–Nordeste
2008 "Mostra Regional Fábrica de Teatro Popular Nordeste." <http://www.nenoticias.com.br/lery.php?var=1227726465> (accessed July 20, 2011).
- Faigin, David and Catherine Stein
2010 "The power of theater to promote individual recovery and social change." *Psychiatric Services* 61: 306–308.
- Ferraro, Gary
2007 *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective*. Florence, KY: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

- Ferreira, Mariana L.
 1982 *Manual do professor indígena*. Diauarum: Xingu Indigenous Park.
 1983 *Livro de mapas e calendário do Xingu*. Diauarum: Xingu Indigenous Park.
 1992 "Escrita e oralidade no Parque Indígena do Xingu: inserção na vida social e a percepção dos índios." *Revista de Antropologia* 35: 91–112.
 1994 *Histórias do Xingu: Coletânea de depoimentos dos índios Suyá, Kayabi, Juruna, Trumai, Txucarramãe e Txicão*. São Paulo: Núcleo de História Indígena e do Indigenismo, USP/FAPESP.
 1997 "When 1 + 1 does not equal 2: making mathematics in Central Brazil." *American Ethnologist* 24: 132–147.
 1999 "Silver fragments of broken mirrors," in David Rothenberg and Marta Ulvaeus (eds.), *The New Earth Reader: The Best of Terra Nova*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
 2001 "Shamanic knowledge and power in Brazilian court cases, 1985–2000," in *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference of Ethnobiology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
 2002 "Tupi-Guarani apocalyptic visions of time and the body." *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 7 (1): 128–169.
 2004 "The color red: fighting with flowers and fruits in Xavante Territory, central Brazil." *Indiana: Art and Music in a Globalizing Latin America* 21: 47–62.
 n.d. *Acting for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Human Rights Center. In press.
- Ferreira, Mariana and Gretchen Lang (eds.)
 2006 *Indigenous Peoples and Diabetes: Community Empowerment and Wellness*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Ferreira, Mariana and Mona Suhrbier
 2002 "The poetics of Tupi-Guarani art in the face of hunger and scarcity." *Paideuma* 48: 145–164.
- Foucault, Michel
 2001 (1966) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Routledge.
- Freire, Paulo
 1998 (1984) *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
 2000 (1997) *Pedagogy of the Heart*. New York and London: Continuum Publishing Co.
 2006a (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York and London: Continuum Publishing Co.
 2006b (1992) *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving the Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York and London: Continuum Publishing Co.
 2007 (1973) *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York and London: Continuum Publishing Co.
- Gough, Noel
 2006 "Shaking the tree, making the rhizome: towards a nomadic philosophy of science education." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 38: 625–645.
- Harris, Soya
 2006 "Groups use theater to inspire change, take action." *Justice Journal* 4 (7): 23–26.
- Johnson, Brett
 2005 "Overcoming 'doom and gloom': empowering students in courses on social problems, injustice, and equality." *Teaching Sociology* 33: 44–58.
- Kuhn, Thomas, B. Brecht, and S. Giles
 2003 *Brecht on Art and Politics*. London: Methuen.
- McLennan, Deanna Pecaski and Kara Smith
 2007 "Promoting positive behaviours using sociodrama." *Journal of Teaching and Learning* 4 (2): 47–55.
- Mauss, Marcel
 1990 (1950) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. New York: Routledge.
- Nelson, Melissa (ed.)
 2008 *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future*. Rochester, VT: Bear & Company/Inner Traditions.
- O'Riley, Patricia
 2003 *Technology, Culture and Socioeconomics: A Rhizoanalysis of Educational Discourses*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Prandini, Kellen and Mariana Ferreira

2011 "Right to know: video-making and theater for social justice and human rights in California." *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 99: 237–253.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy

1992 *Death Without Weeping: Everyday Violence in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy and Mariana Ferreira

2003 "Domba's spirit kidney: transplant medicine and Suya cosmology." *Folk* 45: 125–157.

Solorzano, Daniel G.

1989 "Teaching social change: reflections on a Freirean approach in a college classroom." *Teaching Sociology* 17: 218–225.

Styan, J. L.

1981 *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice: Symbolism, Surrealism and the Absurd*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thompson, Audrey

1997 "What to do while waiting for the revolution: political pragmatism and performance pedagogy." *Philosophy of Education*. http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/97_docs/thompson.html.

Van der Horn-Gibson, Jodi and Christina Marín

2008 "The pink elephant is going to ruin my sofa: theatre as pedagogy addressing racism and social change," pp. 213–231 in Emily Horowitz (ed.), *Teaching Race in Social Science and Humanities Higher Education*. Birmingham, UK: C-SAP.