

YOUTH AND THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED



EDITED BY

PETER DUFFY AND ELINOR VETTRAINO



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To my wife, Patti Walker. This project, along with most things in my life, would never have become a reality without you. To my daughter, Evelyn, I hope this book makes some small contribution to ensure that the world you and all children grow up in will be a healthy, peaceful, free, equitable, and inspiring one.

—Peter Duffy

For my wonderful husband, Peter Vettraino—“thank you for believing”—
and for Elvis and Moose.

—Elinor Vettraino

I am not; I am being. As a traveller, I am passing from one state to another. I am not; I came and I go.

—Augusto Boal, *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Foreword <i>Peter Duffy and Elinor Vettraino</i>	xi
Our Role in Crisis <i>Julian Boal</i>	xv
Introduction: Why This? Why Now?: A Contributors' Discussion	1
Part I Theatre of the Oppressed in Educational Settings	
1 Puppet Intervention in the Early Childhood Classroom: Augusto Boal's Influences and Beyond <i>Andrea Dishy and Karina Naumer</i>	17
2 Exploring the Stigmatized Child through Theatre of the Oppressed Techniques <i>Johnny Saldaña</i>	45
3 Silent Screaming and the Power of Stillness: Theatre of the Oppressed within Mainstream Elementary Education <i>Elinor Vettraino</i>	63
Part II The Political Life of Youth	
4 Viewpoints on Israeli-Palestinian Theatrical Encounters <i>Chen Alon and Sonja Arsham Kuftinec, with Ihsan Turkiyye</i>	83
5 TELAvision: Weaving Connections for Teen Theatre of the Oppressed <i>Brent Blair</i>	97
6 In Search of the Radical in Performance: Theatre of the Oppressed with Incarcerated Youth <i>Diane Conrad</i>	125
7 Rethinking Interaction On and Off the Stage: Jana Sanskriti's Experience <i>Sanjoy Ganguly</i>	143

8	Acting Outside the Box: Integrating Theatre of the Oppressed within an Antiracism Schools Program <i>Warren Linds and Linda Goulet</i>	159
Part III Theatre of the Oppressed Practice with Youth		
9	Staying Alert: A Conversation with Chris Vine <i>Peter Duffy</i>	187
10	From <i>I</i> to <i>We</i> : Analogical Induction and Theatre of the Oppressed with Youth <i>Peter Duffy</i>	203
11	Ripples on the Water: Discoveries Made with Young People Using Theatre of the Oppressed <i>Christina Marin</i>	217
12	Let's Rock the Bus <i>Mady Schutzman and B. J. Dodge</i>	229
13	The Human Art: An Interview on Theatre of the Oppressed and Youth with Augusto Boal <i>Peter Duffy</i>	251
	Afterword: Snacking on the Moment: The Drama of "Working Through" Oppression with Kids <i>Glenn M. Hudak</i>	263
	Contributors	271
	Index	279

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—Peter Duffy

It's difficult to know where to start because so many people have helped me in the realization of this book. First of all, my thanks go to Peter Duffy for asking me on board with this project. This has been a longtime coming for him, and I am privileged to have shared in this journey. I also want to thank the contributors for their input and energy; without them, this text wouldn't exist. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my research mentor Dr. Divya Jindal-Snape, who has been unswerving in her support. My husband's wisdom and support for me in this project has been invaluable, and further thanks go to good friends and family—Tracey, Craig (and Joshua), Pauline, Sean, Linley, John, Brian, Lynn, Linda, Jayne, Lesley, Ruth, Mark, and Amanda—thanks for the feedback and encouragement. I also need to thank Cindy and her team in Dundee for the endless Grande Americanos as I was writing—you kept me going! And lastly, I can't finish without thanking Augusto; I have learned a huge amount from his teachings and his openness. I hope that this text truly does him justice.

—Elinor Vettraino

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Foreword

Peter Duffy and Elinor Vettraino

When this project was first conceived, it had a very different look to it. Originally, it was going to be a book chronicling work Peter was doing at the time with a group of high school students in central Maine. He was a high school English and drama teacher and cocreated an interactive theatre company with a core of about twenty high school students. Their goal was to generate interactive theatrical experiences that dug deeper than the model of audience members asking questions of actors in role about the choices they made. They employed Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, and even Rainbow of Desire to create pieces that challenged the assumptions of students and their teachers, parents, and administrators. The troupe traveled to schools from Maine to New York City creating pieces of theatre with and for student bodies that deconstructed the oppressions of youth, parents, and teachers and challenged participants to look deeper into, to borrow from Paulo Freire, how their world was named.

When Peter and the troupe were creating this work, they kept seeking out resources that would support and challenge what they were creating together. They found a lot of material on Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) but precious little about TO and youth specifically. When Peter first started talking to Augusto Boal about the work the students and he were doing, Boal told him that he had yet to employ TO methods with young people. Up until that point, all of his work had been with adults. Boal did end up doing a fair amount of work with incarcerated teens and other groups of young people, but it was never his primary interest. Because of the lack of published work on the topic, it became Peter's goal to dedicate himself to starting a larger dialogue about the work that youth and youth workers, educators, and theatre artists were doing in conjunction with TO.

The more he discussed the book project with colleagues, the clearer it became that the necessary text would be a volume of international perspectives that explored addressing the oppressions of youth through TO. Peter connected with a colleague and friend, Elinor Vettraino, who became the coeditor for this revised concept. As a practitioner in Scotland working with

children and teacher education students, Elinor shared Peter's vision for a text that connected practitioners' insights and experiences with questions and critical dialogue. This text, *Youth and Theatre of the Oppressed*, is the culmination of this necessary project.

The volume does not set out to be a *how-to* but more of a *how-come?* It seeks to pose more questions than it answers. It seeks to investigate critically the practitioners' praxis and to start a dialogue about the intersection of TO and youth. The book's goals are to provoke thoughtful dialogue, question established conventions, and further the exciting international conversation about TO and youth. This dialectical approach to the text will hopefully spark questions within the reader and provide possible frameworks to experiment within the reader's own work.

The editors hope that the book remains true to the spirit of the arsenal of TO. TO's purpose is to encourage the collective to develop possible alternatives to oppressive forces in their own lives. In its own way, this book shares the goal of engaging the collective by aiming to create generative conversations among its readers that look deeply into the issues of community—whether in India or Indiana—and to work with young people to name their world, untangle the knot of oppressions, and develop with them possible action plans for their own futures.

There is little doubt that young people deal with often-inconceivable oppressions. When we learn their stories, we discover worlds that haunt us and bring us to the point of utter disbelief. We hear of gun-toting child soldiers, youth plagued by famine, young people whose parents were stolen by HIV, child prostitutes, and youth trying to learn about justice while growing up in war-ravaged countries. We learn of those blinded by the lure of materialism and instant gratification, adolescents who spend too much of their days alone or without stable adults in their lives, youth who are abused and neglected in horrifying ways, children who dare not to dream. We meet learners who are sent to institutions that rarely value them as individuals and who must learn how to conform to the standardized ways of teaching and learning in order to get by. We hear stories of young people who are so obsessed with their weight that they will do anything to remain thin. We meet children who have so internalized the oppressor that they become the oppressors of their peers. Such stories can make one numb and feel impotent in the face of this *unfortunate inevitability* of history. This book suggests, however, that this need not be the case. In each chapter, we meet individuals who are working against racism, bullying, poverty, institutions, and governments to create *forums* for the voiceless to discover their voice and the powerless to act on their power. This book acknowledges the complicated lives of young people and gives examples of people working with youth to turn these tides.

The book is divided into three parts. In each part, the authors' approaches to their work make use of TO techniques in a methodological sense. They also explore the relationships between the philosophy of TO and contexts in which they operate. Three overriding themes emerge from these contexts: TO in educational settings, TO and the political life of youth, and TO practice with youth.

Part I, "TO in Educational Settings," examines institutionalized oppressions in formalized places of learning. Schools homogenize in order to run smoothly, and this process creates environments where shy and marginalized students become easy prey for their peers and teachers alike. The chapters in this section demonstrate the versatility of the TO techniques from preschool-age children right to adolescence. Each chapter focuses on student voice and individual power.

Part II, "TO and the Political Life of Youths," uncovers young people's responses to the political agendas they daily face. Many of these political forces are not unique to the lives of young people; however, the power to impact on these issues often lies within the adult world. The chapters within this section amplify the similarities of the political forces waged against young people across the globe, which highlights the fact that they are not alone in their struggle.

The chapters within Part III, "TO Practice with Youth," offer an exploration of broader issues in connection with TO work. Contributors critically reflect on approaches and adaptations of techniques that have evolved over many years in many contexts. The final words in this part are given to Augusto Boal, who offers his own reflections on the intersection between TO and youth.

Boal has said that the TO is a mirror where we can see our psyche and can penetrate it to modify our own image. The three parts of this book offer a mirror to practitioners to discover ways in which their practice can be enhanced through reflection on the praxis of others. Boal was fond of quoting Antonio Machado's proverb, "Caminante el camino no existe, el camino lo hace el caminante al caminar," which, loosely translated, means "the road does not exist; the traveler creates the road by traveling." As a final thought in the context of employing TO with youth, there is no road. We hope to create this road together.

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Our Role in Crisis

Julian Boal

Original translation by Ruth Cave

We are in a time of global economic and social crisis. The funds announced to save our financial system (but is it really our own?) are so enormous that I cannot believe it is possible for anyone not to feel the obscenity in the contradiction of, on the one hand, the paying off of banks' debts so quickly effectuated by the same governments worldwide that, on the other hand, deny the existence of resources to pay for investment in hospitals, schools, pensions, and so on.

Around the world, many people have taken up arms against the systems that they believe have created this crisis. For example, most of the groups that want to do Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) have taken up the fight against corporations and, as part of that, do not want to work for big business—and in my opinion, rightly so. But what about projects that work in schools or in government? While this is not a book about TO and schools, many young people's conceptual development of education comes from their experiences of schools, so it is an important aspect to discuss here. But just as oppression exists in the corridors of power within big business, so it exists in the corridors and classrooms of schools throughout the world. It is not about where you do the work you do but about *what* you do and *how* you choose to engage with the work. We cannot be lulled into thinking that we are doing right in the world just because we are cultural workers; cultural workers often work for the same states that legitimizes oppression.

It is striking to see how the criticisms that Paulo Freire leveled at schools mirror those that Augusto Boal levels at theatre. Both authors vigorously denounce the partition of roles and space established by these two institutions. "Those who know" stand facing their complementary opposite, "those who don't know." The gap that separates the two will never be bridged because this gap is absolutely necessary for the survival of those two institutions. Freire's criticism of the "banking approach" to education cannot but be seen as contiguous with Boal's criticism of the "obscenity of the word spectator."

Over time, these two thoughts have been dulled down. They were transformed from dynamic and powerful tools into methods that became a formulaic approach to emancipation. Doing this has removed any form of critical engagement within these two schools of thought—Boalian and Freirian—and instead reduced the concepts to the strict application of defined steps within a methodology. The benefits of these steps would be measured by extremely arbitrary criteria, such as the number of times the audience intervened. The number becomes the criterion, but what can this number tell us about the quality of the exchanges, of the reflections that were ignited, and of the emancipation possibilities that started to rise or not to rise?

How far away are we from the time when Brecht could announce that his task was not to work *immediately* for the largest audiences but that he preferred to work first with a limited number of workers in order to enable them to become a circle of connoisseurs capable of, by themselves, transmitting their enthusiasm for theatre and the valuable discoveries they made by being involved with it? Because those working with TO in communities are often beholden to funders and grant subsidies, the luxury of time does not exist, and we become, sometimes without realizing it, worshippers of the “number.” I do not believe that any interesting work can be done with youth without a critical reflection on the concrete conditions that allow this work but at the same time set boundaries to it.

Schools have a dual nature. They prepare young people for churning out learned ideas, and sometimes children reproduce what they have been taught more than they create. Intertwined with this is the space that schools create for young people to reflect on their own condition: the fundamental premise of conscientization. Theatre is the best place in which anyone can experiment with what it is to be someone else. Theatre gives anyone the possibility to be in someone else’s shoes and assume all social positions. By performing these other social roles, we discover that what we thought was a completely natural phenomenon, for instance, being a man, is also partly, or maybe entirely, a role that is socially constructed. If it is society that constructed those roles, then we can imagine a society in which those roles will be different.

All the chapters within this book are testimony to the analysis of the tensions that exist between oppression and emancipation. These tensions are always present, regardless of how hard institutions, communities, and individuals try to be free of them. This is for no other reason than because everything within our societies, including us, is constructed by and for oppression; this, in turn, brings the need and possibility for emancipation. In this book, you will not find a “how-to” methodology to follow in order to achieve laboratory and quantified results because all the contributors here are speaking about their specific practices and experiences, all of which are rich, complex, and quite different.

If the world today is in crisis, then so should our role be. If our response to this crisis simply ends up as a lament for the drying up of our subsidies and grants, our response will not be at the level required to match the enormous tasks in front of us now. But if we decide to put ourselves in crisis, to think about what our role really means, to reflect on the real significance that the words *oppression* and *emancipation* can have today, and to see without complacency what means we have at our disposal to challenge oppression, then this crisis might be salutary for us. We have to be humble and recognize the modesty of our means so that our ambition to transform the world transforms first the tool that is ours.

Introduction

Why This? Why Now?

A Contributors' Discussion

Throughout this text, you will meet practitioners all working with young people and using Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) as a vehicle for exploring the lives hidden within their stories. What follows is an amalgamation of a number of conversations that many of the contributors had over the period of the development of this book. These conversations explore the “Why this?” and “Why now?” questions that we had when putting the book together. The book is separated into three parts: “Theatre of the Oppressed in Educational Settings,” “The Political Life of Youths,” and “Theatre of the Oppressed Practice with Youths.” The conversations woven together here offer some indication of our thoughts behind our work.

* * *

Peter: I'm just wondering how, if at all, TO can be introduced in any sort of formal capacity into general education settings such as elementary schools or high schools. What are your thoughts on the possibilities here? What are the issues for you in relation to attempting to embed TO into educational practice within schools?

Johnny: One of the first things that occurs to me is that preservice educators have to first become acquainted with Boal's TO through a dedicated course in the subject.

Elinor: I agree with Johnny on this one. I think it needs to start with teacher education programs.

Brent: There are several aspects of this dilemma, but pedagogically, in relation to training I have carried out with my group in the past, we felt that TO could absolutely be introduced in formal capacities through curricular adjustments in the standards and guidelines based on evidence of Theatre in Education/Drama in Education (TIE/DIE) practice as beneficial to the

overall learning environment. We also felt that this could happen through local visiting artists bringing theatre to the schools and through professional development workshops in TO with teachers. This not only invites all levels of teachers to utilize TO techniques within the curricular program without having to change the standards, but it also makes it formal in the sense that school administrators promote and encourage teachers to attend by paying their workshop fees, for example.

Johnny: At Arizona State University, we require that all preservice theatre teachers take Theatre for Social Change (THP 482) and read related literature (e.g., by Michael Rohd) in other drama education courses. Once teachers become aware of this form of theatre, they are more likely to incorporate it into their classroom curriculum. They most often see how relevant it is to today's young people.

Andrea: Karina Naumer and I wrote about our puppet intervention project, which we carried out in early elementary schools. The project is particularly created for a classroom setting; it's not a presentational format or performed in a theatre so it lends itself quite well to being integrated into the classroom and school focus. It's only for intimate classroom settings. Even though there are bits of puppet show in it, the students come and replace puppet voices in a moment of conflict or in a moment that they feel they should. In this case, the TO is completely embedded in the practice as it is not connected directly to a curriculum. Having said that, if it is very specifically about a story the students are reading, it would take the children's learning deeper into character work as well as plot development and those sorts of preliteracy concepts.

What's particularly different about what we did with this age group in this long-term experiment, what we call puppet intervention, is that the students did not always step in for the oppressed character. We had to flip some of the models a bit because students often wanted to correct oppressor behavior because they could see that was the *bad* behavior. The irony is that even though students embraced working in this style, it didn't mean that when a problem erupted among students in their regular, everyday lives—you know, so-and-so stole so-and-so's pencil—it didn't immediately jump to the *bad* behavior that they just corrected two seconds before. So we were struggling with that, though many teachers said the puppet intervention scenario was one that they constantly referred back to, and the kids had a group understanding or group vocabulary of the situation. They were able to say, "You just did that just like that puppet did. That isn't a good thing." We were only in a classroom setting in which that thrived.

Peter: I think you're raising a really interesting point, Andrea, and it's something that I found as well. If you think about internalized oppressions and the way our bodies have been trained to react to situations, that's a

lifelong training. It's unrealistic to think that a few days of a residency are going to contradict that learning. Instead, I think we need to work with the students to create the language they need to recontextualize the behavioral framework they have so that they can see other possibilities. Often, it's about opening up options and asking, "What else could you do?" It doesn't necessarily change behavior, but it can give students an opportunity to show each other what other alternatives exist.

Elinor: I agree. I think that the power to transform your own difficult situation into something that is liberating is very much underestimated. In a sense, it's allowing your mind the freedom to create through your body a positive vision of what your situation could be like if you had options or took opportunities to behave in a way that was different from your reality. Often, the possibilities are there, but we are too conditioned to believe in them or see them; I find that particularly with young children who are conditioned to respond in particular ways to adults especially in formalized institutional settings like schools.

B. J.: Yeah, permission to imagine something else. The last time I used TO within a school setting was after school with sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, and we made a play about issues in their school, which, in reality, was about the system as oppressor. We didn't have breakout sessions; we had a kind of forum where the administrators stopped the students on their way to class and said, "You have to button up your shirt and look a certain way." The students, as Andrea said, always wanted to stand in for the oppressor, or they wanted to have vengeance. They wanted to be able to talk back to the vice principal because they were never allowed to do that, so it became sort of a Rainbow Forum and it got us to thinking that maybe Rainbow is the way to go.

Diane: That schools are the oppressor has been very much my experience working with high school-aged youths who are deemed "at risk." I spent a few years as a classroom teacher—teaching drama at the junior and senior high school levels—and since have done TO-based research with high school students and incarcerated youth. Young people have told me, on a number of occasions, how oppressive schools are for them. That's what brought me to work in a youth jail. Schools are like prisons for some kids. It's true that it's very challenging to do TO work in school settings because of all the constraints regarding what students can say, the expectations around their behavior, the content of our explorations, and so on. These elements are all heightened to the extreme in jail. If you can do TO in jail, you can do it anywhere!

Brent: One of the many teen communities I am always attempting to work with are the students in the culture of violence, trauma, and abuse—most especially young teens locked up for life sentences for crimes committed

during their youth. But I see barriers to this. First, the work opens people up to the possibilities of life, but the reality is that they will probably never be released from prison, so the letdown after the project is over is frequently too depressing for most involved. Second, depending on location, probation staff, the state, the county sheriff's office, and so on are typically not friendly to any kind of humanizing work that doesn't state as its primary purpose the transformation of these "teens at risk" into more "decent" citizens. This is problematic for honest TO work because most of the work identifies internal conflict in the context of long-standing external oppressions. With a mandate to deal mostly with the teens, individually, as agents of violence, we find ourselves challenged to do work of any integrity if we are not able to show sociopolitical contexts to violence (i.e., race, class, gender, nationality, income, etc.). This is a challenge, but not entirely insurmountable.

Peter: That raises many questions for me. What do we think about using the techniques divorced from the philosophy of the techniques, for example, using Forum in an English class? A teacher might use Forum in place of having the students write from a character's perspective. Instead of using a free-writing activity, the teacher could say, "Get this up on its feet and show the conflict. And let's show other alternatives that the protagonist could pursue in the coming chapters."

Warren: How is that different from what Forum does?

Peter: For me, it's about uncovering and naming oppression and having it be a vehicle to discuss the inherent oppression in the students' lives. It's a great technique, but I am wondering if there is a line we should be aware of when something is about uncovering the personal versus the inner-workings of a story removed from our own experience. That does not mean that you can't get to the personal this way, but it doesn't mean, necessarily, that you automatically do. If the protagonist is kept at an arm's length, we are only curious what happens to the protagonist in the context of that story and nothing else. And at that level, it ceases to be TO for me; it functions solely as an interesting and engaging pedagogical tool, because there isn't an interest in the oppression and the focus is on looking at a scene from a book in a creative writing sort of way.

Sonja: I wonder, too, what is the difference between using interactive theatre techniques, as you've mentioned, Peter, as a mode of active learning—or using sculptures in a theatre class as a way to generate ideas—and using TO as a specific practice? And is there a point in which TO—and especially Boal—get reified so that you're not looking at the genealogy of the practices that preexisted TO, that were being developed by a number of people prior to Boal's publications? At what point do we attach a name to something and then ask questions about whether it adheres to the name rather than looking at the roots of the practices that have not necessarily been codified under that name? That's a separate question from, at what

point are you using the exercises without understanding the philosophy that is specifically associated with TO?

Elinor: I agree that it's a separate question really, but I also think another question needs to be addressed: does it matter? Do we always have to "name" what we do? I suppose I'm asking because I know that, as a teacher, I have used TO techniques as pedagogical approaches rather than as ways to fight open oppression. For example, I have used techniques within TO to give children the spaces to move away from what can be the oppressive physical act of writing. Instead, they have played with writing with their bodies, their voices, and their movements. They weren't fighting capital "O" oppression, but they were certainly freeing themselves up as individuals to think, act, and feel. So at what point does trying to name something actually take away its ability to liberate? Are we in danger of trying so hard to stick within boundaries in TO that we are actually limiting its possibilities?

Peter: It sounds like your work is done within the context of creating liberatory practices in the classroom. The techniques are not a means to get students to do what the teacher wants, but they are methods of engagement and critical analysis. I think it is exciting that the techniques are utilized in classrooms; I just hope that the residual benefits of the techniques are realized there as well.

Johnny: One "red flag" is current in-service theatre educators using Boal's "Games" as just that—theatre games for traditional classroom work or performance warm-ups, rather than exploring their metaphoric capacity and power to explore social inequity, dynamics, and so on. Boal himself acknowledges that his repertoire of Games has potential to assist directors with play production work, but I feel more in-service presence needs to be made by TO practitioners.

B. J.: Even Boal says that the techniques are out there, and you can't really brand them. I mean, if the English teacher wants to use it pedagogically and not go any deeper than that, it begs an extra question, right? *How does this connect to you?* Sometimes it's safe to do it fictionally by growing empathy first. I don't have a problem with it called by another name. I mean a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

Andrea: I think it's an interesting idea. Something that Sonja said about the idea of practitioners knowing what they're doing with the material—that's always more my concern than the name of it. If the practitioner delves too deeply into something with students who aren't prepared or the teacher isn't behind it, there can be things that come up there. It could fall into chaos if the facilitator doesn't know how to structure or facilitate a particular non-sitting-behind-your-desk sort of structure.

B. J.: Yes, exactly. The devil is in the connotation—what you're going to do with the word and its practice.

Andrea: This really is an interesting question. When you challenged us, Peter, to be sure that we used the language of TO in our chapters, we started thinking about the role of the oppressor with young children. Children are in a position of lesser power than the grown-ups in the room, and that's just a fact. And they understand that relationship really well. The head of something or the person in charge is usually an older person with the authority and therefore the oppressor, too, I guess, so talking back to that character or responding in some way was really difficult for them. Consequently, we had to make an adjustment. Did we start our own thing and completely leave the Boal connection? I don't think so. I think we came straight from that connection, but, given our audience, we had to make an adjustment consciously.

B. J.: You are giving the students a sort of dress rehearsal—they are practicing that sort of power. All they have to do is imagine it, even though it's really hard to do. You as the witness, you have your feet in both worlds. You understand what it's like to be them, and you understand what it's like to be an adult.

Diane: I have experienced both scenarios. It seems that more and more people are interested in TO techniques for the power of the techniques themselves rather than the underlying philosophy. I've seen appropriations of the techniques for very instrumentalist ends. In this case, I make a point of reminding facilitators about the philosophical commitments of TO. On the other hand, I've facilitated adaptations of what I consider TO techniques that don't really look like TO at all but where the philosophy is very much underneath the work we're doing.

Peter: For me, it comes down to intention. That's the litmus test for me. I think Boal is really clear that you can change TO techniques or adapt them because they are a living, breathing thing, not something that's set. So if you need to change the techniques, as long as it's for the specific situation, as long as it's for the unearthing of the oppression, then I think it's appropriate. So walking away from what's in the books is all but encouraged by Boal.

Johnny: It's not always the protagonist in Forum Theatre that needs to change his or her ways when confronting oppression; we also need to focus on the *problem* source: the antagonist him or herself. I recall a TV news item recently on a middle school principal who wanted the students to name the people in the school who most often bullied. When he got those names, the principal didn't intervene with punishment, but with counseling, social assistance, and TLC for the bullies. The news item noted how bullying from these targeted individuals dropped dramatically because they now felt "better" that someone was listening to their side of the story and helping them out. TO should also do the same thing with you. We have a responsibility to *both* the real-life protagonists and antagonists in the school setting.

Peter: What are our next steps for TO in schools? What are the things that we haven't thought to do in schools yet?

Elinor: I know this is controversial, but I'd like to see more work done on how to use TO practices safely in classrooms in relation to purely the techniques. The fact (for me, anyway!) is that teachers will use and have used TO techniques for helping children to access subject areas and so on, and I don't always think that's a bad thing. What I do think is difficult though is when the techniques aren't developed in a way that the teachers understand where they came from and how they can be used. I have seen teachers stepping into the role of Jokers in Forum Theatre performances, and they had no real idea what they were doing or how to facilitate the learning. I think that can be really dangerous; many of the latter techniques in Rainbow, for example, are therapeutic in nature. So rather than say people shouldn't work with these techniques outside the original frame of TO, it would be useful to say how can they be done appropriately.

Andrea: Maybe TO is there to facilitate conversations between adults and young people, so we continue to use TO as a form or construct to make sure that student voices are heard. I find there is often a disconnect. I think maybe something like TO could be a really good way to bring ideas out, act upon them, reevaluate and put them into action. That's what I would say could facilitate very possible steps toward that relationship in order to voice the frustrations from students and adults alike.

Diane: I agree. TO practices with youth have as much to teach adults about our social relations, structures, and how we might work to create more justice as they can help empower young people in relation to their life experiences.

Warren: I'm going to be working with a group of families and children. It's sort of complicated, but we're looking at the stories of children in schools and the alienation they feel in the schools as immigrant children and the alienation their parents feel from their kids. I am trying to figure out ways of working with the schools as families. We're using Forum Theatre to look at what are different relationships that we can create together and what kind of strategies we can use to get engaged with the schools in different ways where the children and their parents have no power. I don't know where this will go—we'll develop a technique together—but it's a strategic intervention we're doing using theatre.

Peter: One of the workshops I was involved with that I was proudest of was a family dynamics Forum we held at the school. We had about fifty parents and children that showed up for a few preprepared Forum pieces the students and I devised together about basic issues like curfew and clothing choices. We made sure that we had three family counselors there to provide support while we engaged in Image and Forum Theatre work together. By the end of the night, we had parents and teens practicing

having difficult conversations together onstage. It became a powerful and moving night, and that some parents came out and took that sort of risk in front of their children was incredibly humanizing.

B. J.: In Southern California, we have option schools [called alternative schools elsewhere] and that sort of work would be developed with kids to deal with issues like homelessness, having to work two jobs, and dropping out due to the chaos. I just wish this sort of work was supported curricularly at the local level.

Sonja: I think the family context is a really useful framework to add to this conversation. Because the educational work with TO isn't only happening in the schoolroom space but also in finding ways to include parents into the conversation like you talked about, Peter and Warren. Something that several of you may have seen was Jan Mandel's students' work at the 2007 PTO conference from St. Paul Central High School. One of the things she did was to introduce a parents' breakfast because many parents were not available to meet after school because they were working or had other obligations. Just being conscious of the time that parents can be in conversation with their children has led to some extraordinary exchanges that aren't quite TO but are working with the ideas of liberation, social justice, and celebration. Sometimes I feel like that part of the work can get submerged when the focus of the work is on power and oppression. The work is also about liberation and finding the spaces to create not only the opportunities for difficult conversations but also the spaces for communal connection and celebration through the embodied work of the theatre. This is a really vital part of the work that I've seen.

Elinor: I also think there is a need to understand that sometimes focusing on the oppression can actually put pressure on the young people themselves to "fix" things for themselves and their communities.

Warren: Yes, I was talking to a colleague about the work that we do in Native Canadian communities and the long-term issues that they face that you can't solve during a Forum workshop because they are bigger issues. The youth always say, "Why do you expect us to fix these problems if our parents haven't?" This is a difficult question that occurs frequently and it makes me wonder, how do we integrate this into an established long-term community development program that tried to address the bigger issues? We've developed a five-year project we're trying to get funding for that will culminate with the youth forming a youth advisory council that will then advise their tribal council around health issues and broader issues that affect young people. It has a Legislative Theatre aspect to it, and it involves more than the youth; it also involves the tribal elders and teachers. Our vision is to encourage the young people to become leaders through the theatre. Theatre has given them their voice. But the question is, how do they use their voice, and who hears them?

Andrea: It can become really frustrating when people unleash their new voice and have nowhere to go with it.

Peter: We're veering outside the school realm, which is useful. In this bigger context, what are your thoughts on TO practice with youth in general?

Brent: What I feel is a challenge rests in a few areas. I think that TO for youth practitioners may be confusing "morality" with "ethics." Morality heads people in a vectored direction—a "right" answer, a "better" choice. It's theatre with a "message" predetermined usually by funding sources and concretized. It's a sticky wicket, but it is surmountable if dialogue is clear and the process is *completely* transparent from the beginning—meaning the youth are aware and they have escape clauses built in should they need to opt out when they learn the lay of the land. Also, I think that TO for youth itself can be challenged by the need for acceptance of protagonist stories, on the one hand, versus the real advent of teens unconsciously "hosting the oppressor." TO practitioners may find themselves unwitting allies for oppression as a young teen identifies liberation in ways that serve to oppress others. This is not uncommon in TO, but may be even more prevalent in youth.

B. J.: Our earlier conversation really nailed it for me. We're not getting to the parents. For me, that's crucial. When you're a disenfranchised youth, you're part of a greater system and you have these different dependencies. So it feels like opening that up to the family and schools and not just to one's peers is so important.

Elinor: Perhaps opening it up to everyone is the way to go. Separating out youth from "everyone else" is not always a helpful construct, because, although young people have particular needs and issues, they are still part of a wider picture. I think Sanjoy hits on this really well in his chapter on Jana Sanskriti's work.

Sonja: I agree. I think that's where the work can be really powerful. It's going back to that part that is as much about community building as it is about examining oppression. That is not to take away the importance of that component of examining power and oppression but to look at all of the different stakeholders that could be included if the larger-term goal is to create a liberatory situation for everyone.

And if we look at Chen Alon's intervention, we see the importance of doing theatre of the oppressor. This work can be done to undo the structures that exist within the oppressor position; and not just to humanize like, "Oh, we're all just the same," and consequently ignore the power dynamics that exist but to acknowledge again what Freire acknowledges: that the oppressor wants to be humanized. It's not just about treating the oppressor as a human being but about deconstructing their role in the oppressor position.

Diane: I think TO is only possible if the oppressors have admitted their role and are looking for change. All too often those in positions of power (all

of us, to some extent) are so invested in the status quo that, though we might give lip service to the idea of change, we're really not ready for the kind of change that is needed to make a difference.

Chen: One focus in this work for me that I think is crucial is about how we can work with TO without imposing politics on youth. Maybe for me that's because of the political context I work in [Israel and Palestine], but I feel that the main reason the young people I work with come for theatre is because they are trying to run away from politics. When they get to the work, they understand that the basis of the work is actually the indoctrination of a political view.

Peter: I have two questions about that. One, is anything "politics free"? I think that anytime we make a choice, it is couched in politics. Linked to that for me is a larger question: Why do we use TO with youth? Why don't we use drama therapy or something else? What is it about TO for all of us? Is it that we have certain topics that we want to cover with the populations with whom we work and so we use TO to go after that?

Elinor: I think politics in its widest term actually fits into a lot of what everyone does. But I'm also thinking about what Chen is saying; how do you *not* put your own spin on the situation at hand? How do you *not* put your own ideas, bias, or whatever forward when you're working with young people? I think all of us may have preconceived ideas about the way in which people, society, and so on should be, so how do we leave that aside, and what difficulty does it cause? I was also thinking it linked to something that Warren was saying about struggling with teachers not really understanding how this works.

Warren: You know, Boal talks about the small, personal stories and the structural issues being connected, and one of the things I am struck with is that in our work we have a real struggle working with youth to get beyond the personal stories and personal experiences that come out in the Forum plays and bringing in political analysis. They want to talk about the personal stories because stories are so strong for them. And then we bring it to the political arena and it gets lost. Maybe this is because of the context of the schools we work in, because they are not emancipatory schools.

Sonja: It's actually a major dynamic I found in working with Israeli and Palestinian youth. I've found that that's actually a dynamic about how people enter into the work. There are a lot of studies about people who work in groups with Israeli and Palestinian youth; Israeli youth tend to want to remain in the realm of the personal, they want to stay humans, they want to stay individuated. The Palestinians who are more impacted by the political situation, they see it everyday around them; the occupation is part of their everyday lives rather than an abstract condition that only affects them on occasion, really analyze things only much more through

the political realm. TO in some ways allows for both entry points. You can't just remain only on a personal realm, because you're creating a situation that codes things. You use certain ways of adapting TO, then I find that you can offer opportunities for the young people to code the political situation and not only stay in the realm of personal story.

Johnny: I was looking at the excerpt from the chapter I submitted from the collection, and there was one passage in particular I wanted to share. Charles Banaszewski was a doctoral student here at ASU. This is where I quote him: "Banaszewski (2006) asserts that adult TO facilitators introduce and examine their personal yet hidden social agendas covertly and subtextually in the public school classroom." Now I go into my own work in TO deliberately with, as Chuck said, a personal agenda. It could be a pedagogical agenda, and, you know, if you want to call the pedagogical political, so be it. But I think that it is, for me, impossible to deny that I am definitely going into any kind of TO work, whether it be with children or adults, without some agenda, whether it be covert or overt, whether it be laid on the table, or whether it be subtextual.

Peter: I absolutely agree. When I used to live in Maine, I did a lot of work at the youth detention center there. I would do some TO work with them [the youth in residence] and just to help them find a way to communicate with the higher-ups about their life and circumstances there at the center. It was used as a communication tool back and forth. But even when you're dealing with specific things like the quality of food or only having a few choices about the clothing you can wear, that's a very practical or personal thing, and yet it is such a political idea. I don't know how we can do one without the other. We are such political beasts. Foucault talks a lot about that—where the personal and political can't be extricated.

Andrea: Can I jump in on that, Peter? Obviously we're working with very young children so we're aware of the power struggles and situations when you have adults and very small children; they are looking to us to be the guide. But I think it's very careful training that our Joker, called the outside facilitator, has to bring the children and their views really out and leave their agenda on the shelf, not put it away and not make it disappear. But interestingly enough, whether it's personal or political, asking children their ideas can become a political or pedagogical confrontation to teachers that is surprising to them. So the training of our facilitators or Joker is something that we have to work very carefully on because it's very easy to tell them what the right answer is, even if you don't mean to.

Elinor: There's an article that I read recently by Paul Dwyer about Forum Theatre and Jokers within Forum. The article highlighted the issue of Jokers leading the audience toward solutions that they have perhaps thought

of or agree with. For me, it made me think about how you have to leave your own baggage at the door and think about how you work with that.

Sonja: It's a great point because I think there are a lot of assumptions that facilitation and joking are so similar that you could just throw someone into a situation and easily facilitate a Forum Theatre. There hasn't been so much careful work about how to train Jokers rather than facilitators. Mady Schutzman writes about this as well in the latest *Boal Companion* book. In *Joker Runs Wild*, she talks about how the initial joking system that came out of the arena was much more theoretically complex in some ways than what the position has become in terms of someone who can be more of a pattern recognizer, who makes everyone aware of the patterns that are surfacing in the room rather than just having a dialogue about what's happening onstage. It ties back to Peter's comment about Foucault, too, because it's a way of moving beyond positionality of saying a facilitator walks into a room with a certain set of assumptions and biases—which is always true—and more toward considering that what you're trying to do in joking is to make visible all of the patterns that you see coming out of the dynamics of the situation.

Peter: I see my role as a Joker, whether working with youth or not, to heighten whatever the person's contribution is in order for it to be really clear what the idea behind it is so that we have a collision of ideas that the group collectively then gets to wrestle with. I use TO because it's the most effective way I know to have a communication of those ideas. I clearly have a bias going in there, but I feel that making the choice to use TO is in itself a political choice.

Chen: I want to jump in at this point because I raised the issue about the political dimension of the work. Because of the Viewpoints [Chen's theatre that does TO work with Israeli and Palestinian youth] projects that we do, we meet many audiences, especially Palestinians. We've always been accused by both sides of being manipulative in our scenarios, that we are trying to manipulate the audience. The Israelis often accuse us of manipulating the messages and of showing only the suffering of the Palestinians. This is a very crucial point for me because when we work with Palestinians, with mixed audiences, or in front of Israelis, I don't want them to feel that the reality is balanced; so our scenarios are not balanced. What we do try to do is create a balanced space in which each side can give voice to their concerns. But we are then accused of erasing the oppression dimension by doing this; by allowing both sides a voice. They also blame the Palestinian actors for creating reconciliation theatre too soon; they say it is too early, it is not the time to reconcile with the oppressor.

Sonja: I think this is the difference between Freire and Boal. When you create the Viewpoint scenario, Chen, you are working with a Freirian