

# Though This Be Madness ...? The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy

Paul Dwyer  
(Australia)

## Abstract

Augusto Boal argues that there is a deep coherence between the various branches — political, educational, therapeutic, etc. — of what he calls the ‘Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed’. Looking, however, at the more therapeutically oriented uses of image theatre — the Rainbow of Desire techniques — I argue in this article that there is potentially a contradiction between Boal’s deployment of a (more or less Freudian) psychodynamic theory of personality and the broader political aspirations he espouses. The theoretical foundations for what he presents as a ‘Method of Theatre and Therapy’ are weakly formulated, creating the potential for confusion when it comes to training would-be ‘theatre therapists’. A way forward, I argue, could be to reconceptualise entirely this part of Boal’s work, aligning it explicitly with a systemic/narrative therapy framework.

## Résumé

Augusto Boal explique qu’il n’existe pas de réelle cohérence entre les branches diverses — politique, éducatives, thérapeutiques, etc. — de ce qu’il appelle ‘l’arbre du théâtre des opprimés’ (*‘Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed’*). En regardant, cependant, les utilisations du ‘théâtre d’images’ les plus orientées sur le domaine thérapeutique — les techniques *Rainbow Desire* — j’explique dans cet article, qu’il existe une contradiction entre le déploiement d’une théorie psychodynamique (plus ou moins freudienne) de la personnalité formulée par Boal et les aspirations générales politiques qu’il embrasse. Les fondations théoriques de ce qu’il présente en tant que ‘méthode de théâtre et de thérapie’ sont formulées légèrement, créant ainsi un potentiel de confusion lorsqu’il s’agit de former des nouveaux ‘thérapeutes de théâtre’. Pour aller de l’avant, il faudrait, d’après moi, une complète re-conceptualisation du travail de Boal, en l’alignant explicitement avec une structure de la thérapie narrative/systemique.

## Resumen

Augusto Boal sostiene que existe una coherencia profunda entre varias ramas — la política, la educativa, la terapéutica, etc. — de lo que el denomina el “Árbol del Teatro de los Oprimidos”. Observando, sin embargo, a los usos con una mayor orientación terapéutica de la imagen del teatro — la técnica del Arco Iris del Deseo — Yo razono en este Artículo que hay en forma potencial una contradicción entre el empleo de Boal de una (más o menos Freudiana) psicodinámica teoría de la personalidad y las aspiraciones más amplias políticas que el expresa. Los fundamentos teóricos que el presenta como un “Método de Teatro y Terapia” se encuentran débilmente formulados, dando lugar a una confusión cuando se trata de la formación de aspirantes a “terapeutas de teatros”. Una manera de salir adelante, considero yo, sería la de volver a formular el concepto enteramente de esta parte de la obra de Boal, colocándolo explícitamente dentro de un marco de trabajo de terapia sistémica/narrativa.

**Author's biography**

Paul Dwyer is a Lecturer in the Department of Performance Studies at the University of Sydney. He has a professional background as a director in youth/community theatre and is dramaturge for the contemporary performance group Version 1.0. Previous publications on the applied theatre techniques of Augusto Boal have appeared in several journals. He is currently researching 'restorative justice' practices, conducting fieldwork in the New South Wales juvenile justice system and in Bougainville (PNG).

**Biographie de l'auteur**

Paul Dwyer est maître de conférence au *Department of Performance Studies* de l'université *University of Sydney*. Il possède une expérience professionnelle en tant que directeur de théâtre communautaire pour la jeunesse et est un dramaturge pour le groupe de performance contemporain Version 1.0. Des publications antérieures sur les techniques de théâtre appliqué d'Augusto Boal sont apparues dans plusieurs journaux. Ses travaux actuels de recherche portent sur les pratiques de 'justice réparatrice', et il mène ses travaux au sein du système de justice juvénile de l'Etat de Nouvelle Galles du Sud et à Bougainville (PNG).

**La biografía del autor**

Paul Dwyer es catedrático del Departamento de Estudios de Actuaciones de la Universidad de Sydney. Posee formación profesional como director de teatro del joven/la comunidad y es dramaturgo para el grupo contemporáneo de actuaciones Versión 1.0. Las publicaciones previas sobre las técnicas de teatro aplicado por Augusto Boal han aparecidos en varias revistas. Actualmente está investigando prácticas de la "justicia de restitución" y conduciendo trabajo de campo dentro del sistema de justicia juvenil de Nueva Gales del Sur y en Bougainville (PNG).

[paul.dwyer@usyd.edu.au](mailto:paul.dwyer@usyd.edu.au)

## **Though This Be Madness ...? The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy**

### **Prologue: Xavier gets stuck**

*I'm participating in a week-long training workshop in Augusto Boal's Rainbow of Desire techniques. Xavier, a teacher of children with learning disabilities, is the protagonist of a scene being explored through the technique called 'Analytical Image'. The scene involves Xavier in a confrontation with his school principal. In preparatory discussions, although Xavier was loath to mention specific details, it emerged that he dislikes the brash, charismatic management style of the principal, some of whose decisions have undermined Xavier's relationship with the children. Xavier says that he struggles to persuade his boss to take these concerns seriously: whenever they meet, he feels overwhelmed and ineffectual. Xavier has selected one of the most vocal, extroverted male members of the group (who, unlike Xavier, also happens to be a trained actor) to play the principal, and they improvise a typical meeting. One of the co-directors of the workshop then asks the rest of us to model images of what we saw as the principal's 'strong points' on the one hand, stacked against Xavier's 'weak points' on the other hand. The image in which Xavier seems ultimately to recognise himself involves lying prostrate before his boss, face down, hands clasped together in supplication. In one of a series of 'dynamisations', Xavier is coached into playing the scene with his boss while fixed in this position. He looks faintly ridiculous but struggles on. After a couple of minutes, the director calls out to Xavier: 'You can change the image if you want to!' The director is expecting him to act out some slow metamorphosis into an image of greater strength, an image of how he would prefer to be in this situation. But Xavier isn't moving. 'Change! Change!' the director cries with gusto. Xavier just lies there, silent.*

### **Introduction**

The workshop happened a long time ago and, while everyone in the group was well aware of my status as a participant-observer engaged in academic research, I didn't imagine I would one day want to write about this specific incident. So 'Xavier' is a pseudonym and there is no need for me to identify here the theatre company at which the workshop took place, other than to note that the directors had both received extensive training from Augusto Boal over a number of years. This is not, of course, to suggest that Boal is directly responsible for any shortcomings in their practice, but it does raise questions about the effectiveness with which core principles of Boal's work have been set down in his writings and are passed on through his own and others' workshops.

The exercise involving Xavier appeals to me as an anchor for (what I hope will be received as a constructive) critique of Boal's Rainbow of Desire techniques, not because it seemed to have gone disastrously wrong — there was nothing to suggest that Xavier had been badly scarred by the experience: the improvisation and the images we proposed had clearly connected with some part of his lived reality, and we had been a sympathetic audience, imagining ourselves in similar situations, willing Xavier to change but acknowledging the difficulty. On the contrary, what strikes me now — with the benefit of hindsight — is the way in which our workshop simply moved on without any pause for critical reflection, as if it is an entirely unremarkable thing that an exercise in 'theatrical therapy' could end in an image where,

apparently, the protagonist perceives no possibility of change in a particular area of his life. How did it come to this?

The ‘therapeutic turn’ in Theatre of the Oppressed began in Europe during the 1980s as Boal sought to engage more closely with what he initially considered softer, ‘First World’ issues: loneliness, communication problems, and so on. The response to this area of Boal’s work among First World practitioners of applied theatre has been varied: from ‘I can’t imagine doing [Theatre of the Oppressed] any more without [it]’ to ‘I think [it] is psychotherapy ... (Boal 1995: 210, 217–23). Others have gone so far as to suggest that Boal has been co-opted into an ‘emerging state-financed culture of therapy [which is] used to pathologise, devalue, and massage all dissent into individualised subjectivities’ (Baron Cohen 1994: 19).

For my part, I think it’s quite clear that what Boal *intends* with these techniques is definitely not a form of therapy to substitute for politics. His basic hypothesis — that when oppression has been internalised, there is a ‘cop in the head’ doing the work of repression that would otherwise require a ‘cop in the street’ — has obvious parallels with the way Frantz Fanon describes the psychological violence in postcolonial societies or with Louis Althusser’s account of the subtle forms of indoctrination achieved by schools and other ‘State Ideological Apparatuses’ (Fanon 1967; Althusser 1995). And, while Boal’s arguments to justify the extension of his practice into the domain of therapy are often imprecise, there is also, as Adrian Jackson (1995) notes, a lack of detail and sense of proportion in some of the criticisms levelled at him (1995: xxi). The diverse political orientations of, and complex relations between, different therapeutic theories and practices are all too easily ignored, reducing the broad field of therapy down to a handful of treatment methods with the (presumed) common aim of normalising the thoughts and behaviour patterns of (usually) individual clients.

Taking Boal’s stated aims at face value, then, my critique of his ‘method of theatre and therapy’ focuses on issues of theory and pedagogy. I argue that there is, in fact, a contradiction between the (more or less Freudian) psychodynamic theory of personality upon which Boal draws and the broader political aspirations he espouses. I then return to the exercise involving Xavier to explore how the Rainbow of Desire techniques could perhaps be reconceptualised in terms of a systemic/narrative therapy framework. Without necessarily wishing to convert all Boal-based practitioners to this particular model of therapy, I do think there is a pressing need for would-be ‘theatre therapists’ to examine the theoretical assumptions informing their practice, and for these to be made much more explicit than they are currently in Boal’s publications and in training workshops.

### **Boal, Stanislavski and Freud**

In the section of *The Rainbow of Desire* entitled ‘The Theory’, Boal cites a famous expression of Freud’s and locates theatre — alongside dreams, hallucinations, word-games and slips of the tongue — as ‘a royal road to the unconscious’ (1995: 34). The aesthetic properties of any theatrical space, he argues, are well suited to therapeutic goals: theatre provides a space wherein memories and imaginings, the past and the future, become ‘plastic’ and malleable; this space is also ‘telemicroscopic’ in the sense that actions from a different time and/or place may be ‘brought closer and made larger’ (1995: 27). Finally, theatrical space is ‘dichotomic and it creates dichotomy’ since the actors, their actions and the spectators’ view of these always exist simultaneously on two levels: there is Hamlet *and* the actor who is playing Hamlet; a scene in the castle of Elsinore which is *also* a scene happening in the here and now (1995: 22–23). In Boal’s view, just as the actor always maintains a certain distance between self and role, so too must the

‘patient’, in a therapeutic setting, stage a confrontation between a self who is ‘here and now’ talking about a self who is ‘then and there’ (1995: 23–27).

This analogy between the actor’s process and the therapeutic process is then developed into one of the key propositions of the Rainbow of Desire. Acting, Boal suggests, is an intrinsically unhealthy and dangerous profession. In a cartoon-like illustration that he often uses in his workshops (cf. Boal 1995: 33), he represents theatre as a kind of fire heating up the pressure-cooker that is a *person* (a contained, inner self; the unlimited ‘pure potential’ of each and every human being to exercise *all* virtues and *all* vices). In our everyday lives, the lid to this pressure-cooker of the *person* is held firmly in place and it is only our sanitised social self — our *personality* — which escapes through the safety valves of ‘fear and morality’. As the fire of a theatrical process heats up, however, all manner of sick, depraved and neurotic *personnages* (the French term for dramatic characters) are able to slip out from under the pressure-cooker lid.

Actors, if all goes to plan, will resume their habitual personality upon leaving the stage but occasionally there are *personnages* who cannot be returned to that ‘Pandora’s Box’ from which they were brought forth; ‘there are actors who become ill’ (Boal 1995: 37). Hence, reasons Boal, it may be possible to proceed in the opposite direction. It may be that a ‘theatrical therapy’ can provide the means whereby a ‘sick personality’ can be enriched by the awakening of healthy *personnages*: ‘this time not with the goal of dispatching them back into oblivion but in the hope of mixing them into his personality ... if the actor can become a sick person then the sick person can in turn become a healthy actor’ (1995: 39).

Although Boal’s images of theatre as fire and of the person as a pressure cooker are not unusual, two likely antecedents stand out. First, there is a striking resemblance to a passage in *An Actor Prepares* where Stanislavski writes:

When you are on the stage, you must play yourself. But it will be in an infinite variety of combinations of objectives, and given circumstances which you have prepared for your part, *and which have been smelted in the furnace of your emotion memory* ... [An actor] may not have in his nature either the villainy of one character or the nobility of another. But the seed of those qualities will be there, *because we have in us the elements of all human characteristics, good and bad.* (Stanislavski 1980: 177–78, emphasis added)

Second, Boal’s pressure cooker image clearly recalls Freud’s description of the *id* as ‘a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations’ (1973: 106). Like Boal’s notion of the person, the *id* ‘knows no judgments of value: no good and evil, no morality ... Instinctual cathexes seeking discharge — that, in our view, is all there is in the *id*.’ (Freud 1973: 107) See also Boal (1995: 32) for another cartoon image which loosely follows Freud’s ‘dissection of the personality’ into conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious realms.

In relation to a Freudian theory of repression, the critical aspect of Boal’s model must be the manner in which he conceives of the ‘safety-valves’ which regulate the pressure-cooker/person:

We have the whole gamut, in pure potentiality, boiling away, in a hermetically sealed pan. We have within us such a wealth of possibilities ... But this person is so rich and powerful, so intense, with such a multiplicity of forms and faces, that we are constrained to reduce it. This suppression of our freedom of expression and action results from two causes: external, social coercion and/or internal, ethical choice. Fear and morality. (Boal 1995: 35)

‘External coercion’ and ‘internal choice’ suggest a control mechanism that is more accessible to consciousness than Freud would allow, of course, thus making the process of altering one’s personality and behaviour appear somewhat less of a problem: if an actor can be trained to manage such a dramatic transformation, then surely anyone can. However, the proviso here (which Stanislavski is at pains to stress) is that actors *are* limited in the roles that they play, not just because of type-casting but also because an actor has only the recourse to memories ‘cull[ed] out of his [or her] living experiences’ in order to find ‘appropriate feelings’ and ‘the roles for which you haven’t the appropriate feelings are those you will never play well’ (Stanislavski 1980: 176–77).

### **Systemics: An alternative to psychodynamic theory?**

Boal’s politics are quite clearly saying to any theatre practitioner-cum-therapist: ‘You must help your client to overcome detrimental restraints on his or her ability to change.’ His theory of personality seems to be saying *to the client*: ‘You have, within you, an unlimited potential to change, but you must want to change,’ as if the client’s problems are fundamentally to do with whatever is going on inside his or her head. This is precisely the assumption made by the directors of the workshop exercise involving Xavier which I described at the beginning of this paper. Indeed, during the course of the workshop, the directors posted on the wall enlarged photocopies of the Boal cartoons I have referred to above for myself and other trainees to consider. As per this model of personality, the directors focused on Xavier drawing exclusively on his own inner resources in order to change his situation.

But what if the most significant restraints on an individual’s thoughts, feelings and behaviour are not the internal property of that individual but the result of interactions between the individual and other members of his or her ‘social atom’ (be it simply a family network, or one that extends to include friends, workmates and so on)? As Antony Williams argues, systemic theory leads to a different kind of encounter between therapist and client:

Most people feel that they are the hub, the nucleus of their social atom. Though they might regard themselves as the helpless victims in that atom, or as controlling events within it, they are still the centre. Such is the nature of the experiencing ‘I’. Therapists, however, whose job is to look at other people’s lives, know that clients are not the hub. In fact, there is no hub, only endlessly expanding galaxies of roles, of experiences into which private, social, and cultural forces have merged ... Clients experience their lives immediately, completely, and in the foreground, while therapists, sensitive to their clients’ subjective distress, nevertheless regard that distress as system-produced and somehow system-maintaining. (Williams 1989: 223)

In this view, change to any part of an overall system of relations leads to change in each member of that system. The therapist, therefore, is an agent for change who works first and foremost by introducing new information into the system as a whole, not simply by focusing on the problems of the particular individual member of the system who happens to present for therapy.

Antony Williams (1989) develops this argument in the context of a highly sympathetic critique of Jacob Moreno’s work, arguing that a prototypical systems theory is already implicit in his psychodramatic methods and demonstrating several practical ways to exploit their potential as an adjunctive tool in a therapeutic process that is informed systemic/strategic principles as well as a ‘narrative therapy’ framework (see White 2007 for a comprehensive overview of the latter). I

believe a similar approach to using the Rainbow of Desire techniques is not only possible but also more desirable than the psychodynamic theory currently on offer.

Looking again at the exercise involving Xavier, how might the directors have proceeded had they been working from a more systemic perspective? For a start, the stage of defining Xavier's problem could itself have been problematised. Xavier could have been asked, for example: 'What does this problem stop you from doing that you would like to do?' 'Is it a problem for other people at your place of work?' 'Who stands to gain/lose the most if your problem remains as it is?' 'If you were to be successful at changing this situation, what would the changes look like?' These questions all assume a degree of *externalisation*, thus encouraging the protagonist to disentangle a state of affairs or a sequence of behaviour from his or her self-perception. Importantly, they can also be asked in such a way as to invite *verbal and non-verbal responses*, thus lending themselves to the method of image theatre.

Part of a therapist's job is to challenge any disabling explanations of the client's problem, to offer the client alternative explanations to choose from and to act upon. In Xavier's case, there is obviously a history to what he currently experiences as a lack of self-assertiveness in dealing with his boss. In order that the 'script' according to which this history has taken on the shape of an ineluctable destiny might be rewritten, Xavier needs to hear, or to be reminded of, *news of difference* (Bateson 1972; White 1986). He might have been asked: 'Can you show us a situation in which you felt you had more control over this problem than you say you do now?' By eliciting *double or multiple descriptions* of relationships and events, the directors could have extended the search for what Michael White calls a *unique outcome*, something to break the pattern of the client's current perceptions, as well as showing what *he* saw as his weaknesses (and strengths!) *vis-à-vis* his boss. Xavier could have been asked to speculate on what *the boss's view* of Xavier's strengths and weaknesses might be (and vice versa for the actor playing the boss); instead of looking at the scene between Xavier and his boss in isolation, we could have looked at other scenes in this workplace, exploring the extent to which Xavier and the boss behave differently with different people. As it was, this 'Analytical Image' technique examined a very narrow band of behaviour from a very limited perspective, as if Xavier had told the directors 'I feel stuck' and they had colluded with him in maintaining this belief.

Above all, a systemic perspective eschews linear cause-and-effect explanations of behaviour in favour of more circular explanations to show how behaviour follows recursive patterns. Linear explanations come fairly readily to most of us. If Xavier had been asked to define his problem briefly, his response might have been: 'My boss doesn't listen to me' or, slightly more elaborately, 'I let my boss walk all over me which makes me feel completely ineffectual.' Both of these statements are inadequate from the systemic point of view. The first implies that, no matter how Xavier chooses to behave, it is of no consequence whatsoever to his boss's behaviour; the second leaves Xavier carrying the sole responsibility for their relationship. A circular explanation of how this relationship is currently maintained would run more along the following lines: 'I feel ineffectual when my boss walks all over me and the more I feel ineffectual, the more likely he is to continue walking all over me, making me feel even more ineffectual which means ...' In other words, either the boss or Xavier has to change; in fact, they *both* have to change if *either one* of them changes. Given the hierarchical nature of their relationship, it is perhaps unlikely that the boss will be the main agent for change within this dyadic system, although this possibility cannot be ruled out altogether: the day might come when the principal finds Xavier so ineffectual that he decides to sack him; Xavier might react by

complaining to his union; he might feel that he is, in some respects, in a worse predicament than before but the complaint to the union would at least be a sign of assertiveness on Xavier's part.

Finally, if Xavier is clearly the more likely agent for change but continues to see no alternative to his current diffident behaviour, a systemic therapist *might* resort to what is called a *paradoxical intervention*. In essence, this involves prescribing a dose of the same symptomatic behaviour that has brought the client to therapy *in the hope that he or she will reject the advice*. A therapist could suggest to a client such as Xavier: 'It sounds like your employer needs you to boost his sense of self-esteem, power and authority over the workers, so perhaps you should continue to present to him your most pliable, tractable and docile self.' This may sound like a caricature of therapy-speak, but it is in fact close to the premise on which Boal's 'Analytical Image' technique seems to be based — namely, that there are some aspects of the protagonist's behaviour which are helping to maintain the antagonist's dominant role in the relationship and that if the protagonist sees clearly the effect of these behaviours, he or she will find them intolerable and will want to change. However, paradoxical intervention is definitely not the point at which a systemic therapist would first leap in — not without a very strong hypothesis about the client's position within the overall system; not before having explored some other relationships where the client acknowledges their capacity to behave differently; and hopefully not without both therapist and client having reached enough of a level of mutual respect and trust that the client feels empowered to call the therapist's bluff.

### **Problems of power and neutrality in a systemic framework**

The sort of questions which systemic therapists ask are of value in identifying restraints to change and in making the *system* ready to receive new ideas that could lead to new solutions (White 1986: 171). However, this emphasis on the system (rather than the individual) and on circular (rather than linear) explanations of behaviour brings problems of its own. While there is not the space to deal with these issues at length here, it would be remiss of me to promote a systemic/narrative 'retooling' of the Rainbow of Desire techniques without at least signalling what could be at stake philosophically and politically for practitioners of Theatre of the Oppressed.

One of the major tenets of systems theory, going back to Gregory Bateson, is that no part of 'an internally interactive system can have unilateral control over the remainder or over any other part' (1972: 315). Bateson dismisses the notion of power, in the sense of unilateral control, as 'epistemological lunacy' (1995: 494–95). However, this assumes that there is such a thing as a purely *internally* interactive system, whereas the distribution of power in, say, a family system is, of course, greatly influenced by *external* social, economic and political systems — a point well made in feminist critiques of family therapy practice (James and McIntyre 1983; MacKinnon and Miller 1987). Furthermore, when a therapist gives greater *epistemological* weight to a circular explanation of behaviour that is *experienced* by the client in a very direct, linear sense, this can easily lead to blaming the victim (Dell 1989). If a woman tells her therapist she feels depressed because her husband hits her, then surely the critical issue is not 'What are you doing that encourages him to hit you?' but rather 'How can this man be compelled to accept responsibility for his violence and to stop it?' Similarly, if Xavier's problems are really very much to do with a boss who abusively exercises raw power, then the long-term solutions may well involve taking part in a campaign of industrial action. Taking one's frustrations to a group therapy session is not enough.

Situations where one person is being oppressed by another's unilateral abuse of power are often more familiar terrain for practitioners of Theatre of the Oppressed. This is grist to the mill of forum theatre, for example, where the working assumption is that the antagonists are committed to their role as oppressors and unwilling to give up what power they have over the protagonist without a fight. This is the assumption which systemic theory invites the therapist (or the theatre practitioner-cum-therapist) to question. The challenge is to do this without blaming the victim and without, on the other hand, oversimplifying their role in a complex system — since oversimplifying may in fact be only another route to blaming. The strength of a piece of forum theatre (or a therapeutic intervention) that acts from a linear view of oppression is that there is a very clear alignment (and choice to intervene) on the side of the oppressed. The weakness is that when the oppressed person is constantly viewed as the target of someone else's oppressive behaviour, then it becomes very hard *not* to see the oppressed person as a hapless victim. Forum theatre is obviously meant to break with such a view by exploring ways in which the oppressed can fight back against their oppressor, but this struggle might not always reach very far towards broader, systemic change. Watching a forum theatre piece which only offers the choice of intervening on one side of a dyadic oppressor–oppressed relationship can be like watching two people on a see-saw: sometimes they go up, sometimes down, higher or lower, faster or slower, but still sitting in the same seats. When an overly linear analysis is then carried across into the more therapeutically oriented Rainbow techniques — for example, when it is applied in situations like the one presented by Xavier — the limitations are even more obvious and the risk of getting 'stuck' in therapy increases. Indeed, in a case like Xavier's, the director-cum-therapist may well be advised *not* to align himself or herself too strongly with the protagonist. The duty of care here is similar to that which Antony Williams notes when describing the risks of a poorly conducted psychodramatic session:

If directors over-identify with any part of the family system, protagonists may use the psychodrama to re-inforce, once again, their original dysfunctional structure, despite the added psychodramatic expressionism and fireworks. It looks good, it seems therapeutic, but the system takes up once more its familiar rigidity, and little important learning (change) has eventuated. In fact, the system might be even more rigid, since now a therapist is validating it. (Williams 1989: 136)

At this point, far from assisting the client to find new solutions, therapy becomes a new stabilising agent in the client's social atom, and thus part of the problem.

It is for these sorts of reasons that the often-invoked 'holy grail' of systemic therapy is *neutrality*. Of the many meanings attached to this term in the systemic/family therapy literature, one of the most influential definitions first appeared in the work of the 'Milan School' of family therapists. Neutrality, its proponents argue, is 'the pragmatic effect of the therapist's behaviour ... not his intrapsychic disposition' (Selvini-Palazzoli et al. 1980: 111). A systemic family therapist, for example, tries to remain unaligned with the views of any individual member or power bloc within the family, not because the therapist is cold or indifferent but because, to intervene systemically, the therapist needs, as far as possible, 'to obtain and maintain a different level (metalevel) from that of the family' (1980: 111). The therapist is curious about how the system works as a whole rather than joining with some family members in blaming others or further isolating 'pathological' family members.

Problems with this approach arise when the attitude of curiosity and non-alignment is extended to a theoretical dogma in which the therapist imagines himself or herself to be not immediately concerned with the family's presenting problem or with respect to the hoped-for

outcomes of therapy. This broader, more ‘value-free’ idea of neutrality appears in later Milan School formulations such as the following: ‘The neutral therapist is not interested in blaming anyone or changing the system.’ (Tomm 1984: 258) According to this more radical interpretation, the therapist presents as an expert only in relation to technical knowledge — that is, the ability to understand and explain to the family the logic of the system as is. It is up to the family itself to institute changes. Here, as Furlong and Lipp argue, it does indeed appear that a rhetorical allegiance to neutrality ‘avoids acknowledging the importance of the contexts in which the therapist is operating’ (1995: 115). What is the meaning of neutrality, for instance, when clients are mandated to attend therapy by the courts or by state welfare workers?

### **Beyond ‘gut instinct’: The need for rigour in training**

‘Radical neutrality’ is certainly not the way most Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners would describe their attitude towards the possible outcomes of their theatrical/therapeutic interventions. On the other hand, the Rainbow of Desire is sometimes presented as the epitome of a non-directive model of therapy (e.g. Jackson 1995: xxii–xxiii). If these theatre techniques are at all concerned with opening up a dream-like ‘royal road to the unconscious’, then it is as well to reflect on the director’s role as co-creator of any theatrical dreamwork. Many times, Boal refers to the protagonist’s movement on stage as a kind of writing. The director:

must above all *observe the protagonist observing the couples* [when pairs of spectators are improvising in ‘fair-mode’]; her movements from one scene to the next, the time she spends watching each scene, all her bodily movements, which are, in themselves, a ‘discourse’, a ‘writing’, and which can, afterwards, be ‘read’ so that the protagonist can recognise what she has done and the manner in which she did it. (Boal 1995: 98; emphasis in original)

This ‘writing,’ of course, is on commission from the director of the workshop. From the very first moment the director starts to elicit information from the protagonist, to the choice of a particular technique and right through the sequence of dynamisations, the director cannot but choose to lead proceedings on the basis of certain hypotheses about the protagonist’s problems, drawing attention to certain details of the protagonist’s experience more than others and working with the protagonist to produce a map of the ‘therapeutic reality’ (MacKinnon and James 1987).

How does a novice director develop the skills in therapeutic hypothesising that are needed to bolster an otherwise rudimentary hunch about what techniques to use when, with whom, in what variations, to what ends? Most of the group discussion time in training workshops I have attended has been taken up with the (not insignificant) need of participants to share thoughts and feelings stirred up by the techniques, not with the kind of critique and meta-analysis that is needed to encourage creative adaptations of them. Boal invites experimentation — ‘the techniques were invented to be useful to people ... not with the goal of adapting the people to suit the techniques’ (1995: 188) — but his colleagues who directed Xavier in ‘The Analytical Image’ did little more than ‘walk through’ a technique which they themselves had learnt by rote. As I stressed in my introduction, this is not to hold Boal responsible for the uneven quality of practice inspired by his own workshops, but a space has to be made somewhere for a reflexive critique of the director’s/facilitator’s role. Boal has talked of reading ‘Moreno and all the psychotherapists [I] can get books on’ (Boal, Taussig and Schechner 1994: 26), yet there are no direct references to this literature to be found in the pages of *The Rainbow of Desire* and no discussion, for instance, of issues such as the asymmetrical relationship between therapist and client or the possible uses (and abuses) of transference. Adrian Jackson, Boal’s translator, suggests that the

reader should treat the book ‘like a good cook ... vary[ing] the recipe to suit the ingredients and the tastes of the eaters’ (1995: xxiv): it would help if this theatrical cookbook contained more than a fleeting glimpse of the ideal director’s kitchen, where the major theoretical/therapeutic ‘appliances’ are tucked away.

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