

The Theatre of the Oppressed is an arrangement of theatre techniques representing a place to talk about topics otherwise not addressed and giving voice to the people who otherwise remain unheard. Attributed to Brazilian director, writer and politician Augusto Boal, its beginnings date back to the 1950s. In Slovenia, the Theatre of the Oppressed has been continuously and thoroughly present from 2010 through workshops, educational modules, theatre plays and festivals. In this article, the author presents three examples of good practices from Slovenia that are adapting and developing this method of activist theatre for the Slovenian audience. The first two examples focus on the development of new practices of the Theatre of the Oppressed in KUD Transformator, namely *ImproForum* and the project for children *My Fairytales and Rights*. The third example is the international project Resilient Revolt, which addresses environmental and climate change issues through the method and multiplication of the produced performance, developed with international partners in their respective countries.

Keywords: Theatre of the Oppressed, activism, social changes, political theatre, systemic oppression, community.

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The Theatre of the Oppressed as a Form of Artist Theatre in Slovenia

The author first met with the Theatre of the Oppressed in 2010, at an intensive 17-day training as part of the *Globalna Sofa* (Global State OF Art) project. The purpose of this article is thus to present the method of the Theatre of the Oppressed as a relevant theatre approach.

A method employed for theatre, activist and educational purposes, the Theatre of the Oppressed is used as a tool for achieving social justice as well as to complement the therapy process. Its beginnings, dating back to the 1950s, are attributed to the Brazilian theatre director, writer and politician Augusto Boal. During his theatre creation and later his activities at the Rio de Janeiro City Council, Boal developed the techniques of the method, which since then has spread throughout the world.

The Theatre of the Oppressed represents a space for discussing topics that are not otherwise exposed, and where a voice is lent to those without one – the oppressed. The basic concept of the Theatre of the Oppressed is power; on this basis, the method explores, discusses and exposes the power relations between the oppressor and the oppressed. More precisely, it reveals when and how power is abused by the oppressor to exploit the oppressed, who do not have this power. When talking about oppression or dealing with its forms, the Theatre of the Oppressed does not speak about individual cases where power is abused by one person over another, but about the oppression of marginalised social groups by privileged ones. The goal is to use the method to find ways of emancipating and liberating the oppressed in conflicts – but not by changing the actions of the oppressor, but those of the oppressed.

Working with the method does not employ any pre-prepared solutions to the conflicts. Conflict resolution takes place at the community level, with all those participating in the event (workshop, performance), who test the suggestions in role-playing, especially by putting themselves in the shoes of the oppressed. Such an effect is achieved by means of interventions into the stage action through the technique of Forum Theatre, by creating frozen statues with the technique of image theatre, by embodying the wishes of the oppressed person or one's obstacles to change through the "rainbow of desire" and "cops in the head" techniques, or by interventions in public space with the technique of invisible theatre. In this way, the Theatre of the Oppressed offers a safe space for testing forms of rebellion and liberation in the prepared scenes, with the goal of making changes in everyday life.

As used and spread today by collectives across the world, the techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed represent upgrades, adaptations and variations of the Boal method. Today, the Theatre of the Oppressed can be challenged for its exclusivity due to the high prices of workshops and activities of this kind, and the method may seem to be a tool of white, middle-class activism, i.e., that of the privileged. At the same time, however, the Theatre of the Oppressed increasingly proves to be a useful method for working in schools and preschools as well as with marginalised groups. It offers everyone the opportunity to participate in (potential) change: by means of creation between and with people; and by using the collective authorship method in performance creation. It equally includes all the participants and provides a space for public discussion and the exchange of different views and opinions. In theatre, Boal is interested in the emancipation of the spectator and the transcendence of the actor-spectator relationship. Boal considers the spectator as a co-creator of performances, events and society. The centre of the action is the auditorium rather than the stage.

The community aspect of the Theatre of the Oppressed is also reflected in the location and nature of performing. The performances most frequently take place at non-institutional venues, often non-theatre ones. The activities of the Theatre of the Oppressed namely seek a diverse and wide audience but also aim to address quite narrowly-defined target audiences (schools, preschools, nursing homes, prisons, NGOs, etc.) in certain cases. Through collaborative co-creation in the Theatre of the Oppressed, the method opens up a space for democracy and dialogue.

In Slovenia, the method of the Theatre of the Oppressed with workshops, performances, festivals and other activities has been continuously present since 2010. Before that, some techniques were practised by individuals in the form of short workshops; alternatively, these individuals included the method in their work. As examples of good practice, the author presents three examples of the development of the method within the cultural and artistic association KUD Transformator.

In 2015, KUD Transformator first developed and performed *ImproForum*, then termed *Theatre on Call*. Although based on Forum Theatre, in which spectators act the roles of the oppressed and change the course of events on stage, this technique differs from Forum Theatre in that the story is created, written and staged based on the suggestions of the spectators present at the performance.

As authors of the project *Moje prav(lj)ice: Pepelka (2018)* (My Fairytales and Rights: Cinderella (2018)) and *Sneguljčica* (Snow White, 2019), the author and collaborators tackled the method of the Theatre of the Oppressed for young audiences by addressing the issue of power relations between genders in fairy tales. The project is a continuation and development of the pilot project *Tudi Pepelka lahko ...* (Cinderella, Too, Can ...), which was performed by KUD Transformator in collaboration with the

Jarše Preschool in 2017. These performances featuring actors and puppets employ the technique of simultaneous dramaturgy, adapting fairy tales with female characters in the leading roles into forms without miraculous objects or events. In these fairy tale versions, the heroines are compelled to deal with the problems themselves and find paths to solutions.

In 2019, three organisations operating according to the method of the Theatre of the Oppressed – TDU Wien (from Vienna), Reboot the Roots (from London) and KUD Transformator – organised an international residence entitled Resilient Revolt in Gornji Grad on the topic of global warming. Through the multiplication of the method, the performance and the theme, the project continues in international communities of the Theatre of the Oppressed and beyond.

Translated by Urška Zajec