

Clara de Andrade and Christopher Balme

Transnational networks of the Theatre of the Oppressed

-

The institutionalization of a circulating method

Abstract

This work reflects on how the transnational networks of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) contributed to its institutionalization and permanence as one of the most practiced theatrical methodologies worldwide. In order to understand the expansion of the method developed by Augusto Boal as a transnational network, the article first defines the terms ‘institutionalization’ and ‘network’, before providing a brief review of its history, its adaptation to the cultural policies in France and Brazil, and the importance of the TO Centres in this process. The ability of the method to adapt to the most diverse contexts, cultures and especially to the social development field demonstrate that, more than just circulating a theatrical method, the global network of the Theatre of the Oppressed reveals itself as a vehicle for the circulation of policies connected to the idea of cultural democracy.

Keywords

Theatre of the Oppressed; Augusto Boal; transnationality; cultural policy; Theatre for Development; institutionalization

Authors

Clara de Andrade is an actress, singer, teacher and researcher of Theatre. She holds a PhD and Master’s degree in Performing Arts, both from the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, UNIRIO. In 2014 she participated in a Split-site Programme at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris 3, as part of her doctoral research, which was supervised by Maria Helena Werneck. Recently she was a visiting fellow in the Centre for Global Theatre Histories & Developing Theatre Project at LMU Munich, where she developed, funded by the European Research Council, her project titled “Transnational networks of the Theatre of the Oppressed: exchanges and institutionalization of a circulating method”, within the scope of which this work has been produced (Grant Agreement n. 694559 - DevelopingTheatre). She is the author of the book *O exílio de Augusto Boal: reflexões sobre um teatro sem fronteiras* (7Letras, 2014) and co-editor of

the books *Augusto Boal: arte, pedagogia e política* (Mauad, 2013) and *Cenas Cariocas: modos, políticas e poéticas teatrais contemporâneas* (Garamond, 2020). She has given workshops on the theatre of Augusto Boal at international festivals and in postgraduate programmes in Rio de Janeiro. She co-created and acted in *Crônicas de Nuestra América*, a staging of the stories written by Boal during exile.

Christopher Balme holds the chair in theatre studies at LMU Munich. His publications include *Pacific Performances: Theatricality and Cross-Cultural Encounter in the South Seas* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies* (CUP, 2008); *The theatrical public sphere* (CUP, 2014); *The Globalization of Theatre 1870-1930: The Theatrical Networks of Maurice E. Bandmann*, (CUP, 2020). He is principal investigator of the ERC Advanced Grant “Developing Theatre: Building Expert Networks for Theatre in Emerging Countries after 1945”.

Introduction

The Brazilian director and activist Augusto Boal is one of the defining figures of international postwar theatre. His method known as the Theatre of the Oppressed is employed around the world and his influence can only really be compared to that of Stanislavsky and Brecht. Although methods such as Forum Theatre, Invisible and Legislative Theatre are well known and are today part and parcel of the applied theatre toolbox, what is less well understood is how this remarkable diffusion and dissemination took place. How did techniques of a radical, transgressive theatre developed in exile under extremely difficult, sometimes dangerous circumstances coalesce into the current institutional form known as Theatre of the Oppressed?

In this essay, we shall retrace Boal's journey and that of his method as an example of theatrical institutionalization with a trajectory that developed from a loose network to much more fixed institutional forms. The essay is divided into the following sections. In the first section we will outline some key concepts such as networks and institutionalization and thereby situate Boal's career within the broader context of institutional theory. The second section will retrace Boal's journey as an example of a 'circulating method' that gained in institutional strength as it moved through different national and cultural contexts: from Brazil to Argentina to Peru to France where it gained a much more secure financial foundation and organizational forms. The next section will explore how the method spread to other countries such as India before Boal returned to Brazil from exile in 1986. Here a new stage begins with Boal as City Councillor in Rio where he implemented his new concept of Legislative Theatre. The final section – transnational networks of the Theatre of the Oppressed – will trace how in the late 1990s and 2000s the Boalian method became part of transnational flows that achieved dissemination throughout the world.

From networks to institutionalization

The concept of institution is notoriously difficult to pin down, even in those disciplines such as sociology, economics and political science for which it is a major field of research. The latter cannot be said of theatre studies which has tended to avoid the term altogether or regard it – in the spirit of the avantgarde – as something to be overcome and transcended: institutionalized theatre with its associations of rigidity and tradition is a category to which one is opposed on principle. For a social anthropologist, shaking hands may represent an institution in particular cultural contexts (for instance the signing of an agreement), normally though more complex structures are expected.

The last three decades have seen a revolution in institutional theory that is usually subsumed under the label of 'neo-institutionalism' (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). This reconceptualization of the relationship between institutions and organizations has provided a much more flexible framework for understanding how institutions affect our daily lives and that there are few domains, including theatre, that are not in some way determined by institutional structures. Neo-institutional approaches tend to draw a clear distinction between the levels of institution and organization. The former refers to abstract rules and frameworks, which are manifested in the latter, individual organizations, whereby the two levels are linked together by reciprocal relationships.¹

According to neo-institutional theory, the relationship between institutions and the societies in which they located is determined by the desire and need for legitimacy: “Legitimacy is perhaps the most central concept in institutional research” (Colyvas and Powell 2006, 308) and can be defined as a set of beliefs by which collectives not only accept rules and constraints but bring their practices in line with these rules and ideas. This ‘cognitive pillar’ (Scott 1995: 35) of institutions means that such cognitive frameworks are often more important than normative ones such as laws which makes them much conducive to change. A key indicator of institutionalization is the status of ‘taken-for-grantedness’, a central ‘cognitive pillar’ of any institution. A key factor in any kind of institutionalization is the co-optation by or through prevailing ideas that provide the ideological basis for legitimization.

Theatre scholars tend to concern themselves with the level of organization – individual artists, specific theatres, and theatre companies – because it is here that theatre is made and becomes visible. Less visible is the institutional level, which in most cases involves some form of exogenous support, whether through a ministry of culture or state-funded universities, or through private funding, for example private philanthropy or individual, usually tax deductible, donations. All these instances create rules and constraints which are nevertheless highly mutable. It is in the interaction between the institutional and the organizational level that structures accessible to theatre historiographical analysis emerge.

There are three levels of action that need to be disambiguated in the example of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed: individual actions, connections through networks, and finally institutionalization in the sense of semi-permanent structures independent of specific individuals or groups. Augusto Boal’s function as charismatic founder figure provides the chronological beginning of the process. There exists a tradition in twentieth century theatre, indeed it may even be a feature of theatrical modernism, that certain charismatic artists have managed to actually establish institutionalized organizations with a claim to permanence: Stanislavsky’s Moscow Art Theatre, Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble or Giorgio Strehler’s Piccolo Teatro are all examples of largely private initiatives leading ultimately to permanence through state support (Balme 2019). The concept of charisma refers to Max Weber’s famous essay (1968) on forms of legitimate authority or rule, of which charisma is institutionally the most unstable because it is so closely tied to the biological body of a special individual.² As we shall see, Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed has survived the passing of its progenitor and has already established relatively firm institutional structures, albeit in the form of networks.

Networks are by definition nothing more or less than a set of relations or ‘edges’ between nodes. From this basic understanding network theory has developed a much more nuanced conception of types and functions of networks. They are probably the most efficacious when sustained by ‘heterophilic’ or weak ties as opposed to ‘homophilic’ or strong ones (Ferguson 2018). While this may sound counter-intuitive, network theory has posited and demonstrated empirically that heterophilic networks are more conducive to innovation than homophilic ones. As sociologist Mark Granovetter argues, homophilic networks such as families or clans are strong in terms of internal cohesion but often resistant to change: ‘New ideas will spread slowly, scientific endeavors will be handicapped, and subgroups separated by race, ethnicity, geography, or other characteristics will have difficulty reaching a modus vivendi’ (1983, 202). As we shall see,

Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed begins as an 'ego' network, i.e. one centered around an individual, but quickly transforms into a heterophilic one by forming ties and connections in many different countries and cultures, especially to state and philanthropic funding bodies. The latter phase, in which the network takes on visible organizational forms, is the result of institutionalization processes in the stricter sense.

If we speak of institutionalization, even in the heuristic sense employed here, we mean the gradual acceptance (legitimization) of a network or an organizational field as important and therefore in some way worthy of permanence. The means by which individuals and organizations coalesce into a field and thereby attain institutional legitimacy is one of the main areas of organizational studies (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott 1995). The path to legitimacy is invariably a historical process that can be reconstructed. In an early study, sociologist Paul DiMaggio traced how the largely amateur, little theatre movement in the USA gained professional legitimacy by adopting the organizational and legal form of the trustee-governed non-profit enterprise which had already been established for the fine arts and classical music (DiMaggio 1992). A more recent investigation into early educational cinema in the US defines institutionalization in terms of 'a stabilization of sorts - the coalescing of various one-off experiments or isolated initiatives into a field characterized by regularized modes of production, distribution, and exhibition' as well as the establishment of 'norms and conventions' (Dahlquist and Frykholm 2019, 3).

In both these examples we can observe a transition from loosely organized 'networks', i.e. in this case like-minded, usually informal groups of individuals and associations, that over time take on more permanent organizational forms that may even lead to political recognition in the form of charters, incorporation or regular subsidy.³ These processes are often accompanied by trends towards professionalization which means that employees can shift easily between organizations, a clear sign of the isomorphism, i.e. similarity of forms, required of any organizational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

In the following examination of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed we will reconstruct the institutionalization process by which a charismatic founder figure builds an informal network which, when it moves to France in the 1980s, finds political legitimacy within the framework of the new cultural policies pursued by the socialist government, which privileged social development. From a small group connected by loose associations it grows into an established organizational field. It expands again after Boal returns to Brazil and enters politics, and gains even more legitimacy in the context of the cultural policies promoted by the Lula government. From there the method grows again transnationally and establishes itself in numerous countries.

Theatre of the Oppressed – a circulating method

Before the creation of the Theatre of the Oppressed, indeed as far back as the 1950s and 1960s, the director Augusto Boal had already woven an international network of contacts in the theatre world. After an internship at Columbia University and the Actor's Studio in New York in the 1950s, Boal returned to Brazil bringing experience in playwriting – gained at John Gassner's seminars – and with Stanislavsky's 'method'. By the 1960s, as director of the *Teatro de Arena of São Paulo*, Augusto Boal was already well-known in international theatre circles, having toured with his group to the United States – thanks

to Joanne Pollitzer's and Richard Schechner's initiative –, and taken part several times in the Nancy International Festival in France, at the invitation of the then festival director, Jack Lang. This early network, as well as his subsequent life in exile, certainly contributed in the following decades to the transnational expansion, movement and the growing legitimization of the Theatre of the Oppressed world-wide.

In his early career, Boal gained extensive experience as author, director and introducer of new theatrical techniques at the *Teatro de Arena*, where he created workshops on naturalistic acting, taught seminars on dramaturgy, wrote and staged acclaimed plays such as *Opinião* and *Arena Conta Zumbi* that acted as a powerful denunciation of Brazil's military dictatorship. In his endless search for a theatre that was both politically committed and liberating, and which could survive inside dictatorial regimes, Augusto Boal started researching techniques that would later give rise to the Theatre of the Oppressed. By transferring to the audience the means for art production, Boal became an investigator of the artistic processes through which ordinary people became the authors of their own aesthetic experience. This feature appeared first in his creation of 'Newspaper Theatre'. In one of the most repressive moments of the dictatorship, during the government of General Médici, the creation of scenes produced overnight was a way to escape the harsh censorship – which, after 1968, increasingly targeted plays and theatre groups.

In 1971, Augusto Boal was kidnapped and arrested by the military dictatorship. He underwent torture and systematic interrogation and was kept in solitary confinement for a month in the Department of Political and Social Order – DOPS in its Portuguese acronym. After that, he was kept as a political prisoner in the Tiradentes penitentiary in São Paulo for two more months. In the same year, Boal went into involuntary exile, living away from Brazil for the next fifteen years and experiencing another form of censorship, as he was now blocked from working in his own country (Andrade 2014). The Theatre of the Oppressed was shaped, therefore, when Augusto Boal was on the move during his exile – from 1971 to 1986 – and thus crossing borders and different political regimes.

Like Newspaper Theatre that was created as a reaction to the intensification of censorship in Brazil, Boal's proposals for the radical transformation of the actor-spectator relationship also emerged as a political and aesthetic response to the authoritarianism that plagued the South American continent. The initial development of the method followed, therefore, the trajectory of Boal's exile in Latin America. Setting off for Argentina, which then enjoyed the camouflaged status of a 'democratic dictatorship' (Boal 2000, 291), Boal experimented with Invisible Theatre with a group of actors from Buenos Aires. After that, in Peru, while taking part in a program to increase popular literacy alongside Paulo Freire, and working with people from different indigenous groups that spoke multiple dialects, Boal investigated non-verbal communication, which led to the technique of Image Theatre. Still in Peru, Boal said he 'discovered' (2000, 197) forum theatre, a modality of the Theatre of the Oppressed in which the spectator joins the scene and becomes an actor as well, or a *spect-actor*. Confronted with a scenario of oppression, the spectator is invited to directly intervene in the scene, suggesting and reenacting on stage a dramatic action that might resolve the conflict. By executing its proposition and transforming the scene into real life, the *spect-actor* can rehearse the transformation of reality itself. In forum theatre, the internationally most widespread

technique of the Theatre of the Oppressed, the performance is, in Boal's own words, 'a preparation for action' (Boal 1985, 141).

In his European exile, after a period in Portugal, Boal lived principally in France, the country in which he developed the techniques of the internalized oppressions of the subject known as The Cop in the Head and the Rainbow of Desire. During this period there began a greater systematization and dissemination of his techniques. From France, the Theatre of the Oppressed spread to countries in Africa and in Asia. Only then did the method return to a redemocratized Brazil, when Boal could develop Legislative Theatre. An understanding of the development of the method in France is key to comprehending its subsequent transnational expansion and institutionalization.

Theatre of the Oppressed in France – The starting point

Augusto Boal arrived in France in a moment of cultural effervescence in the post-1968 context. His presence, and the publication of his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* in French (1979), provoked an intense debate on the applicability and adaptation of the method in new countries. During Boal's exile in Paris, an entire generation of theatre artists, intellectuals and pedagogues gathered around him and founded the first group devoted to research on and practice of the Theatre of the Oppressed, the *Groupe Boal*. Following the rapid spread of the techniques, the original group saw an urgent need to found a reference centre for the method.

The institutionalization of the Boal method begins with the establishment of the first Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed as a non-governmental association. The *Centre d'étude et de diffusion des techniques actives d'expression - Méthodes Boal – CEDITADE*, founded in Paris in 1979, acted as a studio for the creation, research, reflexion and adaptation of the method, while at the same time providing a centre for the diffusion of the techniques. This continual transformation of the Boal method was documented in the *Bulletins du Théâtre de l'Opprimé*. These newsletters were published by the pioneer group of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Europe. The information bulletins of the Parisian group drew attention to previously unknown articles by Augusto Boal and his collaborators, as well as reports of new practitioners in Germany, Belgium, Canada and Brazil. By promoting the exchange of information among groups of the Theatre of the Oppressed from different countries, the Parisian journal acted as a tool for circulating the method. The Parisian centre's effort in publishing these *Bulletins* contributed, then, to the initial formation of an international network of practitioners (Andrade 2017).⁴

At that time, author and critic Emile Copfermann, editor of Boal's books in France, acted as a key mediator in the introduction of the Theatre of the Oppressed to the French public. Besides being initially responsible for the editing of the *Bulletins*, the writer presented Boal's work to the artistic-intellectual world and (re)established connections with influential names, such as Jack Lang who would soon become Minister of Culture in the government of François Mitterrand.

Up until that point, the members of *Groupe Boal* had aligned their experiments in different fields of intervention in France with a search for distinct forms of economic support. The group experimented with forum theatre in corporate contexts such as Air France. However, this intervention method was not considered as Theatre of the

Oppressed by Boal himself and his followers. Another form of support tried out by the Paris group was to integrate the Theatre of the Oppressed into the institutional framework of French art theatre by providing seasons of forum theatre performances inside theatres with normal ticket sales (CEDITADE 1982).

Between these attempts, a change in the context of 1980s France favored the adaptation of the group to modes of production connected to the funding of the social development field. In 1981, François Mitterrand was elected the first socialist president of France. The financial support provided by François Mitterrand's new government was paramount to the institutionalization and spread of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Up until the early 1980s, the policy of 'theatrical decentralization', which had existed in France since 1948, was being reviewed. The new government's symbolic change was accompanied by a reform of decentralization and by a doubling of the budget for culture. Mitterrand's policies, and those of the new Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, aimed to reach a target of 1% of the national budget for culture, including percentages from other ministries earmarked for cultural projects (Abirached and Atoun 1995, 14).

In this context of revalorizing the cultural environment, there were two kinds of state policies that reflected differing views on culture. The first and older one, known as 'cultural democratization', was based on the notion of amplifying the audience for art by offering Parisian performances to the provinces. The second line of cultural policies, called 'cultural democracy', was based on the notion of culture as an expression of local culture by affirming equality among artists and non-professionals (Urrutiaguer 2014, 155). The new French political and cultural moment gave the Theatre of the Oppressed the opportunity to integrate their practices with these state policies created by a socialist government. The method was able to capitalize on both lines of cultural policies active in the context of 1980s France. First, via cultural democratization, the Theatre of the Oppressed spread out from Paris to the provinces, by offering performances of forum theatre all over France but only there. Secondly, by embracing the policy of cultural democracy, the Theatre of the Oppressed found ways of developing itself autonomously and expanding beyond the borders of France.

The Boal method arrived in France precisely at the moment in which the public policies for theatre shifted from the notion of *democratization of art* to culture as *social development*. Faced with the difficulty of resolving political and ethnic conflicts, the French state began to mobilize culture to act as a tool of social mediation (Saez 1995, 52-53). Thus, the Theatre of the Oppressed started being applied as a mediation methodology, alongside local communities and in social centres across France. The method gained even more traction in this new and increasingly important notion of culture than that of cultural democracy. Thus, the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed of Paris / *Groupe Boal* was able to be fully co-opted for these new French policies. This factor accelerated both the institutionalization of the method and the professionalization of its practitioners.

An example of state support received by the Parisian group was the subsidy provided by the *Fonds d'Intervention Culturelle* (FIC), which relied on the cooperation of several ministries for the support of projects deemed 'innovative' and 'relevant'. At that time, the projects subsidized by this fund were defined by their commitment to social action, targeting an audience of individuals already considered as 'excluded': women, immigrants, inmates, etc. (Girard 1995, 147-150). Through projects subsidized by this

fund, the CEDITADE/*Groupe Boal* was able to perform countless interventions of the Theatre of the Oppressed methods in schools, psychiatric hospitals, shelters for youth and women under threat and, especially, in community centres with groups of social minorities.

By moving into the field of local political action, the Theatre of the Oppressed reached a point of institutional no return. Adapting the techniques to their local cultural reality, new practitioners started to perform forum theatre by themselves with the social groups of their own cities. Such dynamics of appropriation and, at the same time, diffusion of techniques contributed to numerous experiments with the methods in other European countries, thereby multiplying exponentially the number of practitioners of Theatre of the Oppressed. The multicultural experience with excluded groups in France also well prepared the Theatre of the Oppressed for the dialogue with the most diverse cultures it faced on its path towards internationalization (Andrade 2017).

The projects and pioneering expeditions of the Parisian core reinforced the base for an even larger scale diffusion of the techniques, which were disseminated through workshops given by Boal or by the members of the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed in Paris. In the period between 1979 and 1984, these workshops were carried out in several European countries, but also further afield including the island of Reunion, as well as on other continents such as Africa, Canada, North America and Brazil in South America.

In the 1990s, with the dissolution of the Paris Centre, new independent groups sprang up who contributed to an increasingly autonomous diffusion of the method. In addition, since the end of the 1970s, the publishing of Augusto Boal's books in French and English, and then in several other languages, allowed the Theatre of the Oppressed to spread geographically all over Europe and to other countries in Africa and Asia that Boal and the French had not yet visited.

Exchanges and institutionalization

In the process of adapting to the cultural policies in France, the Theatre of the Oppressed acquired methodological and institutional capabilities which served as parameters for its subsequent globalization. The growing institutionalization of the method demanded by the French state subsidies – its ideological convergence with the prevailing cultural policies, localized methods, NGO status and professionalization of its practitioners – established a way of working that could be followed in other countries and territories.

The foundation of the first Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed, as a non-governmental organization, instituted an operational technology that served as a model for the creation of new Centres in this same NGO format in countries such as:

1. India - *Jana Sanskriti* - Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed, in Badu, West Bengal, founded by Sanjoy Ganguly in 1985. It acts with 30 “satellite” local teams through the Indian Federation of the Theatre of the Oppressed, which consists of around 25,000 people in the region of Kolkata. *Jana Sanskriti* hosts the *Muktadhara*, International Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed, which has been organized bi-annually since 2004.

2. Brazil - Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed - Rio, in Rio de Janeiro, founded by Augusto Boal in 1986. Today it is managed by a collective team. It acts alongside

social movements such as the Landless Workers' Movement – MST, as it is a part of the *Pontos de Cultura* (Cultural Hubs), a Brazilian network which consists of more than 3,000 small centres for the promotion and spread of culture.

3. Mozambique - Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed of Maputo, founded by Alvim Cossa in 2001. It acts alongside the Mozambique Network of Community Theatre – RETEC, which consists of about 120 groups and works with the support of UNICEF.

Nowadays, such centres act as diffusion hubs of the method, thereby strengthening the institutional view of the Theatre of the Oppressed around the world. In the case of the Brazilian Centre, it is possible to study how transnational flows contributed to the institutionalization of the method. In 1982, inspired by the successful experience of the French Centre in using the Theatre of the Oppressed in the field of education, the Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro invited Boal to develop a similar project in the public school network of Rio de Janeiro. However, this governmental project in public education could only be realized in 1986 once Boal finally returned to Brazil and to his hometown after fifteen years of exile. The Theatre of the Oppressed could now, finally, be implemented in Brazil. This project, named *Fábrica de Teatro Popular* (Popular Theatre Factory), was integrated into a broader context of the reopening and redemocratization of Brazil: it was the return of the exiled, the resumption of a left-wing agenda, and the possibility of implementing democratizing policies.

Much like the Theatre of the Oppressed in France, which was being applied in schools and social centres, one of the goals of the Popular Theatre Factory was the training of local disseminators who started applying the method in public schools in Rio. The project thus was grounded in a vision of *animation socioculturelle* (community-based cultural activities) influenced by the French cultural policies as well as the notion of cultural democracy. The new Brazilian practitioners from the Popular Theatre Factory were then invited by Boal for a training internship in the city of Orvelte, in the Netherlands, along with participants of several other nationalities. After this exchange and first-hand experience of the application of the method in France and the Netherlands, the Brazilian core group decided to found in 1986 the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed of Rio de Janeiro, CTO-Rio, managed by Augusto Boal (Centro... 2016, 10-12).

In the 1990s, during Boal's 'political-theatrical' tenure as city councillor, he and his new collaborators in Rio developed an innovative way of using the Theatre of the Oppressed, which became known as Legislative Theatre.⁵ In this new modality of the method, forum theatre was applied as a tool for the radical democratization of institutional politics through the direct participation of citizens in the drafting of legislation. Drawing on their work with community groups, TO groups were formed by domestic workers, black university students and landless agrarian workers who created their own forum theatre performances, with the goal of turning their desires and claims into laws. The proposals that arose from the forum theatre performances, which happened inside or in front of the Municipal Chamber building, were transformed into projects to draft new laws. At that time, thirteen of these projects were approved as laws as a result of the actions of Legislative Theatre (Boal 1998). This contribution of the Rio de Janeiro core group was then added to other modalities of the Theatre of the Oppressed and quickly spread to the rest of the world.

The development of the Legislative Theatre method by Boal and the jokers⁶ of CTO-Rio in 1990s Brazil is another example of the ability of the Theatre of the Oppressed to adapt to highly diverse contexts, and to create sustainable institutional structures. By adapting to the Brazilian context of the New Republic and contributing to the strengthening of the then quite recent democracy in the country, the method reinvented itself once more, finding another form of action, now in legislative politics.

Initially, the collective was able to count on the support of Boal's position as a city councillor of Rio: the jokers worked as his advisors; his cabinet was a space for organization and resistance; the square and staircases of the Municipal Chamber, occupied by popular groups, acted as both stage and audience for the debates presented by the forum theatre scenes.

At the end of his mandate in 1996, Boal failed to get reelected. To continue with this pioneering experiment in Legislative Theatre, now without Boal as city councillor, the CTO-Rio searched for new forms of institutional and financial support, starting with its formalization as a non-governmental organization. From 1998 to 2000, the Centre of the Theatre of the Oppressed-Rio was sponsored by the Ford Foundation to further develop the Legislative Theatre work.⁷ The initial project was renewed and extended, and included a training branch alongside community groups (Bendelak 2000).⁸

The new modality of TO spread quickly around Brazil and the world, and the different forms of institutional support certainly contributed to such diffusion. For an example of the international expansion: in 1997 Boal was invited by the Paulo Freire Society to give a lecture and hold a formal session of Legislative Theatre in the city of Munich (Schechner, Chatterjee, and Boal 1998, 86-87). In Germany there were already several groups working with forum theatre, some of them nowadays specialists in Legislative Theatre. At the time, Boal also held a formal session in the Greater London Council that had been abolished by Margaret Thatcher's government (Boal 2000, 328). In Africa, the Theatre of the Oppressed Group GTO-Angola implemented the new modality and CTO-Rio itself held formal sessions on Legislative Theatre in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. In Portugal, Legislative Theatre was developed by José Soeiro alongside the university students' collective *Estudantes por Empréstimo* (On-loan Students) during his mandate as congressman in the Portuguese parliament. The method was also applied in the country in 2003 in partnership with the Centre for Social Studies, coordinated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Today, Legislative Theatre is practiced and researched worldwide, from Brazil to Taiwan (Bendelak 2016, 25; Centro... 2016, 32).

Amid the growth of the Legislative Theatre, a shift in cultural policies in Brazil after 2004 contributed significantly to the institutionalization and transnational expansion of the Theatre of the Oppressed. The *Programa Cultura Viva* (Living Culture Program), and its network of Cultural Hubs was implemented by the Ministers of Culture Gilberto Gil and Juca Ferreira during the government of Lula. Inspired by the previously mentioned French concept of cultural democracy, the program helped spread the Theatre of the Oppressed through the national network of Cultural Hubs all around Brazil.

Based on the principle of shared management between public power and sociocultural agents, the program was created to foster and connect diverse cultural manifestations that were already being autonomously carried out all over the country. Upon receiving the seal of Living Culture and becoming Cultural Hubs, such activities were officially

recognized as belonging to Brazil's 'national heritage'. In that period, the construction of discussion forums, self-management commissions, as well as multiple networks of Living Culture strengthened the movement for policies of cultural democracy in Brazil through the idea of activating hubs in an autonomous web of culture.

From 2005 to 2009, CTO-Rio was included in the new Living Culture Program for the project *Teatro do Oprimido de Ponto a Ponto* (Theatre of the Oppressed Hub to Hub), becoming a Cultural Hub as well in that first year. The program also opened up a new perspective for the Theatre of the Oppressed as a Brazilian methodology operative beyond national borders. Thus, in 2008, the project Theatre of the Oppressed Hub to Hub also facilitated the international expansion of the method to several provinces in four African countries: Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Senegal. The aim of the expansion was the formation of International Cultural Hubs, dedicated to the dissemination of the Theatre of the Oppressed on the African continent, combined with an affirmation of the historical and cultural bonds with Africa.⁹

In this cultural exchange, Brazil exported a social technology, the Theatre of the Oppressed, as well as a new form of cultural policy, which favored its multiplication. That way, the Theatre of the Oppressed and the idea of democracy activated via hubs in an autonomous network of culture circulated transnationally, taking the same routes, from Brazil to Africa, and then to countries of Latin America. In the same period, the CTO-Rio also received various sponsorships from the oil company Petrobrás for projects in areas of high poverty and violence, such as the northeast of Brazil and the *favelas*, the slums of Rio, like Maré. Such projects have facilitated the practice of the TO all over Brazil, as well as creating international bridges with Africa. The confluence of these projects resulted in the largest training program for multipliers in the Theatre of the Oppressed run by the CTO-Rio, both in terms of geographical spread and cultural diversity, reaching a total of 700 artist-activists from distinct sociocultural backgrounds (Santos 2016, 28).

Since 2019, with the drastic cuts in the area of culture by the current far-right government of Brazil, the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed-Rio has reaffirmed itself as an exception in the theatrical environment of Rio de Janeiro by receiving renewed sponsorship by Petrobrás, which runs until 2020. The survival of the CTO in the climate of a new form of censorship in Brazil – which is executed by the government through budgetary cuts to cultural projects – is guaranteed precisely because of the aspect of social development the group's projects are devoted to. To better illustrate the gravity of the Brazilian situation: in 2019, Petrobrás, the semi-public oil company, which was one of the largest cultural funding bodies in the country, suspended all its sponsorship of artistic and cultural projects. However, the sponsorship of CTO-Rio was funded through the Petrobrás socio-environmental program and not through the artistic and cultural segment of the company. This integration in the field of social development is what has enabled the Theatre of the Oppressed to escape the recent cuts in cultural sponsorship and to continue to work in Brazil, especially in the communities and slums of Rio.

In the case of Brazil, where the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed-Rio can look back on more than thirty years of continuous work, one can observe that the spread of the method resembles the initial stage of the TO in France. Whether in Brazil or France,

the activities of the Centres for the Theatre of the Oppressed were made viable by integrating the method into social development policies.

Transnational networks of the Theatre of the Oppressed

The integration of the Theatre of the Oppressed in social work within community networks reflects an epistemic shift in the field of culture, which started in the 1970s. At that time, there was a broad move in theatre that questioned the model of high culture and which led to projects where theatre was redefined as a tool for social development. This led ultimately to the field of applied theatre and its many subfields of which Theatre for Development is probably the best known and to which the seminal contribution of the Theatre of the Oppressed is undisputed (Prentki 2015, 15-16). By adapting his techniques to the policies of cultural democracy, Boal found ways to systematize and disseminate his method on a transnational scale.

However, the opening that Boal found in the social development field for his theatrical techniques, also in Brazil, contrasts with the difficulties he faced in the world of art theatre on his return to the country in the 1980s, when he tried to reintegrate himself into the Brazilian theatrical environment. These different receptions illustrate the complexities of the legitimizing forces that acted in the field of cultural policies in the post-dictatorship period. After fifteen years of exile and intent on resuming his successful career as a director in conventional theatre, Boal, although already world famous thanks to the Theatre of the Oppressed, was targeted by a campaign of persecution by *Jornal do Brasil*, then the dominant news outlet in Rio de Janeiro. In 1985, Brazil was still under the remnants of the military dictatorship, and Boal's reputation as a famous exile, identified with the historical left-wing, directly influenced the reception of his play *O corsário do rei* (*The king's corsair*) – his first to be staged after his return. The intense discussion generated by the performance in the news media and the theatrical world of the time ended up serving as a catalyst for a debate on cultural policies and their relationship with the state. Post-dictatorship Brazilian society's rejection of every form of state interference in culture ensured that Boal, as a stage director, could not fit into the new kind of legitimization of art theatre, which was gaining strength in Brazil (Andrade 2014).¹⁰

In 1985, the world of post-dictatorship art theatre did not welcome director Boal back into its fold.¹¹ However, the field of theatre as social development increasingly facilitated the work of the Theatre of the Oppressed, from the 1980s to the 2000s, when finally Boal's method started being more widely known in Brazil itself. Supported by the cultural policies implemented by a center-left government, the institutionalization and network building of the Theatre of the Oppressed had such a sustained impact at the beginning of this century that the Brazilian practice of the method could expand beyond national borders and influence other countries.

This complex relationship between distinct modes of theatrical legitimization, as demonstrated by Boal's return to Brazil, had already been revealed in the process of integrating his method in 1980s France, as mentioned at the beginning of this article. While the attempt at inserting the Theatre of the Oppressed into the French art theatre world was extremely controversial, and resisted by French critics at the time, the method found ample backing when adapted to the French policies of cultural democracy. Thus,

the analyses of both cases demonstrate that, starting from the period of exile, the institutional legitimization strategies tended to be most fully realized in the field of theatre as social development. The transnational expansion of the Theatre of the Oppressed connects directly to this push towards redefining theatre and culture in terms of social and political activism.

As a sign of recognition of his global importance, it is worth mentioning that, in addition to being a candidate for the Nobel Peace prize, Augusto Boal was nominated Ambassador of Theatre by the International Theatre Institute – ITI / UNESCO, in March 2009, a few months before his passing. On the same occasion, he was chosen by the ITI to make a statement on International Theatre Day in his last public appearance in Paris.

Despite Boal's death, the Theatre of the Oppressed continued to circulate transnationally through the diverse networks created around the method. Several such international networks – connected or not to the previously mentioned TO Centres – have formed since then, including the francophone countries' network, *Réseau Théâtre de l'Opprimé*; the *Indian Federation of the Theatre of the Oppressed*, managed by *Jana Sanskriti*; the Asian network, started by AHRDO - *Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization*; the international network *Ma(g)dalena Laboratory - Theatre of the Oppressed Women*; in Africa, RETEC - *Mozambique Network of Community Theatre*; in Portugal, the network *Multiplica*, formed by *GTO LX* - a group from Lisbon, and *Óprima!*, a gathering of TO and Activism from Porto; and also the Latin American network of the Theatre of the Oppressed, RELATO, which brings together several Central and South American countries. These multiple networks gather practitioners and groups from different countries, who meet frequently to carry out an exchange of practices in different parts of the world at international conferences and festivals of the Theatre of the Oppressed.

Through these discourse networks, the Theatre of the Oppressed crosses borders by circulating as a political tool for activists who use the method in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Palestine and Israel. Much the same way, the method is applied in areas with high degrees of poverty and violence, through social projects in countries such as Brazil, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, quite often with the support of non-governmental organizations that act in defence of human rights.

In a double dynamic of local transformation and network expansion, the Theatre of the Oppressed has established itself throughout the world. In this dialectical process that conjoins appropriation and dissemination, the method engages with the concept of 'imagination as a social practice' and links itself to the growing number of 'diasporic public spheres', to which most of the activist movements in the postnational world are now connected in a 'postnational network of diasporas' (Appadurai 1996).

Summary

By envisioning a trajectory of geographical and cultural intersection, it was possible to investigate how, beginning in exile, the Theatre of the Oppressed acquired mobility and, at the same time, an open methodological approach that enabled its dissemination in international networks. That capacity for adaptation is directly connected to the modularity of the method. These characteristics of the Theatre of the Oppressed allowed changes, adaptations and contamination by the local cultures and aesthetic traditions of

the territories in which it came to be applied, which enabled its survival in the most diverse contexts, geographical terrains and cultural landscapes. This adaptability of the method contributed significantly to the transnational expansion of the Theatre of the Oppressed and its status as one of the most practiced theatrical methodologies globally (Andrade 2017).

In a movement of expansion comparable only to the worldwide reach of the methods of Stanislavsky and Brecht, Augusto Boal's method spread throughout the world so that today it is practiced in all five continents. The director that helped bring to Brazil Stanislavsky's 'method' and the ideas of Brecht, is the same one that allowed Latin America to send out a theatrical method to the world as well: Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed.

In the case of the Theatre of the Oppressed, network structure and institutionalization are not antithetical entities but rather mutually conditioning processes that enabled the ideas and practices of one charismatic theatre artist, Augusto Boal, to form resilient structures that have not only been sustained over a fifty-year period but have mutated and attained, at least for the meantime, signs of permanence associated with institutions. Boal, being a product of the theatre-modernist avantgarde, would probably be appalled at the thought of his method being labelled as 'institutionalized'. Yet the fact that the method has survived the passing of its progenitor and now enjoys numerous offshoots and centres of practice, suggests that it is indeed an institution in its own right.

Endnotes

- ¹ Following Douglass North's famous definition, we can say that institutions define "the rules of the game," and constitute "the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction" (North 1990, 3), whereas organizations are the individual players, "groups of individuals bound by some common purpose to achieve objectives" (North 1990, 5).
- ² The other two forms of authority are legal-bureaucratic and traditional. The former regulates succession through legal means such as a constitution whereas the latter privileges practices such as primogeniture to formalize structures of authority.
- ³ Definitions of the term 'network' are highly contextual. For more on the concept in theatre history, see Balme (2020).
- ⁴ For more on the *Bulletins du Théâtre de l'Opprimé* and the transnational development of the Theatre of the Oppressed from France, see Andrade (2017), about to be published.
- ⁵ Soon after the election of Boal, the entire crew visited Germany to enact a protest performance against the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Colonization of America, at the invitation of the German group *Spectaculum* – consisting of students and teachers from several areas of the country, who had taken part in a workshop with Boal in Rio. The starting point was the previously mentioned pioneer internship in Orvelte, in the Netherlands, and the scenes that were co-created by both groups were performed on the streets of Berlin, Hamburg and Mainz (Centro... 2016, 16).
- ⁶ In the Theatre of the Oppressed, a joker is someone who acts both as a mediator between stage and audience – especially in the modality of forum theatre –, and as an instructor and a multiplier in the training workshops of the method.
- ⁷ We are grateful to the generosity and contribution of Professor Victor Hugo Adler Pereira who allowed access to the rich material and records of his research entitled *Teatro e Movimentos Sociais* – executed in 2000/2002 and funded by the Brazilian research council CNPq, under the project Ler-UERJ under his coordination, at the Rio de Janeiro State University, UERJ.
- ⁸ Information also mentioned on the website of CTO-Rio, available at: <https://www.ctorio.org.br/home/grupos/>.

- ⁹ Information mentioned on the website of CTO-Rio, available at: <https://www.ctorio.org.br/home/projetos/>.
- ¹⁰ The resistance to accepting Boal's work in his own country clearly signals the difficulty in his reintegration into the Brazilian artistic environment, even after the proclamation of amnesty in Brazil. For more on the perspective on Augusto Boal as a 'permanently exiled artist', see Andrade (2014).
- ¹¹ It is worth mentioning that, during his exile in France, Augusto Boal kept up his career as a director in conventional theatre by directing a series of plays in different European countries. In 1979, the director staged his play *Murro em ponta de faca*, about Brazilian exiles, in the then recently open Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed in Paris. In 1980, he directed the same play in the Schauspielhaus of Graz, Austria. In 1982, he staged *Nada más a Calingasta*, by Julio Cortázar, also in the Schauspielhaus of Graz. In the following year, 1983, he directed the Brazilian play *Zumbi* in Austria and staged *Eréndira*, an adaptation of the story by Gabriel García Márquez, with actress Marina Vlady as part of the cast, in the Théâtre de l'Est Parisien. And in 1985, he directed *El Público*, by García Lorca, in the Schauspielhaus of Wuppertal, Germany (Boal 2000, 196-198).

References

- Abirached, Robert, and Lucien Atoun, eds. 1995. *La Décentralisation Théâtrale : 1969-1981. 4. Le Temps des Incertitudes*. Arles: Actes Sud.
- Andrade, Clara de. 2014. *O Exílio de Augusto Boal: Reflexões sobre um Teatro sem Fronteiras*. Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras.
- . 2017. *Teatro do Oprimido de Augusto Boal na França: Transformações Locais e Expansão Transnacional*. 2017. PhD Thesis, University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, UNIRIO.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Balme, Christopher. 2017. "Theatrical Institutions in Motion: Developing Theatre in the Postcolonial Era." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 31 (2): 125-140. Project MUSE. doi:10.1353/dtc.2017.0006.
- . 2019. "Institutional Aesthetics and the Crisis of Leadership." In *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Politics*, edited by Peter Eckersal and Helena Grehan, 169-172. Abington: Routledge.
- . 2020. *The Globalization of Theatre 1870-1930: The Theatrical Networks of Maurice E. Bandmann*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bendelak, Olivar. 2016. "Teatro Legislativo." *Metaxis* 8: 22-25.
- . 2000. Interview given to the team of the research named "Teatro e Movimentos Sociais", coordinated by Victor Hugo Adler Pereira, funded by the Brazilian research council CNPq, 1 DVD (40'). Rio de Janeiro: LER-UERJ, Rio de Janeiro State University, UERJ.
- Boal, Augusto. 1977. *Teatro do Oprimido e Outras Poéticas Políticas*. 2º ed. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
- . 1985. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Translated by Charles A. McBride and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communications Group. Original edition, 1979.
- . 1998. *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics*. Translated by Adrian Jackson. London; New York: Routledge.
- . 2000. *Hamlet e o Filho do Padeiro: Memórias Imaginadas*. Rio de Janeiro: Record.

- . 2001. *Hamlet and the Baker's Son: My Life in Theatre and Politics*. Translated by Adrian Jackson and Candida Blaker. London; New York: Routledge.
- Britto, Geo. 2016. "Na Terra Brasilis". *Metaxis* 8: 20-21.
- CEDITADE. 1982. "Théâtre de l'opprimé direction Augusto Boal : Enjeux la Vie - Spectacles Forum". *Théâtre de l'opprimé* 8 (Déc.): Spécial encarte - Programme.
- Centro de Teatro do Oprimido. Website of the CTO-Rio. Available at: <https://www.ctorio.org.br/>.
- . 2010. "Teatro do Oprimido de Ponto a Ponto." Rio de Janeiro: *Metaxis* 6.
- . 2016. "CTO 30 anos." Rio de Janeiro: *Metaxis* 8.
- . 2016. "CTO 30 anos: da Fábrica de Teatro Popular ao Centro de Teatro do Oprimido." *Metaxis* 8: 9-18.
- Cohen-Cruz, Jan, and Mady Schutzman, eds. 2006. *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Colyvas, Jeannette A., and Powell, Walter W. 2006. "Roads to Institutionalization: The Remaking of Boundaries between Public and Private Science". In Barry Staw [Hg.]: *Research in Organizational Behavior An Annual Series of Analytical Essays and Critical Reviews*: 305-353.
- Dahlquist, Marina, and Joel Frykholm, eds. 2019. *The Institutionalization of Educational Cinema: North America and Europe in the 1910s and 1920s*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- DiMaggio, Paul. 1992. "Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: The Extension of the High Culture Model to Theater, Opera, and the Dance, 1900-1940." In *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, edited by Michèle Lamont and Marcel Fournier, 21-67. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- DiMaggio, Paul J., and Walter W. Powell. 1983. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." *American Sociological Review* 48 (2): 147-160. doi: 10.2307/2095101.
- DiMaggio, Paul, and Walter W. Powell. 1991. "Introduction." In *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Paul DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, 1-38. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Ferguson, Niall. 2018. *The Square and the Tower: Networks and Power, from the Freemasons to Facebook*. New York: Penguin.
- Girard, Augustin. 1995. "Le Fonds d'Intervention Culturelle : un Instrument d'Innovation Encore Mal Évalué." In *La Décentralisation Théâtrale : 1969-1981. 4. Le Temps des Incertitudes*, edited by Robert Abirached and Lucien Atoun, 147-155. Arles: Actes Sud.
- Granovetter, Mark. 1983. "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited." *Sociological Theory* 1: 201-233.
- Jackson, Adrian. 2009. "Augusto Boal – A Theatre in Life." *New Theatre Quarterly*: Cambridge 25: 306-309.
- North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance: The Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Prentki, Tim. 2015. *Applied Theatre: Development*. London; New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.

- Saez, Guy. 1995. "Les Progrès du Partenariat : Les Villes Entrent dans le Jeu." In *La Décentralisation Théâtrale : 1969-1981. 4. Le Temps des Incertitudes*, edited by Robert Abirached and Lucien Atoun, 45-61. Arles: Actes Sud.
- Santos, Bárbara. 2016. "Identidade Estético-Política". *Metaxis* 8: 26-29.
- Schechner, Richard, Chatterjee, Sudipto and Augusto Boal. 1998. "Augusto Boal, City Councillor: Legislative Theatre and the Chamber in the Streets: An Interview". *TDR* 42 (4) (Winter): 75-90.
- Schutzman, Mady, and Jan Cohen-Cruz, eds. 1994. *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Scott, Richard. 1995. *Institutions and Organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Urrutiaguer, Daniel. 2014. *Les Mondes du Théâtre : Désenchantement Politique et Économie des Conventions*. Paris: Harmattan.
- Weber, Max. 1968. *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers*. Edited by S.N. Eisenstadt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.