

T.C.
KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
SOCIAL SCIENCES INSTITUTE
AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
TURKISH AND AMERICAN ACTIVIST THEATRE IN THE 20TH CENTURY**

Master of Art Thesis

ÖZÜM ÜNAL

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UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF ASST. PROF. DR. MARY LOUISE O'NEIL

Istanbul, 2008

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

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Degree Awarded and Date	: Master of Art- September, 2008
Keywords	: Performance Theory, Activist Theatre

ABSTRACT

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TURKISH AND AMERICAN ACTIVIST THEATRE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The essential goal of this project is two-fold: to gain a greater understanding of the role of activist theater in Turkey and in the U.S and discuss the need for activist theater. The research component of this project includes the historical context of activist theater and delves into its purpose in today's world. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s saw the development of the *Theater of the Oppressed* and other activist theater movements that sought to creatively expose inequality. My project takes into account the historical setting of modern activist theater and then discusses the urgent need for these types of productions to continue to be staged today.

GENEL BİLGİLER

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Programı	: Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı
Tez Danışmanı	: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Mary Louise O'Neil
Tez Türü ve Tarihi	: Yüksek Lisans - Eylül, 2008
Anahtar Kelimeler	: Performans Sanatı, Aktivist Tiyatro

KISA ÖZET

20. YÜZYIL TÜRK VE AMERİKAN AKTİVİST TİYATROLARININ KARŞILAŞTIRILMASI

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, aktivist tiyatronun Türkiye ve Amerika'daki rolünün daha iyi anlaşılması ve aktivist tiyatroya duyulan ihtiyacın tartışılmasıdır. Tez aktivist tiyatronun tarihçesine genel bir bakışla başlayıp özele inerek aktivist tiyatronun toplumda değişime vesile olabilme gücünü irdelemektedir. Tezin temel iddiası aktivist tiyatronun bu değişim ve değiştirme gücünü barındırdığıdır. 1960 ve 1970 yılları, eşitsizliği yaratıcı bir şekilde gözler önüne seren “Ezilenlerin Tiyatrosu” ve diğer aktivist tiyatro akımlarının gelişmelerine tanık olmuştur. Bu gelişmeler tezde sözü geçen tiyatronun değişim aracı olarak kullanılmasını desteklemektedir. Proje, modern aktivist tiyatronun geçmişini göz önünde bulundurarak, bu tür yapımların sahnelenmeye devam edilmesinin kaçınılmaz ihtiyacını tartışmaktadır.

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INTRODUCTION

*And now I am going to say
Something which people
May find quite stupefying.
I am the enemy of theater.
I always have been.
I love the theater so much
I am, for that reason,
hostile to it.*

--Antonin Artaud

Theater is an important part of our being, a living, breathing act of humanity. Present is where it exists, never to be repeated. Whether you are participating in or watching theater, you are involved in the act of creation. The power exchanged between the performer and viewer is so effective that a playwright can utilize this power to cause social awakening and to motivate action.

This thesis does not pretend to explain theater history; my goal is to explore the history of theater to point out that theater has been used as a political vehicle. Theatre is political because it causes transformation. It may be the transformation of a single person or crowds. Rituals are also transformation of specific human behaviors into skits. Theorists like Eugenio Barba can argue that theatre should be an empty ritual, not in a sense that it is absurd, but because it is not captured by any doctrines (Turner, 9). Yet, in my research for the thesis I considered that every speech is determined by the position and the conditions of speaking. Our conception of getting free from any doctrine is determined or captured by ideologies like modern Western humanism. There is no such a thing as a neutral voice, a voice without desire and than without politics, and than without power. My definition of politics in the thesis is that politics is not only the final determinants or aims of the discourse and politics is not placed between the lines of the text. Politics is set of effects of every performed discourse. Theatre performance is politics, theatre is politics, and theatre meta-language is politics... Moreover, everything has a connection with politics. Theatre provides a space not only to imagine

transformation, but also practice it on stage, and thereby both spectators and actors become empowered to generate social action. So, theatre produces effects in the discourse and the discourse is real.

There are many theories about the origins of theater. A few people like Schechner think that theater emerges from rituals. Ancient societies used rituals to embody their understanding of the human condition and the world around them. Ritual performances in some social settings are parts of ecosystems and mediate political relations, group hierarchy and economics. In some other settings, rituals have the qualities of show business. Schechner describes ritual as an event upon which its participants depend; whereas theater depends on its participants. Beginning as efficacious events, rituals are transformed into a kind of entertainment where the entertainers depend on their audience. In the first chapter of this thesis I will make a brief review of the discourse of theater history.

In the second chapter I will explore these questions: a) “What is the social significance of theater?” b) “Can theater be politically effective?” c) “What is the difference between propaganda and politically effective theater?”

As an American Culture and Literature department graduate I have read and written comments on many plays during my college years, but I never thought that theater was accepted as a political weapon; but after graduating I came across the methods of Augusto Boal, political activist and major innovator of post-Brechtian theater¹.

In this thesis I have focused on Boal’s activist theater methods because they, I believe, make certain connections between communicative qualities of art and political

¹ Augusto Boal served as Artistic Director of the Arena Theater in Sao Paulo from 1956 to 1971. Boal has lectured, conducted workshops, and mounted productions throughout North and South America, Europe, India and Africa, and has written a number of books, including *Theater of the Oppressed; Games for Actors and Non Actors; and The Rainbow of Desire*. Currently, Boal continues to work with the Center for the Theater of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro and is researching and formulating a theory of the aesthetics of the oppressed. See <http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.com>

action. His methods have functioned as a voice or a kind of communication conduit for people.

Theater is conflict, struggle, movement, transformation, not simply the exhibition of states of mind. Theater is a verb, not an adjective. To act is to produce an action, and every action produces a reaction—conflict (Boal, 39).

Aiming at changing the dynamics of conventional theater, Boal worked out to make popular theater an accessible place where people intervened. By constructing a bridge between the spectators and the actors, he changed the usual conceptualizations of theme, space actor and spectator and this led to transformation. He stressed that theater was a developing process rather than a finished product. In the third chapter I will discuss and exemplify Boal's theater methods: Theater of the Oppressed, Invisible Theater, and Forum Theater. I will give descriptive information about the historical background of the movements to highlight how they are implemented plays and in what ways they differentiate from other movements.

The 20th century has exposed the political importance in the US. Political consciousness has become the key element in cultural expression. Deep within this struggle theatre-makers were the ones whose voice could be heard out loud. The fourth chapter of the thesis explores the transformation of political theatre in the US with examples.

In my approach to the research, I found it necessary to explore the role of activist theater in my own country. In the fifth chapter I look at how Turkey has been engaging with activist theater from the time of the military coup d'état of May 27, 1960 until the present. I argue in this chapter that activist theater provided a space and a tool for the 1960 proletariat in terms of their transformation and helped them to develop strategies for resisting the political environment of the era. The Constitution established after 1960's coup marked the beginning of a new period and 1960's theater reflected the vitality, novelty and progress in Turkish social life. Playwrights began writing new plays. New theater groups experienced new styles. Toward the end of 60's the excitement gave away to a depression; economic and political. In this chapter I will

focus on the plays and productions of Turkish playwrights of the 70's, i.e. Ayak Bacak Fabrikası (*Foot Leg Factory*). Ayak Bacak Fabrikası (*Foot Leg Factory*) can also be thought as a means of deciphering the construction of identities, organization of everyday life and the political power relations.

In the conclusion, I take into account the historical setting of contemporary activist theater in Turkey and then discuss the urgent need for these types of productions to continue to be staged today. Activism for social change is achieved through many different strategies. Activist theater serves its purpose well in challenging the spectator to act for change. "All theater is necessarily political, because all the activities of men are political and theatre is one of them" (Boal, ix).

CHAPTER I: EARLY THEATER DISCOURSE

“Theater is only one node on a continuum that reaches from the ritualizations of animals (including humans) through performances in everyday life-greetings, displays of emotion, family scenes, professional roles, and so on- through to play, sports, theater, dance, ceremonies, rites, and performances of great magnitude.”

--Schechner, introduction, xii

Schechner remarks in his book *Performance Theory: from Ritual to Theater*, “My purpose is to outline a process through which theater develops from ritual and, conversely, ritual develops from theater” (Schechner, 112).

Theater is probably as old as humankind, but to understand the discourse of theater over time, one must take notice of the fact that culture and theater are inseparable. Over the years, anthropologists and historians did not agree on the origins of ritual and theater. I believe that theater is a symbolical playground for human beings. For this reason I collected my examples from real life events staged as rituals. This study, while acknowledging the ritual theories, will be restricted to those that have accepted by the scholars. My main concern is not to argue about whether rituals are the mother of theater or vice versa; on the contrary, it is to present how theater and rituals happily live together. There may be many definitions of rituals, in this thesis I want to describe ritual as an action, a doing, praxis, and above all a bodily doing, acting, performing.

This chapter explores the relations of theater and ritual by referring to ancient or contemporary sources from different countries and cultures. The basic assumption that rituals are crucial to human behavior is influenced by the arguments of many scholars including, Turner, Huizinga, Schechner and others (Schinina, 19). Victor Turner in his research for a universal means of communication stressed the biological identity of human beings and made a rigid division of the functions regulating instincts, emotions and rituals according to the different cerebral regions (Schinina, 19). According to Schechner rituals have regulated the social functioning of both human

groups and animal groups from the prehuman era (Schinina, 19).

Johan Huizinga, the writer of *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture*, argues that play and culture are actually interwoven with one another (Ehrmann, 51). He prompted rather than concluded the investigation and discussion of the relationship of play and ritual to other cultural forms. For him the whole point is to show that genuine, pure play is one of the main bases of civilisation. Concerning rituals he writes:

Primitive society performs its sacred rites, its sacrifices, consecrations and mysteries, all of which serve to guarantee the well-being of the world, in a spirit of pure play truly understood. Now in myth and ritual the great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin: law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom and science. All are rooted in the primaeval soil of play (Huizinga, 5).

Anthropologists in their writings for the most part deal with rituals in traditional societies in Africa, Asia, and other places where religious ritual and theatre still co-exist. Thanks to the systematic way, Huizinga alluded to certain relationships between various human activities such as war, art, law etc. The play element of these activities, which is the common denominator of rituals, opens up new perspectives. Huizinga defines play:

From the standpoint of form, we can define play in short as a free activity, experienced as "Make believe" and situated outside of everyday life, nevertheless capable of totally absorbing the player; an activity entirely lacking in material interest and in utility. It transpires in an explicitly circumscribed time and space, is carried out in an orderly fashion according to given rules, and gives rise to group relationships which often surround themselves with mystery or emphasize through disguises their difference from the ordinary world (Huizinga, 34-35).

From this perspective, rituals would act as a free way through which people can express their needs, feelings and thoughts. Schechner in "From Ritual to Theatre and Back: The Structure/ Process of the Efficacy-Entertainment Dyad" mentions the efficacy of different ritual ceremonies of humans (468). Schechner suggests that theater history is based on a braided structure constantly inter-relating efficacy and

entertainment (468). Before I discuss the examples of rituals, Schechner's efficacy entertainment dichotomy thesis can be graphed as follows:

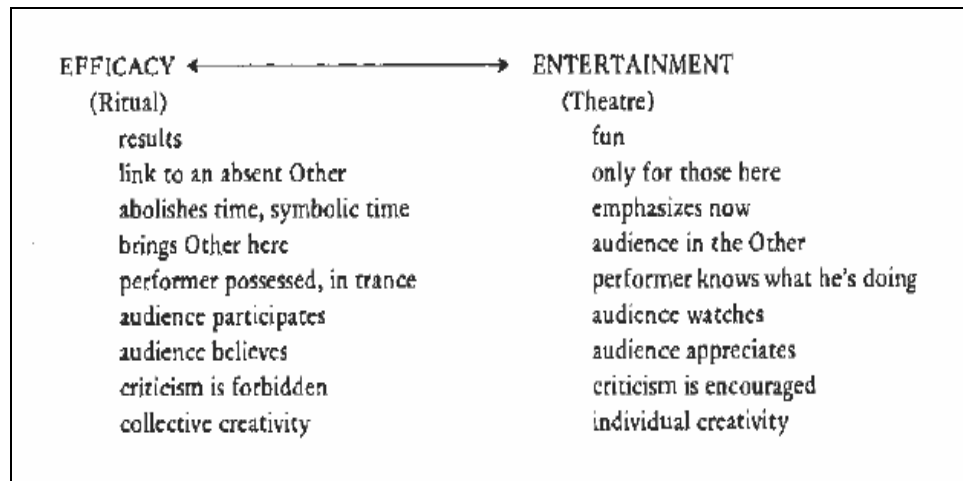


Figure 1. (Schechner, 14)

To call a specific performance a “ritual” or “theater” the context and function should be reviewed.

One of the rituals Schechner describes is the Papua New Guinean *kaiko*² dancing ceremony of Tsembaga which is a year-long festival. Schechner says, “The *kaiko* entertainments are a ritual display, not simply a doing, but a showing of a doing” (Schechner, 1974). Even though dances and sounds have been taken from battles, *kaikos* are transformation of war techniques into an entertainment. The combat behavior is the integral part of the *kaiko*. Schechner says “...the more splendid the displays of dancing, the stronger the alliances; the stronger the alliances, the more splendid the dancing” (Schechner, 109). *Kaikos* are held when there is peace. *Kaikos* also have social roles,

² In describing *kaiko* the account of Roy A. Rappaport in *Pigs for the Ancestors* (New Haven, 1968) is followed.

like regulating trades between the neighbors. The hosts pay the guests with meat in the first part of the *kaiko*; in the second part the guests pay the hosts with trade items. There is no balance in the payments. Schechner implies that “this symmetrical imbalance guarantees further *kaikos*-continued exchanges between groups” (456). In *Kaikos* debtors and creditors exchange places. As to the social functioning of *kaikos* Schechner says:

The *kaiko* depends on the accumulation of pigs and goods, and on a willingness to dress up and dance; neither by itself is enough. The dancing is a performance-and appreciated as such, with the audience serving as frequently acerbic critics-but it's also a way of facilitating trade, finding mates, cementing military alliances, and reaffirming tribal hierarchies (Schechner, 457).

Kaiko is culturally beneficial, organizing the Tsembaga's relationships with their neighbors, “to their lands and goods, to their gardens and hunting ranges” (Schechner, 457).

Another New Guinean ceremony which symbolizes the process of exchange is *konj kaiko*. The basic difference between them is that, *konj kaiko* lasts two days. Major event in *konj kaiko* is the slaughter of the pigs. It is a part of a natural cycle which depends on the raising of sufficient pigs to stage a *konj kaiko*.

Unlike *kaiko* and *konj kaiko*, Australian *krumugl* dancing ceremony is held near village. Schechner represents *krumugl* as an ecological ritual which consists of displaying meat, the merging of the opposing groups into a collaborative group, orating and carrying the meat away. With the arrival of the guests, who are recently their enemies, they set up a temporary house inside the long rectangular huts and dig cooking ovens. The second day the slaughter begins. As each owner kills his animal, he delivers an oration about how difficult it was to raise the pig, who it is promised to, what a fine animal it is, etc. All moves and chants are taken from combat which is a transformation of real behavior into symbolic behavior. Schechner indicates that the ritual at *Kurumugl* is already traveling along the continuum toward theatre in the modern sense. “Transformation is the heart of theater”, claims Schechner and continues:

....There appear to be only two fundamental kinds of theatrical transformation: (1) the displacement of anti-social, injurious, disruptive behavior by ritualized gesture and display, and (2) the invention of characters who act out fictional events or real events fictionalized by virtue of their being acted out (as in documentary theatre or Roman gladiatorial games). These two kinds of transformation occur together, but in the mix usually one is dominant (Schechner, 109).

Mostly rituals start with dancing and end with eating. The dances are the keystones to transform destructive behavior into constructive alliances.

The *Kose* type play is an interesting and widespread form both in Anatolia and its neighboring cultures. The Persian word, *Kose*, means a beardless or thinly bearded man. As one of the central characters of Turkish popular tales, it seems to be not only a ritual, but also a mythical part of it. Metin And in “The Turkish Folk Theatre” describes *Kose* as “a negative type, not sympathetic, a trickster, at times treacherous, at times cruel, vicious, at times a mysterious, supernatural character who injures people; he is an intriguer who lacks any human feeling” (And, 159). A variety of *Kose* plays can be found in Azarbaijan, Iran and Iraq. Ivar Lasser illustrates a masquerade held among the Azarbaijan Turks of Caucasia, called *Kos-Kosa*. The main characters are *Kosa* and *Hekim*. It is assumed by Lasser that the definition of *Kos-Kosa* in Arabic is an ingenious or cunning woman. During the ceremony *Kosa* wears a special outfit:” a fur coat turned inside out, has a tail attached to her back, her face covered with grinning masks, and her head ornamented with a high cap shaped like a sugar-loaf, garnished with bells” (And, 159). They travel from pillar to post and bless the villagers even if they are allowed or not. If *kosa* is allowed she dances for the people in the house. At the end of the dance she falls on the floor pretending she is dead. Accompanying an oration, it is *Hekim* who brings her back to life. As a reward for her dancing sometimes people offer some gifts, when she is offered a gift she blesses the house with a son. If no one offers a gift, she blesses the house with twelve daughters. As it is a year end festival, the death of *Kose* personifies the old year whose days are numbered; the resurrection of *Kose* is the birth of the New Year.

In Northern Iraq, Khorsabat, a similar type of Kose can be seen. Two characters, one of whom is in a woman's outfit and a man wearing a conic hat and carrying a stick, darken their faces and start the ceremony with dancing. The man acts like he is dead. In order to indicate the anguish, the woman beats her breasts and ululates. Spectators actively participate in the ceremony by throwing a bucket of water on the dead man. Their aim is to help the dead man return to life. Immediately the dead man is resurrected and both performers end the ceremony by dancing. Similar to the other *Kose* plays the performers ask for gifts especially food. Praying for rain and dining together the ceremony comes to an end. According to Metin And the most important feature of this ceremony is the song the performers sing while they are dancing. The first two lines are:

“Kozbarata, kozbarata

Rain comes, rain comes...” (And, 161).

There are many examples of Kose plays in Anatolian Turkey. Kose Oyunu from Kars contains the themes of both death and resurrection and the story of a kidnapped girl. The characters are two brothers in sheepskin, a girl and a man disguised in a pig posture. There is a happy ending at the end of the ceremony: the dead man is resurrected, the kidnapped girl returns, as a sign of joy the pig is sacrificed.

Rituals are connected to specific occasions and geography. They are familiar to all of us because they are scenes from real life, symbolizing events. As Schechner indicates, through rituals people reenact “ordinary” and “super-ordinary” realities (460). Rituals are the doors between dream time and real life experiences. “There is an interesting point about the Kose type folk plays in Anatolia,” points out Metin And, in “Turkish Folk Play” and continues, “they combine the rite for the Year End ceremony with the pastoral ceremonies for the fecundity of cattle and flocks”(And, 164). Besides the meaning of Kose in the foregoing Kose type of plays, Kose has other meanings

which are associated with a ram³ and a he-goat. I would also like to mention the associations of the word *Kose* with he-goat in Greek Folk plays. Metin And illuminates:

....the chief characters are called *momoerois*, a word constructed from *momos* which means fool, idiot, and *geros* which means old. This old fool frightens the children. He is also called *Kosia*, from the Turkish word *Koc* meaning ram, but the Greek usage of the word means he-goat, and this character wears a goat-skin and imitates the movements of a he-goat, and he carries some red dye which is used when simulating a sacrifice in lieu of blood (And, 164).

As I have already outlined, rituals are examples of the early and contemporary discourse of theater that open up many discussions to scholars. It is highly effective to mention Dionysian festivals even if little is known about them. Let us now look at the Cambridge School⁴ which Schechner describes as the school which has had the deepest influence upon the climate of ideas in which we now read Greek tragedy....” (Schechner, 1).

The Cambridge thesis says that, the dithyramb and Greek Tragedy are derived from Primal Ritual which is the spring festival held in Athens for five days each spring (Schechner, 2).

Dionysian spring festival is named after Dionysus⁵, who is the god of wine and vegetation, in ancient Greece. According to tradition, Dionysus died each winter and was reborn in the spring. To his followers, this cyclical revival, accompanied by the seasonal renewal of the fruits of the earth, embodied the promise of the resurrection of the dead. The yearly rites in honor of the resurrection of Dionysus gradually evolved into the structured form of the Greek drama, and important festivals were held in honor of the god, during which great dramatic competitions were conducted.

³ The derivations are taken from Metin And’s “The Turkish Folk Plays” published in *Asian Folklore Studies, Vol. 38, No. 2. (1979)*. “The word for ram is *koc*; *kos* is the bell which is carried by the last animal in the flock; *kosem* or *kosemen* is a he-goat that assists the shepherd, or the ram or he-goat which leads the flock; *koruz* is a one-year-old kid; and many other similar meanings” (And, 164).

⁴ Cambridge School is composed of Frazer, Cornford, Harrison, Murray and their followers.

⁵ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysus>

Finally let us look at Augusto Boal's creation myth for the theater, "the fable of Xua Xua, the prehuman woman who discovered theater" (Boal, 11). This fable is remarkable because it situates the origin of theatre in the pregnant body of Xua Xua. In her pregnancy, Xua Xua, recognizes her own separate identity looking for answers inside of her. After the birth of her son Lig-Lig-Le, she lost control over her son who had been a part of herself. Once she accepts the separate entity that had been part of herself, discovers theatre (Philip, 99).

In this moment theater was discovered. The moment when Xua Xua gave up trying to recover her baby and keep him all for herself, accepted that he was somebody else, and looked at herself, emptied the part of herself (Boal, 15).

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the historical framework from which I have investigated my case studies. As to Freud art was "the sublimation of the conflict between the pleasure and reality principles, (Schechner, 11). Freud also identified art with play alluding that artistic creation was an extension of fantasy life, (Schechner, 11). The examples of rituals from different countries in the first chapter were meant to show the importance of "play" element in rituals and culture. Schechner illustrates: "the boundary between the performance and everyday life is shifting and arbitrary, varying greatly from culture to culture and situation to situation," (Schechner, 71). To sum up, events are the ritual. Theatre makes use of the events which are real or fantasy within a time and space structure. So, theatre is a mix of ritual and performance.

CHAPTER II: THEATRE'S SCOPE

This is theater- the art of looking at ourselves.

(Boal,1)

In this chapter, I will ask the following questions that will be explored throughout the remainder of the thesis: a) “What is the social significance of theater?” b) “Can theater be politically effective?” c) “What is the difference between propaganda and politically effective theater?”

When I have engaged in my studies, I arrived at these questions as a ground for my thesis. To give a sense of what I mean by this, I start with the definition of theater. Webster dictionary⁶ defines "theater" as:

1. an outdoor structure for dramatic performances or spectacles in ancient Greece and Rome
2. a building or area for dramatic performances
3. a place or sphere of enactment of usually significant events or action
4. dramatic or theatrical quality or effectiveness

These definitions may help us to understand the nature of theater, but they do not explain all theatrical activity. Theater, as I argued in the first chapter, is a playground for people. In this sense I use the term “spect-actor” to assess theater’s significance. Spect-actor is a word derives from the spectator and the actor. Augusto Boal, in his book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*,” coins this phrase (15). Boal describes theater “everything that actors do on stage, we do throughout our lives, always and everywhere” (15). As I agree with Augusto Boal that theater is the most essential human language, we act and become actors; we observe and become spectators. While

⁶ See <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theatre>

we observe ourselves and others, we undergo a set of perceptual transformations and elaborations in our behaviors. When we accept that behavior, it is what theater is. The main ingredient of theater is the human body. Boal indicates the difference between the woman and man in the street and man and woman on stage as:

The only difference is that actors are conscious that they are using the language of theater, and are thus better able to turn it to their advantage, whereas the woman and man in the street do not know that they are speaking theater.... (Boal, 15)

Starting from the polemic of the social role of theater, Schechner constructed a system which interprets theater's basic functions in society (98). Theater can be seen as a safe arena where the spectators can play with alternate behaviors in modern western society. Behaviors are more powerful than reflective thoughts; theater is one of the best places where one can experience them. It provides a chain of actions with its consequences to its end in a way not possible in real life. As Boal describes theater as an inseparable part of our lives, Schechner says "theater is a kind of in between genres, and therefore dangerous. Theater can at any moment slip into life and, of course; it can be in danger of being fossilized" (98).

When Schechner was about asked theater's social role in society, his answer was quite interesting: "What is the role of a bagel at breakfast" (Schechner, 99)? How can we find a better medium to expose and play with behaviors, characters, and stories that not only fascinate us, but upset, disturb, shock, and change us better than theater (Schechner, 99)? Whether theater is political or not is rather chaotic. Despite the Greek theorist Aristotle who argues that there is a complete separation between art and politics, Augusto Boal implies the efficacy of tragedies with "the tragic and coercive system of Aristotle". According to him it was the first blueprint of the attempt of political theater. Becoming spectators, ordinary people would act in exchange for emotional relief. Through theater human acts and relationships have been presented to the spectator live and direct. In the context of Hegel's thought, human passions and actions can only be reposed on stage by free characters whose internal movements are exteriorized without limitations or restraints. Characters' being subject to their own activities is the essence of political theater.

Theater has always been considered as politically effective that dominant classes wanted to contact with the public immediately and to gain greater power to convince through theater for centuries. Hauser in his book *The Social History of Art*, in analyzing the social function of theater, wrote that clergy and nobility had the control of theatrical production in middle ages (Boal, 54). Those years were the peak of feudal art that religious respect for the status quo was inculcated in the minds of people. The Church utilized art as a vehicle for spreading its ideas, dogmas, and decisions.

The feudal plays were morality plays: the good were rewarded and the bad were punished. Among morality plays I would like to recall *Everyman* written by an anonymous English writer. The name of the play itself shows the purpose without effort: the tendency of modifying the society. It tells the story of the day when Everyman is to die, his repenting, and penance for his purification. Tended to fulfill a single purpose by evoking certain fears on the public, those types of plays were too narrow in narrative styles. In this sense, not utilized by the same sources suggested by Aristotle, the cathartic effect of theater continued to function as a purifier.

Schechner declares that theater can be used both as a way of sending coded messages and in the opposite way, forming mainstream values as well. Development of commerce had also a direct link to the theater's function. In other words people started to build for themselves as soon as the thought that nothing is eternal in this world had been avoided. God came to be an invisible organizer of this world, and the individual ability and the value of each man became more important than the social estate in Renaissance. Because of the ongoing political conflicts, the bourgeoisie unconsciously served as the coming of the individualized man in the theater. Theater takes its' basis from people; thus theater needed to create man of flesh and blood, especially the virtuous man. Characters' became subject of the dramatic actions, abstract figures disappeared, and that is to say they suffered the consequences like people suffered in real life.

It is necessary to emphasize that theater functioned as a reflector, fed by political ambitions of the ruling classes. Either praising or criticizing the social system, theater always became a part of social dissent.

Ignorant of his true role in class issues the bourgeois playwright was not as conscious as Erwin Piscator who realized during the First World War that theater could be used for political motives. He founded the Theater of the Proletariat in 1919 which influenced Brecht creating the concept of Epic Theater. Piscator's definition of epic theater was "the text of the play disclosing its sociopolitical circumstances" (Carol & Bial, 42). The roots of modern political theater were born in Europe. The goal of theater according to German theorist Brecht is to help common man in social struggles and correct social errors. He wanted to break traditional theater forms by creating a new one. He started with the traditional distance of audience. He conceived the idea of Distancing, more commonly known as Alienation (in German, *verfremdungseffekt*, note: exact translation is "strange making") (Carol & Bial, 42). It had everything to do with consciousness raising. He thought that if empathy with audience was impeded, the audience became more concerned with the choices and reasons behind the action. He created the concept of Epic Theater which helped politically focused theater groups flourish in Europe and in the U.S. It is not a coincidence that most radical groups practice theater as a way of protesting and educating others. Among these radical groups in the U.S. are El Teatro Campesino, the Bread and Puppet Theater, and the San Francisco Mime Troupe. El Teatro Campesino was founded in 1965 by Louis Valdez. It was remarkably effective in Chicano Farm workers' movement. Peter Schumann, using huge and extraordinary masks and puppets organized antiwar marches under the name of the Bread and Puppet Theater in 1963. The San Francisco Mime Troupe had a direct link to free speech movement. They performed free commedia-based shows in city parks in 1959.

Before proceeding, I would like to mention Antonin Artaud who was influenced by Brecht and existential philosophy. He developed The Theater of Cruelty in France in 1932. The Theater of Cruelty was a combination of Artaud's creation of new theater methods and theories to convey representative strengths in theater through

using the world in an ample form. Artaud's explanation why he employs the word cruelty:

“.... in the sense of an appetite for life, a cosmic rigor and implacable necessity, in the Gnostic sense of a living whirlwind that devours the darkness, in the sense of that pain apart from whose ineluctable necessity life could not continue; good is desired, it is the consequence of an act; evil is permanent” (Artaud, 103).

The early 20th century was revolutionary in style and creativity in theater. The modern theater theory was intense that it would break the comprehension and empathy. The main focus of theater was on the reasons which helped propaganda plays to spread easily.

Warren Taylor, in “What is propaganda?” pointed out that this age is the age of computing propagandas. Since anything could become political, propaganda took its own polemics with it; hence the polemics resulted from the generalizations of propaganda. The organization of the Institute of Propaganda Analysis declared that "expressions of opinion, fact, alleged fact, and actions intended to influence human beings" are all propaganda. Naming almost everything propaganda was not an objective breakthrough. It would have gone further and arrived at a distinction such as good propaganda and not bad propaganda. Similar to Schechner, Brecht pointed out that, under some circumstances, theater is a place of entertainment. Propaganda is effective because of the methods it uses: entertainment, persuasion and manipulation. Warren Taylor, in “What is propaganda?” went further and calls the propagandist a good showman who is equipped to satisfy the hope to follow new thoughts. Let me put a question: What is the difference between propaganda and politically effective theater?

Because of the political environment of 20th century, theater was also political. One can call 20th century as a literature of opposition, a literature that threatened the establishment, the State. Propaganda in theater had certain limits. A playwright can make use of propaganda in theater, yet this does not mean that it is just the method to use. Theater's function is to work as a catalyst, sometimes relationship with audience so strongly implicit that using propaganda as a tool became a problem. It is the audience's role to decode the given message. It should not be pushed too far. The audience is to be

made to realize that there are similarities with its own way of life and philosophy. Trying to sell or repeat the message is useless. The playwright reflects the values, ideas, and ideals of the class which he belongs to. This presentation leads to an impulse to social forces which “mold the spectator’s character and determine the side on which he finds himself in the social conflict” (Vivas, 92). This carries us through the fact that whether he was class conscious or not, the bourgeois artist was as much a propagandist as the communist.

In other words, I have been saying in this chapter that a play is always written for the audience and it has a social role. After giving a brief history of politically effective theatre, I would like to add Eric Bentley’s explanation of the reasons why a playwright writes a political play, “first, in order perhaps to have some little on someone somewhere sometime; and second, because politics is one of the main subject matters for writers to treat, “ (Bentley, 57). Additionally, Eric Bentley sets aside the critical question whether theatre is political which this chapter explored, “in the theatre anything can become political by a sudden turn of events outside theatre,” (Bentley, 48).

It is during times of great turbulence, both politically and socially, that political theater necessarily evolved. Boal was an important figure while political theater was progressing in Latin America. In his introduction to *Theatre of the Oppressed*, he asserts that “Those who intend to separate theatre and politics try to lead us into error, and this is a political attitude” (Boal, ix). I will give more information about Augusto Boal in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III: INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVIST THEATRE

METHODOLOGY

*“To transform is to be transformed. The action of transforming is, in itself, transforming“
(Boal,xx).*

In this thesis: the different voices which are representing the theater are weapons are vital for the subject. Augusto Boal, perhaps the most important figure in 20th century activist theatre in Latin America, founded the Theatre of the Oppressed which has had worldwide consideration since that time. Boal continues to direct workshops, formulate theories and create new forms of doing theatre. Boal works toward waking up spectators, forcing them to look outside their comfort zone to notice social conflicts, and then motivate them to protest and fight for human rights.

This thesis does not have the space to give adequate attention to all of the complexities of these philosophical discourses and, thus, will keep the framework simple. Boal divides his analysis of theater into four categories: Theater of the Oppressed, Cops in the Head, Forum Theater, and Invisible Theater.

It was Augusto Boal, political materiality of activist necessity, who, in stating the obvious, radically altered the perception of the spectator in theater. He developed The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) during the 1950s and 1960s. In an effort to transform theater from the monologue of traditional performance into a dialogue between audience and stage, Boal experimented with many kinds of interactive theater. Theater of the Oppressed is a process of learning together moving from the individual to general, abstract to concrete. Even more, Theater of the Oppressed might create representations that show both realities as it is and as it could be. The basic feature of Theater of the Oppressed is the active audience, “the spectators come on stage, substituting themselves for the protagonist, and trying to find viable solutions for real problems” (Boal, 6). Boal says in his works that all people are capable of acting. The

experience of oppression is enacted on the stage while seeking solutions for real life. He encourages the audience to perform a responsible act as he calls them spect-actors. Furthermore, he wants the spect-actor to invade the stage which is the representation of reality. Invading the stage and the character become a symbolic trespass which the spect-actor breaks free from the oppressor. Boal asserts, "In an 'ordinary' performance, one usually forgets about real life because it is necessary to pay attention to the stage. Here, the stage reminded the spectators of what was actually happening in the streets" (Boal, 38). In spite of the fact that the conventional theater auditorium stage dialog is intransitive, in the theater of the oppressed and other Boal methods, "the stage may attempt to transform the auditorium," in response to that, the auditorium has the intention to change everything (Boal, 38). Thus, audience members could stop a performance and suggest different actions for the actors, who would then carry out the audience suggestions. Another way to suggest an idea in a performance is for audience members to come onto the stage to demonstrate their ideas. This provides a space not only to imagine change, but also practice it, and thereby they become empowered to generate social action.

One could ask whether the oppression which generated the social action the same. While Boal was working in Europe in mid-'70s, many people said their oppression was "non communication", "loneliness". They were not the same oppressions he was used to in Brazil where social and political oppressions: police, education, unemployment etc. were not solved. This experience made him care about internal oppressions. He says "I discovered the cops in our heads—knowing that the headquarters are outside" (1989). Because of the fact that this technique contrasted with Boal's other techniques which emphasizes the collective oppression and group solutions, people ask him if this was a shift in his own thinking from the group to the individual. He noted that internal and external oppressions complement each other. "The Cop in the Head" is a part of the Theater of the Oppressed framework which concerned internalized oppressions. The Cop in the Head workshops started with sharing the group member's own oppressions. Each person told personal stories related to the agreed-upon theme. Then they came up with a story as the basis of each scenario.

By linking of individuals to the group a strong commonality was created. While someone from the group, “the protagonist”, was making a personal problem scene, a special attention should be paid to the “invisible forces or characters”, which were the main causes of the actions. Chosen by the protagonist several people among the group became the cops in his/her head. They played the scene in several variations. The objective of the scene was to make protagonist gain control over his/her own interior blocks and oppression.

According to Boal in a traditional theatrical performance the spectator/character relationship is established through empathy. Boal considers the emotion that the audience gets in a traditional theater as vicarious, “We are led by the characters and their actions which we cannot control” (Boal, 38). The empathy which establishes the bond between the character and spectator in traditional theater becomes the sympathy in theater of the oppressed performances. Namely, the world of the performance they create is based on their own oppressions. Boal explains this sympathy as:

We are no longer led, now we lead. I am not touched by somebody else’s emotions. I produce my own. I control my actions. I am the subject. There, where somebody like me led the action, we are now the subjects.... The oppressed become the artists (38).

In his book, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal begins by defining what he calls “Aristotle’s coercive system of tragedy.” This system, he explains, one of the foundations for modern theater, is the method whereby the aristocracy establishes allocation,

Some persons will go to the stage and only they will be able to act; the rest will remain seated, receptive, and passive—these will be the spectators, the masses, and the people. And to reflect the dominant ideology, some actors will be protagonists (aristocrats) and the rest will be the chorus... (*Theatre of the Oppressed*, ix).

Boal recognizes that “on one hand, art is affirmed to be pure contemplation; on the other hand, it is considered to present always a vision of the world in transformation and therefore is inevitably political insofar as it shows the means of carrying out that

transformation or of delaying it” (*Theatre of the Oppressed*, xxii). The argument between scholars about whether all human activities, including the arts, are political still persists. Aristotle who claimed that tragedy, poetics and theatre have nothing to do with politics had a conflict with himself. According to Boal, in his *Poetics*, he wrote ‘we have to be better friends of reality: all of man’s activities—including, of course, all the arts, especially theater—are political. And theater is the most perfect artistic form of coercion’ (Boal, 39).

Boal argues that Aristotle’s tragic theater, which survives very well today, is a powerful system of intimidation. But, even as theater has traditionally been seen as a mirror of the world, the authors and theorists in radical theater may argue among themselves, but they all subscribe to the idea that traditional theater has to be broken down in order for theirs to be different, revolutionary. As for Aristotle’s system, Boal rejects it:

Aristotle formulated a very powerful purgatory system, the objective of which is to eliminate all that is not commonly accepted, including revolution, before it takes place. His system appears in disguised form on television, in the movies, in the circus, in the theatres. It appears in many and varied shapes and media. But its essence doesn’t change: it is designed to bridle the individual, to adjust him to what pre-exists. If this is what we want, the Aristotelian system serves the purpose better than any other; if, on the contrary, we want to stimulate the spectator to transform his society, to engage in revolutionary action, in this case we will have to seek another poetics! (*Theatre of the Oppressed*, 47).

One could go on about theorists and their influence, but one must recognize the innovative work of activist theatre in Latin America and the United States. Those who are oppressed share something essential which was the willingness to challenge the authority. In the 1960s and 1970s, when groups such as Bread and Puppet, the San Francisco Mime Troupe and Teatro Campesino came to prominence, there was a lot of opposition to the government, in both the United States with anti-war protest, and in Latin America during the political turmoil and internal strife that, along with military coups, set up dictatorships. This was the situation in Brazil when Augusto Boal developed his theatre of the oppressed.

Since Augusto Boal helped theater become a tool for activism, he was considered as a threat for Brazil. The military coup regime in Brazil ended democracy, Boal was jailed, tortured and exiled to Argentina. This did not stop him; he continued teaching his revolutionary methods. He established several Centers for the Theatre of the Oppressed. From his work Boal evolved various forms of theater workshops and performances that aimed to meet the needs of all people for interaction, dialogue, critical thinking, and fun.

While the performance modes of Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, Invisible Theater and the vast array of the Theater of the Oppressed are designed to bring the audience into active relationship with the performed event, the workshops are virtually a training ground for action not only in these performance forms, but for actions in life. With these techniques he proved that theater is a place of action beyond theory. He organized the International Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed.

In 1992, Boal ran as a candidate for the position of *Vereador*⁷ of Rio. His new position helped him to attract more people in presenting social issues through theater with his new theater styles. Boal as politician, emphasized that he was not anxious to separate his theatrical career from his new role. He, on the contrary, used his new role to create a new stage in the Theatre of the Oppressed which is known as Legislative Theater.

I want to make politics but I don't want to change my profession. I am a man of the theatre! For me, this was always possible and now it is necessary: theatre is political and politics is theatre [...]. My proposition consists in this union, rich for the theatre and for politics: I propose a democratic theatre where the spectator transforms himself into the protagonist, discovers and experiments with possible solutions-on the stage, theatrically: and this is a political activity! The spectator is transformed into Protagonist and acts; the elector becomes a legislator and proposes the law. Both the campaign and the mandate will be explosively theatrical: street theatre becomes the Chamber and the Chamber is in the street [...], in the '60s theatre politicized itself; today in the '90s, the moment has arrived to theatricalize politics (Boal, 1992a).

⁷ Vereador is a position similar to a City Council seat in the United States.

The 7th International Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed was considerable, because Boal was able to obtain funding to hold an international festival in Boal's own Rio de Janeiro Center. The festival was mainly based on the history of the Theatre of the Oppressed theory, practice and Forum Theater. Hosted by Rio de Janeiro Center of the Theatre of the Oppressed, the festival was held in July, 1993. The participants had the opportunity to experience the recreation of the birth of spect-actor. The festival coincided with the horrific massacres of street children in Rio. It was on 23 July 1993 when eight children were shot by members of the Military Police at the Church of Candelaira. The impact of the situation on participants was profound. They produced a play about a boy who is forced to leave his family and live on the street. Paul Heritage says this performance is "an eclectic style that mixed rap and capoeira with naturalistic dialog, they dispensed with many of the myths surrounding the street children while simultaneously presenting the individual trajectory of particular protagonist" (31). This proves Boal's notion that the oppressed are the subjects of theatrical activity rather than the objects.

The participants of Rio TO festival tested varying degrees of constructions of different Boal techniques. The Forum Theater is one of them. The forum theater gets its essence from the active participants who decisively intervene in the dramatic action and change it. In a forum session, first, the participants tell a story which contains a political or social problem. Then, intended for opening a discussion, a short skit which shows the problem is rehearsed. At least some of the participants object to the solution. The skit is performed once more. This time the audience has the right to replace any actor and change the direction of the action. This leads to a newly created situation based on the possible solutions. Any possible solution must be done on stage, comfort zones, this time comfort of seats, are not accepted. Advocating a revolutionary opinion is easier than to practice on stage.

To analyze the method deeply, I will give an example forum session about an eighteen-year-old man who worked in a fish meal factory in Peru. His boss was a ruthless man who forced his employees to work twelve consecutive hours per day. The possible solution to be discussed in the forum session was as follows: to fill the machine with

excessive weight of fish so that it could break down and workers could rest a couple of hours. Would this be the best solution was the main concern of the forum session. The scene was performed. The actors represented the boss, the workers, the foreman, “the informer”. The stage was converted into a fish meal factory; they performed the same tasks which factory workers did. There was an ongoing discussion on the possible solutions while the scene was being performed. The workers broke the machine. They rested for a while until the machine was fixed. Then they had to get back to their work. The question was raised: Were all in agreement? Each one had different proposals: to start a strike, explode the factory etc. The scene was performed once more. This time the audience would have the right to change the direction of the action. The first one to change the action was the one who proposed the bomb. He replaced the actor who was portraying the young man, and figuratively threw the bomb at the machine. All the others protested this since it meant to destroy the factory and the source of work. He even did not know how to produce a bomb or how to throw it. Then they tried the strike solution until they all agreed upon the impracticability of the proposed solutions. The solution which was judged to be the best was to form a small union. The forum theater provides space to try out all ideas, rehearse and practice them. Boal says “It is not the place of the theater to show the correct path, but only to offer the means by which all possible paths may be examined” (Theatre of the Oppressed, 141). Recognizing the situation, feeling the part of a debate, Forum Theater takes us to the Boal’s famous declaration that “perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself: but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!”(155). With Boal’s theatre methods, audience becomes spect-actors and face their oppressions and they find opportunity to manifest themselves freely throughout an actor’s body. This is the rehearsal of the revolution, to know to speak up.

Forum theatre never imposes ideas; it is the arena that spect-actors liberate their own repressed ideas. As Boal indicates “forum theatre does not preach, it is not dogmatic, it does not seek to manipulate people. At best, it stimulates them. At best, it transforms them into actors. Actor - he or she who acts,” (Boal, 28).

Let me give another forum theatre example which comprises both oppressors and oppressed. In 1977 Boal performed his first forum theatre in Godrano, a little village

in Sicily, Italy. I will give detailed information about the village so that I can show the condition of the villagers. The village was so small that it lacks facilities such as; hotel, hospital, supermarket, cinema, theatre etc. In order to buy a newspaper, you needed to go to another village which was ten-minute drive away. There were a few facilities for the villagers, a bar, a church, a public telephone, butchers, grocers, and a police station. There was a local mafia which used to kill the people with whom they had disagreements. Half of the population of the village immigrated to other countries. The ones who stayed in the village think that the emigrants would return one day. So there are more and more houses and fewer people. The village seemed to be peaceful but the villagers were unhappy. Observing the village Boal thought that everyone in the village was unhappy, the unhappiest ones were the women. Because of the cultural pressures the unhappiest were the girls. I chose this forum theatre example because the similar cultural pressures still go on the eastern parts of Turkey. The country and the language are different but the treatment of women is more or less the same. Women who were married or soon to be married were oppressed; they were busy with preparing the trousseau. Trousseau is *corredo* in Italian. *Corredo* is a strict Italian institution in Sicily when compared to the rest of the Italian nation. When the bridegroom's family meets the bride's family before marriage the bride's family starts showing the contents of the *corredo*. This is called valuation. Every component of the *corredo* has a value, so they discuss till they have a rough figure. Boal explains this process with a simple arithmetic, "1 bride + 1 trousseau = 1 bridegroom," (Boal, 21). The bride also must be a virgin. In some parts of the Sicily it was the custom to hang out the bloodstained sheet after the nuptial night so that everyone could see that the bride had been a virgin. After the bureaucratic transactions, the villagers gathered in the square. Most of the forum theatre performances are done with the oppressed. This time the audience was composed of both oppressed and oppressors. The performance started with exercises and games so that the actors and audience could warm up. After that, the first scene started based on a real event and featured by real people from the village using their real names. Giuseppina, a young woman age of 20, wants to go out for supper. Her mother says her father could be agreed if her brothers will accompany her. The father arrives with sons. Each of them was a different kind of oppressors. They all think that a woman's task is to carry out her feminine tasks. Her

brothers ignored her wish to accompany her out. The father bans her from going out for a walk as she is a woman. The forum session began around the supper table. Three young women replaced Guiseppina and tried to break the oppression. There was no agreement in the discussion; they were still beaten by the men at the end. They could not find a solution. Audience accepted this solution; she went out for a walk after he went out for a sleep. The second forum started, the spectators were eager to take place of the characters. Unaware of the power theatre laid their true feelings and ideas in their acting, a man played out his solution. He ordered all his children out of his house including his wife, telling her to find a boyfriend for herself. Boal made an observation: “when a young woman took Guiseppina’s place she immediately excited a feeling identification....By contrast, with the young man’s performance, there was no identification,” (Boal, 25). Finally a male actor played Guisseppina’s part with another name.

The analysis of this technique is that, in a normal play when actor/actors carry out liberation, since the intervention of the spectator is not allowed, this liberation is a catharsis for the audience. When a spect-actor intervenes and carries out the same act as they know that if they do not agree they have opportunity to invade the stage and show their opinions, the event for them is a dynamization.

Another method Boal proposed in his works is Invisible Theater. It is a theater which breaks with every single concept of traditional theater. In invisible theatre, no one other than the actors knows there is a show. It is like a guerilla theater, one cannot mark it as semiotically staged until spectators would catch themselves in the enactment of oppression. As Boal has written, “The Invisible Theater never places itself in an illegal position because it doesn’t intend to violate the law. It intends to question the legitimacy of law...” (1990: 32).

Boal promoted this theater when the military did not allow organized public discussions of politics. So Boal would plant a few actors in a public place such as a shopping mall, or a bus etc., create a believable scenario, and begin the show. Normally, the situation would be something about which it would be possible to make social comment. For example, actors who are costumed as an espionage stereotypes could go to

a shopping mall and perform certain spy behaviors. Boal notes, “In espionage, for instance, spies use techniques such as camouflage, interpretation of roles, and simulated realities-which are all invisible theatre techniques” (1990:32). On Saturday the seventh of December 1991, inspired by Boal’s invisible theater techniques, 11 actors inhabit Cortana Shopping Mall in Baton Rouge, Louisiana for the purpose of showing the codes of a popular culture entertainment commodity, the spy thriller. It was a 45-minute performance. They spanned the shopping mall to let their audience notice, comment upon and question their everyday interactions as secret agents. *The Operation Mallfinger* took place in the following way:

First Action: Eleven actors fan in a shopping mall. They are costumed as secret agents (black clothing with dark glasses). They carry an object of exchange: a briefcase, a large envelope, a newspaper or a camera.

Second Action: Each actor has a portable cassette tape player through which they are directed. The tape plays James Bond movie themes etc. The music commands them to perform certain spy behavior.

Third Action: As the actors follow a prearranged script, they go to the different areas in the mall or exchange items with other spies. The exchange of the items is scripted but they also randomly exchange tape cassettes depending on arbitrary contact. This activity of exchange continues through five scripted exchanges.

Fourth Action: By the time the fifth exchange takes place, they go to a large meeting area where they wait for other actors to arrive. Only one tape contains the final command which is “remove your earphones, you are busted”. Since the tapes are randomly exchanged, no one knows who will be busted. They all wait to see who will give the sign.

Fifth Action: Escorted by all the actors, the busted agent goes out of the mall. Some of the actors clear the way, while others make sure the busted agent does not get away. As soon as all actors are out, they return to their cars and leave.

This performance reveals how invisible theater is expressed at everyday routines; therefore, spect-actors provide alternatives to the oppressive regimen. Even if there were several differences, the non actor participants involved in the same way Boal described, “The invisible theater erupts in a location chosen as a place where the public congregates. All the people who are near become involved in the eruption and the effects of it last long after the skit is ended” (2000:144). At this point almost everyone in the mall would be involved in the discourse and this would hopefully bring out new perspectives and criticism. Non actors witnessed and participated in the same experience the actors go through the suspicious spy activities. During the performance they attracted attention of the non-actors that several U.S. Marines followed some of the female agents. Marines became spect-actors as they interacted with the agents by helping them escort the busted agent out of the mall.

In this thesis, my main argument is theatre is political. Writing political plays, playwrights, have the right to show their own colors. A playwright who has a design on us, and pretends not to have, is attempting to impose an idea. This chapter is designed to explore the fact that theatre is political from the spectators’ point of view. There is always someone suffering more than us, but it is not an argument which should prevent us speaking about our own oppressions. Boal’s rehearsal theatre method’s purpose is to help us to free ourselves.

CHAPTER IV: THE ACTIVIST THEATRE IN THE U.S.

Theatre is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it.

-- Augusto Boal

This chapter intends to examine how American political theater took its roots from social changes in American society and how it has been influenced by class development and formation in the 20th century. The Industrial revolution which introduced mechanized farming and mining, huge industries and the transcontinental railroad, spread across the United States during the second half of the 19th century. Technological advances were also encouraged by industry and trade, leading to an increased belief that science could solve human problems. As with the Industrial Revolution, laborers started to complain of low wages, long hours and poor conditions. The working classes had to fight for every increase in rights: unionization and strikes became the principal weapons workers would use after the 1860s. There seems to have been rejection of Romantic idealism; pragmatism reigned instead. The common man seemed to feel that he needed to be recognized, and people asserted themselves through action.

Labor unions, such as The American Federation of Labor (AFL) demanded shorter working hours, and decent conditions. Strikes turned into bloody battles, such as the Carnegie steel plant strike in Homestead, Pennsylvania (1892), and the Pullman Strike in Chicago (1894). Since AFL excluded immigrant, black, and female industrial workers through strict admissions requirements, and prohibitive initiation fees, the vast majority of workers remained unorganized and unrepresented. There was a social dilemma that gave rise to economic and political struggles.

Together with low pay, dangerous work environments and poor living standards, the other difficulty that the laborers faced was the public schooling, which

was generally inaccessible to many working-class children. Moreover, the existing public schooling system for working class youth was criticized by working class leaders. Among the working class leaders, James H. Maurer ⁸ describes the school system as “penal institutions” and he also argued that the public schools inculcated anti-labor attitudes into the students. Workers’ social and educational experiences led to a need for their own schools. Due to workers’ dissatisfaction with the formal school system, labor colleges were founded, i.e. Work Peoples’ College (1907), Brookwood Labors College (1921), Commonwealth College (1923). Since some of the founders and supporters of labor colleges were members of Socialist Party of American labor unions, which founded in 1901, one can say that socialist ideology influenced the social and education ideals of the labor colleges. The colleges stood for a better education which prepares students to be labor activists and potential leaders who are equipped with the skills necessary to organize and to continue a union.

Leonardo Craig, in “Workers’ Education in Pennsylvania “ defined “labor colleges” as a group of workers and educators brought together for the purpose of gathering and distributing educational literature and for conducting educational campaigns among the workers of a local industrial area (Barrow, 95). Among all the other educational offerings of labor colleges, labor drama was an important part of the curriculum. Drama classes in Brookwood and Commonwealth allowed students analyze and produce plays portraying working-class problems and the importance of collective action in resolving these problems. Similar to Augusto Boal’s Forum Theater techniques, labor drama workshops were the integral part of production of labor plays. In other words, participants of the workshops would forge connections between “the objective and subjective dimensions of life that captured in the drama” (Barrow, 10). Each workshop consisted of three stages. The main focus of the first stage was “the external dimensions of the event”, that is the events independent of the workers’ control. In this stage unconnected skits tended to be slice-of-life, using simple events like getting fired. The second stage begins when actors explore their own feelings about the event which is called the internal dimension. Out of the skits a finished product and

⁸ Socialist-President of the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor and a founder and proponent of Brookwood

performance emerges. One knows how these workshops begin but does not know how they will end. Even though the way the workshops are practised is the same, there is an obvious difference when compared to Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre which is labor drama workshops seek for a finished product through the actors performance. In forum theatre there is a more open forum for discussion; while the actors and the scene may have its agenda, it can be influenced by the "spect-actors." Still, According to Boal the proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know what their world will be like, so they prefer rehearsal theatre, "not the finished spectacle", (Boal, 142).

Labor drama's main aim was to arouse the social-class consciousness of both the audience and participants through using propaganda instruments and providing entertainment. It reflected working class culture. Labor drama was a considerable medium because it was a means of expressing how the vital labor movement was to the workers as it gathered the people who had the same difficulties. They were the ones who oppressed by the same oppressors. Labor drama is a cultural production that gives the worker the opportunity to feel himself "a part of the enterprise as a subscriber, as an actor, or as an important part of the audience (Carter, 5). One can further comment that art, especially the labor drama, was a way of adjusting cultural needs of workers.

The Brookwood players relied upon agitprop, the theatre of agitation propaganda, which stemmed from worker organizations and workers themselves. Instead of focusing on deep characterizations, agitprops concentrated on easily recognizable symbols. Agitprop was also popular among radical theater companies such as Artef (1927-37,1939); the Theatre Collective (1933-1936); the Theatre Union (1933-1937)and the Actors Repertory Theatre (1934-1937). The Brookwood Players first produced David Pinski's *A Dollar*, a one act drama satirizing the concept of money. It was about an acting company that found a dollar bill lying on the road. Worshipping the dollar scene in the play made clear the class conflict:

We must contemplate the dollar with religious reverence. Keep quiet, I say! -
-A dollar is spread out before us. A real dollar in the midst of our circle, and everything within us draws us towards it, draws us on irresistibly. Be quiet! Remember you are before the Ruler, before the Almighty. On your knees before Him and pray. On your knees (Pinski, 6).

This scene continues with the Villain grabbing the dollar and declaring himself the ruler. Through the end of the act, the character who wanted to attain an equal distribution of wealth was the Comedian, he shouts at the villain, “let there be blood... You are to give the dollar up to all of us. At the first opportunity we'll get change and divide it into equal parts” (Pinski, 11). The play ends with the Stranger’s taking the dollar by force of arms from the acting company.

The Brookwood Players was an important drama group in Labor College movement; among the plays they produced were, *Peggy*, by Harold Williamson, *The People*, by Susan Glaspell, *Miners*, by a Brookwood student, Bonchi Friedman. Bonchi Friedman’s *Miners* was the first time The Brookwood players composed and staged their own social drama, since they were demotivated because of the prohibitive royalty fees and the lack of suitable plays. It was such success that it influenced Commonwealth College to write and stage their own dramas. A Commonwealth teacher Harold Coy wrote *Risen from the Ranks, Or from the Office Boy to President*. While the themes of Brookwood’s plays were relevant to urban, industrial workers, Commonwealth College productions appealed to rural, agricultural workers. The Brookwood players performed drama at school and in New York City and they also travelled thousands of miles performing their plays. Brookwood students also formed different companies and toured the country.

Labor College drama players either worked or assisted the radical theatre groups. As *The New Theatre* stated in 1936:

A strong social theatre can only become a reality when the theatre recognizes the need of cooperation with organized labor and achieves that cooperation, and when labor realizes the powerful ally it has in the theatre and utilizes it effectively (24–25).

Labor Colleges also helped the general development of the Community Theatre Movement which aimed to produce thought-provoking plays and to reach the maximum number of participants from the community they served. Among the groups established were Theatre Guild, Provincetown Players, and Neighborhood Playhouse.

The theatre of the twenties and that of the thirties emphasized the social, economic, and political background of the individual psychological case. The theatrical twenties reached and satisfied audiences with stereotypes criticizing the spiritual blindness and materialistic functionalism of America. In the late twenties characters on stage gained psychological depth. Harold Clurman, in "The Theatre of the Thirties" remarked this change as an introduction of psychology. He says "men and women were no longer heroes or villains but 'human' – a mixture of contradictory traits. The standardized Puritanism typified by the old vice-societies became an object of scorn and ridicule"(5). During the Great Depression American theater played an active role in developing national self-examination and criticism. Theater groups presented their ideas through theater, defined by Joseph Freeman as "a weapon in the hands of the masses for fashioning a sound society."

The reason why theatre was important in thirties is that the rediscovery of the thought that theatre is formed of various performances, the intense craft and political classes, the endless debates and manifestoes even if the quality of its plays or the correctness of its plays were debatable. One can speculate that the Marxist dictum that art is not neutral was readily accepted by the theatre groups of the time. Theater was seen to serve a social and political function. Besides, this led to a content matter among the playwrights to write about the central concerns which involved everyone. It is necessary to emphasize that theater functioned as a reflector, fed by political ambitions of the ruling classes. Either praising or criticizing the social system, theater always became a part of social dissent. The goal of theater according to German theorist Brecht is to help common man in social struggles and correct social errors.

An offshoot of the Theatre Guild, Group Theatre was founded in 1931. It was an important theater group for several reasons; firstly, Clifford Odets was among its acting members; secondly, *Men in White* (1933) by Sidney Kingsley and *My Heart's in the Highlands* (1939) by Saroyan, were first presented; thirdly, it trained its actors in a common craftsmanship organizing a permanent company. The Group Theatre, in contrast to the workers theatres, tried to function as a professional company, they reached Broadway with a full-length agit-prop play Sifton's *Claire and Paul* in 1931. Instead of

using the bourgeois aesthetics of the literary text, such as linear plot and psychological characterizations, group theater comprised the performance event involving performer energy, audience dynamics and the rehearsal process. The Group Theatre became a model for politically oriented workers' theatres such as; the Theatre Union; the Theatre Collective; the Theatre of Action.

Clifford Odet's *Waiting for Lefty!* was one of the memorable and powerful plays in thirties as it gained a powerful audience response. The play was about a taxi driver strike. The theme of the play was mainly on the discussions of the members of the taxi driver union whether or not to walk out through flashback episodes dramatize the reasons that have led them to the point of strike. This discussion occurred in a hall which gave the sense that the audience played the role of union members. There is an ongoing struggle in the play between the union leader Fatt, symbolizing the capitalistic system, and the idealist Lefty. S. N. Behrman's *End of Summer* was also considerable because it represented depression era from a different angle: from the eyes of privileged class. According to Harold Clurman what the play presented was that a person who was inclosed with "the unhappy phenomenon of mass unemployment, nascent radicalism, spectres of fascism and the ambiguities of the psychoanalysts" (7).

Some of the American playwrights of thirties were criticized by critics such as Clurman as they generalized social themes which they were interested but not truly familiar. Robert Sherwood, the playwright of *Idiot's Delight* was an example of this. *Idiot's Delight* gave Sherwood's grasp of European political situation. As Clurman alluded,

He makes his French pacifist a Radical-Socialist who speaks of the workers' uprising and alludes to Lenin with reverence, whereas any knowledgeable foreign correspondent could have told Sherwood that the radical-Socialists of France are the party of small business, abhor Lenin's doctrines and are neither radical nor socialist (7).

The thirties were considerable because American Theatre which was mainly centered in New York, discovered the rest of the country. This led to a diversity in

themes. John Steinbeck's well-known novel *Of Mice and Man* was produced by Sam H. Harris in 1937. It mirrored the state of the nation during the depression era in a broad sense. The characters in the play were ranch workers, unemployed of the farm lands, bus and truck drivers.

Washington was aware that the Group Theatre and the Federal Theatre Project were so successful in terms of supporting social causes since they had strong audience. It meant that Group Theatre and its playwrights could be used in the service of wartime patriotic, pro government propaganda. Furthermore, The Federal Theatre Project (1935–1939), which was the first government-sponsored theatre in US history, reduced the theatre fare to a nominal price. Among the plays produced by the Federal Theatre Project were *One Third of a Nation*, *The Negro Macbeth*.

American sense of freedom and way of life changed with the Depression and later with the World War II. On one hand, wartime industry and business moved the nation from slumps of depression to a new prosperity, on the other hand, the taken for granted sense of freedom was under attack from fascist ideologies subversives and ideologies both at home and abroad.

The U.S Army seemed to remember how Group Theatre used dramaturgical techniques for propaganda that conducted a playwriting competition among the troops after Pearl harbor in 1941. They selected the five best one-act play for production in New York and around the country. In addition to this, the U.S Air Forces commissioned playwright Moss Hart to write *Winged Victory*. The play's mission was to promote the desirability of enlisting in the U.S Air Force and to raise the confidence of the audience in American air power. Intended to improve recruits' eating habits and personal hygiene, the Military Training Division issued didactic dramas. Furthermore, play scripts for various age groups and communities were issued by the American Treasury Department. These scripts served in two ways: Americans were inspired to buy War Bonds and War Stamps: Americans were also encouraged consuming American goods. This was another example that dramatic theatre played an important role in providing wartime awareness and propaganda efforts. This also supports R. J. Kaufmann's

expression that serious drama provides a visual complex which (when much is doubt everywhere else) ties meanings more closely to what is being enacted in the society itself. Propaganda in theater had certain limits. A playwright can make use of propaganda in theater, yet this does not mean that it is just the method to use. Theater's function is to work as a catalyst, sometimes relationship with audience so strongly implicit that using propaganda as a tool became a problem. It is audience's role to decode the given message. It should not be pushed too far. The audience is to be made to realize that there are similarities with its own way of life and philosophy. Warron Taylor says that propagandist is a good showman, the US army acted one. (Taylor, 558). U.S army evaded the issue of patriotism, they fostered national unity and strength through using theatre as a propagandistic medium trying to spread Americanism.

After World War II and the McCarthy-era the civil rights movements were under way. Middle class whites began to realize the American dream's constraints and contradictions. Once American Dream meant equal opportunity, it became shifty. Postwar era was no longer seen as prosperous by baby boomers. Besides people felt spiritually empty, since extremes of poverty and inequalities entrapped them. These diverse circumstances in the society laid alienation which resulted in activists and artists call for people to get involved in student strikes and other mass demonstrations.

According to Schechner and Thompson, the rise of the identity politics resulted from the failure of the revolutions 60's gave rise to "a radical shattering of the 'public' as a singular identity into many groups comprised of individuals of similar ideology, religion, gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, ethnicity etc." (Thompson / Schechner, 12). The theatre became as a single entity which helped the emergence of different type of theatres.

1960's theatre both adopted past forms and brought new visions. It socially progressive role and theatre for social change in the US focused on social movements, the activist role of theatre began to be praised and even celebrated. Theatre groups were seeking the sense of livingness, and of vitality that touches off the revolutionary political activity, in contrast with the boredom of the status quo in the plays. 60's theatre

can be defined as social which has social agendas. Aesthetic concerns were decaying, Schechner alluded that theatre outside the commerce, which drives Broadway/the West End, and the cult of the new dominates the avant-garde (Thompson/ Schechner, 12). The Free Southern Theatre and Living Theatre had direct link to mass social movement as they built plays through process of collective creation. On one hand the effectiveness of social theatre was that it could be performed in different locations such as, prisons, refugee camps and hospitals etc. Social theatre belonged to the locations where the project brought about. On the other hand, it turned non-performers into performers. Typical features of late 1960's and 1970's theatre were proceeding from a solid stance on an issue and wanting to share with the audience.

In the United States, another form of theatre developed that was opposite in concept to the idea of Boal's Invisible theatre, but while different in technique, both desire a similar outcome. The Free Southern Theatre held discussion sessions after the plays to engage the spectators into debates. The main goal was to call for political action: "get the United States out of Vietnam, enforce equal rights for all people regardless of race or ethnicity, boycott grapes" (Cohen- Cruz, 98). While both Invisible and The Free Southern theatre take place in non-traditional spaces and in a form that allows the public to participate, the fundamental difference is that in latter, the theatrical event is a conscious act done both to shock and inform whereas the invisible theatre covertly informs and attempts to make a passive public critically active. Both forms of theatre are rejections of conventional, plot-based, fourth-wall realism, i.e. traditional theatre.

Among theatre groups which consistently showed up in public spaces and kept criticism of the government in the public eye were El Teatro Campesino, Bread and Puppet Theatre, NYC Street Theatre and San Francisco Mime Troupe. Unlike the other political theatre groups, NYC Street Theatre made use of realist tradition and focused on unequal distribution of wealth in the country. These theatre groups helped expand the audience for political theatre by performing in various locations along with streets. Through the efforts of the theatre groups to show performers and audience could experience performances in a broader and deeper way than before when compared to Broadway plays, political drama occupies a wide space in American culture.

San Francisco Mime Troupe is one of the theatre groups seeking the sense of livingness, and of vitality that touches off the revolutionary political activity, in contrast with the boredom of the status quo in the plays. They were sustained by the forms of entertainment associated with fun. Regardless of the social and economical status, common man was the center of the plays. Distanced from the artistic forms, they used techniques from *commedia dell'arte*, circus, puppet shows, and vaudeville. What they put distance were some of the bourgeois characteristics like realism, intellectualism and reliance on words. Theodore Shank further commented that they attempted to find bases for theatre outside Realism. The performer's body was the essence. They kept their energy because they had to remain open to the political circumstances. After all their work was based on establishing the opposing sides "we" versus "them", it was important that the performer should remain visible under the mask of the character. If not so it was hard to create the sense of "we". The character was a kind of medium like a puppet which was used a means of demonstration of something. In traditional theatre where spectator is passive, political groups promote reaction and interaction, which is a two-way communication. The elimination of the 'fourth wall' (that imaginary wall between the actors and the audience in conventional realism) in alternative theatre is also widely used. The point here is to encourage spectators to feel free to share their enjoyment with each other. When the 'fourth wall' is broken in conventional realism, it is the actor that breaks the wall and not the spectator unlike, for instance, Boal's idea of the 'spect-actor' which results in there not being a 'fourth wall' to even break.

San Francisco Mime Troupe gave its first performances in 1959. As they believed in the hypocrisy that words carried, they made use of unrealistic means of expressions which is mime. They were interested in the mime of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. The focus was on the body movements to convey the action and character which was associated with *commedia*. They adapted Molière, Machievelli in the manner of *commedia dell'arte*, "with the traditional stereotype masked characters, exaggerated movement and voice...." (Shank, 112). Satire is also used in activist. It is more difficult to distinguish activist satire, but the difference is in the message and the goal of the performer. The use of ridiculous props as well as contemporary references to popular society or culture form

is a link between the actor, not the character, and the audience. The performances were held in the parks of San Francisco. These adaptations were infused by the political radicalism in the mid 1960's.

L'Amant Militaire (1967) was their first long anti-Vietnam play. It was an adaptation of Goldoni. There was a parallel with the Spanish army fighting in Italy and the US army in Vietnam. The general Pantalone could do anything to win the war. He wanted his daughter marry the old general but she was in love with a young lieutenant who disguised himself as a woman to avoid military service. At the end of the play the war was stopped by the soubrette, dressed like the Pope. According to Shank, who had an interview with Joan Holden, who adapted the play, considered the production quite militant for 1967. Another play they performed was *Independent Female* which was a melodrama. *The Dragon Lady's Revenge* arose from discussions of five people. After the discussion sessions they write their parts. The play is about a young American lieutenant who investigates a man who killed his friend with an overdose of heroin. The play focuses mainly on the drug traffic with stereotypical characters. Even if they did not use masks the acting style accommodate a man playing a mother and a woman playing the general. The repertoire of the Mime Troupe included plays on political subjects such as the Vietnam War, or women's liberation, and short plays on the political events as they occurred. Some of the plays they performed were *A Minstrel Show (Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrel)*, in 1965. In their short plays such as *Highway Robbery* (1971), they made use of performers dressed like clowns using slapstick movements which reminded circus. The other plays were *High Rises* (1972), *San Fran Scandals of '73*. They used circus techniques in *Frozen Wages* (1972). In Gorilla band plays, they tended to achieve a unity among spectators and performers. To provide this they made spectators sat on the grass at outdoor performances so that they could see each other. The play performed among the spectators, sometimes through them. Performers spoke directly to the audience to enclose them in the performance. It was the way how they created the sense of "we", the spectators and performers against "they". The point here is to encourage spectators to feel free to share their enjoyment with each other. Thus, audience members could stop a performance and suggest different actions for the actors, who would then carry out the audience

suggestions. Another way to suggest an idea in a performance is for audience members to come onto the stage to demonstrate their ideas. In Theatre of the Oppressed method this provides a space not only to imagine change, but also practice it, and thereby they become empowered to generate social action.

Social theatre in the US has similarities with Boal's Forum Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed. According to Weinblatt, Forum Theatre is useful for generating dialogue among people with similar experiences, and embraces the US experience better. As mentioned in the previous paragraphs the 60's was the era that people were much more aware of the internalized oppressions. Boal's Rainbow of Desire methods, in other words Theatre of the Oppressed, allow participants to explore the conflicting forces. Schinina alludes that the relationship between the visible and the repressed superseded the visible and the invisible in the 20th century. According to Jan Cohen-Cruz there was something missing in sixties theatre: a space for the expression. The theatre groups kept what was unique to the group: "race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity" (Cohen-Cruz, 99).

In addition to the political theatre of sixties there was community-based theatre that was as effective as the political theatre according to the critics. Political theatre of sixties dealt with content conversely community-based theatre focused on the process. Community-based theatre in other words tended to respond local issues. Unlike the theatre of sixties that allied with politically oppositional groups such as the War Resister's League, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the community theatre intended to join civic institutions especially schools. Community-based theatre held participatory workshops at various locations in 1970's and 1980's. Mass Transit Theatre is an example of community-based theatre. Susan Perlstein who is the founder of the group states that community-based theatre is more effective than the political theatre of 1960's as the leaders of activist theatre are the same with community-based theatre but they had thirty years more experienced.

The community-based theatre's power stemmed from the facilitators. Schechner use the word "facilitator" for the performers, Boal uses the term *joker*. Jokers or the facilitators are the performers who help others perform as much as performing themselves.

With the help of workshops empowered both the personal and the political. As the group established trust, improvised scenes came into being to reenact painful memories. It gave chance to nonprofessional actors reflect their lives.

Infused by the works of Augusto Boal, community-based theatre has become more expansive and refined. Having been used different techniques while building plays brought different community members who might explore new projects. At the beginning of 1990's stemming from community-based theatre, new theatre, theatre therapy based on the body relationships, came into being. The artistic or aesthetic goals were not primary focus. According to Schinina it was ready to become a tool for social action by workshops and laboratories aiming at "healing and heightening the quality of social interactions" (22).

Community-based theatre and street theatres have the potential to engage the public with contemporary issues. Theater is a tool to create civil dialogue. The American Festival Project (1982), was collaborated by the African American FST's ⁹John O'Neal and Dudley Cocke of the White Appalachian Roadside Theatre. They had similar concerns: strong devotion to their communities and a primary focus on the poor people. These concerns made them perform in the other's territory to understand racial and cultural differences. With the participation of many other companies the project became a festival across the US. Anna Deavere Smith carried theatre of civic dialogue into somewhat different platform. She criticized the community-based theatre in her keynote address to the Association for Theatre in Higher Education in 1993. She mentioned the importance of the role of the artists in 1970's and 1980's yet they voiced their own views from the eyes of their own cultural fortresses. The main criticism was on the role of the artists: an educated artist should speak for people. She made solo performances based on interviews with range of people in various "conflict-ridden social situations" (Cohen-Cruz, 105). Her Harvard-based Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue (IACD) not only provided space for socially minded artists to perform but also project of civic dialogue groups for local people to attend . All these efforts were to meet the needs of the multi-dimensional and multicultural concerns of the public. One of the founders and leaders of the Living Theatre

⁹ The Free Southern Theatre

Judith Malina expresses the role of the artist in social structure when there is a call for the changing times:

....

In time of social stasis: to activate

In time of germination: to invent fertile new forms

In time of revolution: to extend the possibilities of peace and liberty

In time of violence: to make peace

In time of despair: to give hope

In times of silence: to sing out (Cohen-Cruz, 95)

....

While the future of the theatre is assured, activist theatre is not. We have to fight the tendency to relax into an inactive and passive position. And the truth is that the theatre has to continue to be a form of protest while there exists insecurity, injustice, the oppressed and the oppressor. Thus it is important to study the roots of modern activist theatre and to use it as a basis for the future of the movement.

CHAPTER V: HOW DOES ACTIVIST THEATRE WORK IN TURKEY?

This chapter of the thesis discusses how and when Turkish Activist Drama came into existence. Relation to the changes in political environment and liberal religious attitude, Turkish theatrical activity made a shift from shadow plays with a cast of colorful puppets to social plays. This was a little short of a revolution in dramatic arts of Turkey.

Before the new Turkish Republic established, since all theatres were abolished by Sultan, the shadow plays had been almost the only dramatic art form. Karagoz and his companion Hadsheivat were the main characters of these plays, of which thematic concern was the social relationships in Ottoman Empire. Darulbedayi, which became later the nucleus of the Istanbul Municipal Theater, was established after 1908 when theater ban was lifted. Until the middle of the 20th century, Turkish drama was centered on Turkish history and Turkish myths. The Turkish drama represented the psychological conflicts of the self in the beginning of the new Turkish Republican era. Patriotism and poetic tragedies were the overtones in drama. The playwrights searched for a meaning for the self in the family, neighborhood and in the nation as almost everything were on the move in the midst of cultural revolutions in the Republican Era. The Western influences introduced by intellectuals who attempted to combine Western cultural forms with Turkish forms were satirized by Turkish playwrights. It was ironic that the Istanbul Municipal Theater opened with *Hamlet*. It broke a record of running of 15 performances that it is now a tradition in this theater to open each new season with a Shakespearean tragedy.

In spite of the dependence on the foreign works, there were several Turkish dramatists continued to build a native literature for their stages. Among those dramatists the followings can be considered: Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel, *Kahraman* (“*The Hero*”),

Necip Fazıl, *Bir Adam Yaratmak*, (“*To Create a Man*”), Cevat Başkurt, *Buzlar Çözülmeden*, (“*Before the Ice Melts*”).

The revolution in drama itself entered a new and more satisfying phase in 1950’s based on the increase in number of playwrights and diversity of themes. The modern drama was ready to strike a balance in promoting national theater and embracing the influences from either East or West.

There was rapid growth in Turkish economy in the early 1950’s commonly called Democratic Party Miracle which turned out to be a mirage. The economical imbalance and inflation created tension among citizens. Street demonstrations, student riots and constant criticism of DP regime sharpened the oppressions. Furthermore, the Democratic Party regime neglected the socio-cultural improvements that lead to a stagnation in municipal theatres. Thus, community centers and village institutes had an active part in constructing the national progress.

The playwrights of this period chose their subjects from the class issues in Turkish village life, village agha (seigneurs) and villager relations. The emphasis was on the class conflicts and community matters. i.e. oppression, poverty, partisanship, moral depravation. They not only addressed the themes which were central to society but also did they consider more universal themes. The important playwrights were, Oktay Rifat, *Kadınlar Arasında*, (“*Among Women*”), Haldun Taner, *Fazilet Eczanest*, (“*Fazilet Pharmacy*”), Orhan Asena, *Hürrem Sultan*, (“*Hurrem Sultan*”). Even though there was an economic decline and a political turmoil, the foundation of the first private theatres such as, Küçük Sahne, Oda Theater, Istanbul Theater, Karaca Theater, strengthened theater’s production capacity.

On May 27, 1960 a military coup staged by military officers ended the Democratic Party regime. The country was run by Milli Birlik Komitesi (Committee of National Unity) for one and a half year. However, the CNU and the temporary Constituent Assembly worked to create democratic organizations which could not be overruled by future partisan regimes. The 1961 Constitution was considered as relatively revolutionary by intellectuals since it recognized labor unions (Article 47) and

defined Turkey as a social state (Article 2), guaranteed the freedom of media (Article 22), freedom of thought and speech (Article 20). The 1961 Constitution had allowed the formation of political parties based on class interests. Making use of this liberal atmosphere, the Turkish Labor Party was founded on February 13, 1961. Furthermore, Turkish democracy system accessed a new phase. On October 15, 1961 general election was held. From 1961 to 1965 Turkey was ruled by four coalitions. The coalitions fell one after another and military officers attempted two unsuccessful coups. Finally Justice Party under the leadership of Süleyman Demirel came to power in 1965. However, Turkey could not stay away from dissatisfaction with political institutions and left right wing clashes which led to violent political atmosphere. The transition period would outlast for years.

Unlike the political disturbances, together with the constitutional freedoms of 1961 Constitution, Turkish theater groups and playwrights progressed in quality and quantity. In addition to the increase in private theater groups, the progressive social theater groups (AST, Dostlar Theater, Yenişehir Theater Group etc.), political theater groups (Community Actors, Ankara Union Stage, Action for Revolution Theater) and Labor Theater and a theater group sponsored by Labor union came into being.

The correction of social errors, social and political criticism shaped the construction of Turkish politically activist Theater. In 1960's and 1970's Turkish Activist Theater emerged combining both traditional, political and universal subject matters in national framework. The political writers and playwrights of this era thought that the social errors took roots from the illiteracy and irresponsibility of the common man. The playwrights made use of epic and absurd tendencies with traditional motives. The well known playwrights of the era were Güngör Dilmen, *Ayak Parmaları* ("Toes"), Sermet Çağan, *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası*, ("Foot Leg Factory"), Vasıf Öngören, *Asiye Nasıl Kurtulur?* ("Can Asiye be Saved?"), Adalet Ağaoğlu, *Evcilik Oyunu*, ("Playing House").

Sermet Çağan was an important figure in Turkish Theater History because he redefined the spectator stage relationship in Turkey. He was born in Amasya in 1929 and he devoted his life to theater. He worked as a playwright and a manager at Turkish

Teacher's Union. With the help of this union he framed a plan to compose a mobile theater. This was a part of his intention of familiarizing the characteristics of the people living in the different Anatolian cities. He believed that theater is a combination of the needs of the society and the stage. He composed a questionnaire of 17 questions so that he could analyze the perceptual differences, the total number of stages and theatrical conceptions throughout Turkey. Then he sent this questionnaire to the country wide 270 branches of Turkish Teacher's Union. It could be considered the first well-planned project analyzing the scientific statistics and feedbacks regarding Turkish Theater from the perspective of the spectators.

Sermet Çağan made use of the results he got from the project while writing plays and sharing his techniques. Sermet Çağan's experimentalist tendency and rehearsal practices bear a resemblance to Jerzy Grotowski and Augusto Boal.

Çağan established a location to rehearse in a village on the Aegean coast called Ören. Çağan made the actors go through exercises so that they had full control over their bodies. Jerzy Grotowski in an interview says: "The actor must give himself, and not play for himself or for the spectator. His search must be directed from within himself to the outside, but not for the outside"(Grotowski, 32). What was important to Çağan was to find the best way to stage *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası* ("Foot Leg Factory") through theoretical and physical practices. He considered theater as a collective organism that he gave equivalent importance to theater criticism, theory and education. In addition, Grotowski and Boal consider theatre as a collective organism that they both make workshops so that the performers can find the real actor in themselves. Methods can be different yet the outcome is the same.

Writing his plays, Çağan used newspaper reports. He thought that a playwright should see the world from a universal perspective. He thought that any occasion came about anywhere in the world could be a part of a bigger chain. Here his tendency reminds of Brecht's view of the goal of the playwright. The playwright's goal is to correct the social errors. A playwright must have social and universal concerns. In *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası* (*Foot Leg Factory*), his usage of simple décor is a part of alienation

effect which takes the focus out of the staging and direct it to the action which is the social error to be solved.

The story of *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası (Foot Leg Factory)* is a fact occurred in Karakuçur, Uluyaf, and Sarıdana villages in Antalya, Turkey. In *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası (Foot Leg Factory)* he tries to answer the following questions: Why are the villagers crippled? Why do they eat black seed even though they know the results? How powerful is the order to make them accept the risks? Why is the order universal?

Ayak Bacak Fabrikası (Foot and Leg Factory) is a criticism of class structure and the order. It is an epic play. The class divisions are shown by representative characters without psychological depths. Sermet Çağan tries to show how the order should not be.

In *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası (Foot and Leg Factory)* there is a clear segmentation among the oppressors and the oppressed. Even the chief who has the highest rank in hierarchy is ruled by seigneurs. The chief is represented figuratively as a puppet that gains knowledge about the country matters through the newspapers. The real rulers are the seigneurs; they are the judges, the police, and the politicians. Moreover, they have a loyal assistant, the clergyman. For his own benefit, the clergyman betrays religion by deifying the fish. The citizens in the play are used to the way they live and they do not know how to live otherwise. They are so blind that they are oppressed. There is an ironic character in the play: an ox. The ox represents the intellectuals who talk in a way that common man cannot understand. The ox uses technical terms and gives scientific speeches. His speeches go nowhere because they do not have any purpose. In Turkish traditional plays animals like fox, deer, camel or ox represent abundance. In rituals it represents Dionysus, the God of fertility. Ironically in the play ox instead of doing something just talks. Here Çağan satirizes the intellectuals who criticize everything but do nothing to solve the problem. One can further comment that the ox is the representative of people lacking of any aim or faith in anything that Chekhov labels as “spineless intelligentsia”.

There different characteristics of citizens are represented by citizen I, citizen II,

citizen III. They do not have names because this story can come about to anyone. Citizen I does not work, thus he is starving. He is nihilistic and hopeless. He wants to gain without working so he is waiting for a chance. In fact at the end of the play coincidentally he kills the chief and starts the revolution. As he does not foresee the probabilities he becomes the new puppet of the seigneurs. What he gain is a little bit more food. Citizen II is an opportunist. He works for his own benefits. He represents the private enterprise. He wants his country to be involved in a war to sell his goods. When citizens become crippled, he starts to sell crutch. He lives for his own benefits. Citizen III made a robot step by step in the play. The robot is the ideal citizen. It does what it is said. Sermet Çağın uses this robot as an abstraction effect in the play. Young man represents the proletarian. It is also meaningful that Çağın chose a young man to represent the proletarian. He gives the impression that the young man needs to have more experience. In the play the young man is tied to a stake. As his mouth is bound, he can see but he cannot say anything. The goods are represented by woman and girl. They are sold in the public auction. The broker in the play describes the woman for sale as “She eats like a bird, tows a car like a mule, and tows an ox-cart like an ox. She carries load like a donkey”¹⁰(Çağın, 47). In the third chapter, while giving a forum theatre example I mentioned the fact that similar cultural oppressions remain in eastern parts of Turkey. In that example, the girls and women in the country were busy with preparing dowry all the time. Çağın satirizes here the same thing that the girl is for sale in the auction. In the forum theatre example the family members of bride and bridegroom arrive at a price by observing the goods in the dowry. So it was an example from Italy, now here a similar example from Turkey, one can be agreed that any occasion came about anywhere in the world could be a part of a bigger chain.

The time and place concepts in the play are simple. The décor consists of tree hills. This is a part of alienation effect. The action is more important than the psychological depth of the characters in the play. Thereby, Çağın gives the opportunity to the spectator to arrive at decision. The play is a social criticism.

¹⁰ Kuş gibi yer, katır gibi araba, öküz gibi kağı çekerek. Eşek gibi yük taşır.

He uses grotesque elements to expose contrasts. For example, when citizens get the peg legs, they try to put them on. Some of the citizens put on them reverse and walk backwards. Some of them put on them sideways and walk like a crab. Some of them put one of peg legs reverse then they cannot walk. Çağın criticizes the order by showing, mostly absurd, physical activities, i.e. When the young man calls for a strike, citizens do not know how to react. One of them jumps, the other one spins around, another one does an hand stand.

The themes of labor drama encompassed working class-struggle, unionization, sexism, racism, and working conditions among others. Turning to labor theatre, one has to note that according to country and situation, the usage of theatre changed. Even if it is not a contemporary of Sermet Çağın's, *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası* (*Foot Leg Factory*), David Pinski's *A Dollar*, a one act drama, have similar concerns. The first similarity is the representative characters. Çağın uses representative characters such as: citizen I, II, ox, chief, woman, girl. They do not have names because this story can come about to anyone. These characters represent the class divisions. Pinski's characters are the comedian, the villain, the stranger. The characters in both plays do not have psychological depths. The event is more important than the character. There is money concept in both plays yet the way they handle money is different. In *A Dollar*, they worship money, "... Be quiet! Remember you are before the Ruler, before the Almighty. On your knees before Him and pray. On your knees" (Pinski,6). In *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası*, they use wheat as a commodity exchange. The villagers do not directly worship money but the fish which was deified by the clergyman to have wheat to buy food. ¹¹"...I praise you holy fish. Thus far you accepted all our prayers. I praise you, I praise our noble chief, I praise the seignours, I praise the clergyman..."(Çağın, 35). The chief in *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası* can be the compatible of the villain who grabs the dollar and declares himself the ruler in *A Dollar*. They both use power of wealth to oppress the others. This is a criticism of class distribution system. They are the puppet of the system. It is ironical that the characters who want equal distribution are abrupt:

¹¹ Şükürler olsun size kutsal balıklar, bugüne kadar bütün dualarımızı kabul ettiniz. Şükürler olsun size, şükürler olsun yüce Şefimize, şükürler olsun beylere, şükürler olsun Papaz efendiye...

the comedian in *A Dollar*, young man in *Ayak bacak Fabrikası (Foot Leg Factory)*. It seems that it is so funny to ask for equality as the comedian asks and it also seems that it is so immature to ask for equality as the young boy continuously asked and is tortured for that. Both plays ends with the change of rulers. The first citizen becomes the ruler and he gets easily intoxicated by the wealth and power. In *A Dollar*, the stranger comes and takes the dollar by force and he becomes his own ruler.

His death at the age of 71 was a big loss for Turkish theater, Sermet Çağan's theoretical and practical thoughts influenced playwrights. Since the structure and thematic concern of *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası (Foot and Leg Factory)* are compatible to anytime or anywhere, it can be still staged.

To sum up, because of the progresss in theater 1960's-1970's, there was a rapid increase in Turkish spectators. This leads to a discussion regarding the purpose of theater: "educate", "enlighten", "criticize"... The fact that theater embraces the every day life in Turkish citizens and discuss the oppressions on stage is a proof that theater is political.

CONCLUSION

This thesis claims that culture and theater is inseparable. For this reason the first chapter explores the rituals of different countries with the examples of their usage in skits. The common denominators of rituals, such as certain relationships of war, law etc. opened up new perspectives. Therefore, I related them to Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*.

As Augusto Boal states theater as the art of looking at ourselves (1). The other concern of this thesis is to show the social and political significance through taking into consideration of the theoretical discourse of theater. The second chapter emphasizes that theater functions as a reflector, fed by political ambitions of the ruling classes. Namely, theater is a part of social dissensions.

Within the thesis, a well known activist, Augusto Boal, stands out not only a man who create new forms of doing theater, but also a man who implements these to real life. An overview of his methods such as; The Theater of the Oppressed, Cop in the Head, Forum Theater, Invisible Theater in chapter three shows that people search for who they really are and who their oppressors are within theater. In other words, theater's goal is to create an awakening in the spectator by making them a part of the action which is the reflection of real life. As Boal states, "the spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action!"(155). As the main argument of this thesis is "theater is political", I have tried to show that political materiality of activist necessity in stating the obvious, Augusto Boal radically altered the perception of spectator in theater. As I have demonstrated in chapter three, in that sense practices of the Theater of the Oppressed helped people reveal their oppressions and suggest consequences.

The 20th century has exposed the political importance in the US. Political consciousness has become the key element in cultural expression. Deep within this struggle theatre-makers were the ones whose voice could be heard out loud. The fourth

chapter of the thesis explores the transformation of political theatre in the US with examples.

This thesis also considers the historical setting of Turkish Activist Theater. However, when compared to Western countries, collective consciousness flourished after 1950's in Turkey. The last chapter of this thesis shows how political environment and rapid economic growth in Turkey in 1950's and 1960's created a little short of a revolution in Turkish theater.

For reasons already discussed, it is the theatre (the performing arts) that has the power to mobilize ordinary citizens. Protests, marches and other forms of activism are essential, but theatre is a way to destroy passivity among the 'silent majority.' There is a need and this void will be filled. The age old argument of theatre's place in society will probably never be solved, but the need for activist theatre will probably never abate.

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