

**Scripting Resistance:
Governance through Theatre of the Oppressed**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Theatre of the oppressed (TO) emerged out of a rights-repressive context to challenge the way cultural institutions are created and reproduced, and to enact alternative social and political relationships. More than a form of art, it is an interactive medium of communication, used by communities to engage in critical analysis of social, political, economic and ecological relationships. Rooted in the foundational principles of Paulo Freire's (2005 [1970]) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, its purpose is to "humanize" relationships by identifying and deconstructing the many and complex ways in which some people are subordinated to others. Its theatrical mechanisms (improvised role play, for example) turn contextual analysis into praxis, recreating oppressive scenarios, and enacting alternative outcomes. As such it becomes a "rehearsal for reality," generating the critical knowledge needed for oppressed people to confront their subordination, backed by the solidarity of their community.

This research is an examination of the ways in which TO practitioners and communities envision and enact alternative social relationships, thereby embodying the emancipatory potential of human rights theory. I caution that not all theatre of the oppressed is equally emancipatory, but where it meets its liberatory potential, participants manifest an empowering embodiment of cultural resistance in four ways:

1. Theatre of the oppressed practitioners engage with communities in processes of intentional praxis, equipping participants with the skills for critical social analysis.
2. Practitioners are developing a provocative meshwork of solidarity to collectively resist the subordinating effects of disparate cultural power.
3. Theatre of the oppressed communities construct an emancipatory discourse which resonates among socially diverse and politically disparate groups around the world. I propose that theirs is a manifestation of counterhegemonic globalization.
4. Theatre of the oppressed participants reorient their ontologies, and decolonize their epistemologies. By negotiating the terms of co-existence in innovative ways, they bridge the gap between human rights theory and practice.

Participants in theatre of the oppressed activities collectively challenge and redefine the norms which dominate cultural and political institutions. As such, their work embodies a promising demonstration of how those who are oppressed can change the way they understand and enact their political actions.

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Dedications

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Chapter One

Governance from Below: An Anti-oppressive Globalization

At a time when globalizations are dominated by neoliberal interests, where power and wealth are increasingly concentrated in a class of global elites privileged by neoliberal ideologies (Roubini 2011, Dervis 2012, McNally 2002), and where popular understandings of democracy are limited by the experience of tradition, there is an urgent need to critically consider how our governance institutions and ideologies reproduce rather than eradicate various forms of oppression. Human rights norms, as institutionalized through international governance organizations, proficiently define societal aspirations. Yet these norms often fail to penetrate the cultural institutions which perpetuate certain people's interests at the expense of others'. The oppressed know that "another world is possible." We see glimpses of it in prefigurative movements like the World Social Forum, Occupy Wall Street, and other rights-affirming assemblages. These radical approaches to democratization challenge our political assumptions, and stoke the visionary resolve of those working towards substantive and sustainable change.

This research is an investigation into a lesser known but equally inspiring community of resistance which is currently expanding around the world, and engaging participants in empowering, performative manifestations of change. Against histories of opportunism, exploitation, marginalization and dehumanization, I invest my academic energy in the struggle to humanize cultural and political institutions. People trust that political thinkers and world leaders have thought long and hard about the global system, and have concluded that what we have is the best we can achieve, or that there is nothing else we can do to prevent oppression and injustice; this trust is misplaced (Pogge 2008, 32). On the contrary, the world and its institutions are

structured to privilege certain people, states, or other entities while neglecting, disadvantaging and disempowering others (Pogge 2008, Stiglitz 2006, Santos 2005, Escobar 2008, 1995).

Different, more rights-affirming, anti-oppressive and pro-poor models of political, social and economic inter-relations are not only possible; they are happening. It is my task to find them, and to study them, because their existence testifies to the ingenuity of the human imagination, and the collective capacity of political willpower, even (and especially) in communities which have been pushed to the margins of society.

1.1 What can “the people” do to humanize governance?

Theatre of the oppressed (TO) emerged out of a rights-repressive context to challenge the way cultural institutions are created and reproduced, and to enact alternative social and political relationships. More than a form of art, it is an interactive medium of communication, used by communities to engage in critical analysis of social, political, economic and ecological relationships. Rooted in the foundational principles of Paulo Freire’s (2005 [1970]) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, its purpose is to “humanize” relationships by identifying and deconstructing the many and complex ways in which some people are subordinated to others. Its theatrical mechanisms (improvised role play, for example) turn contextual analysis into praxis, recreating oppressive scenarios, and enacting alternative outcomes. As such it becomes a “rehearsal for reality,” generating the critical knowledge needed for oppressed people to confront their subordination, backed by the solidarity of their community.

Its proponents are employing the method in localities around the world, taking seriously the emancipatory potential of human rights theory, and engaging oppressed people(s) in critical analyses of their contexts. While the relationships of oppression addressed through TO are

typically confined to the scales of interpersonal or community conflicts (the “local”), they are also interwoven with global institutions and ideas (such as patriarchy, capitalism, neoliberal economic norms). TO is both evolutionary and revolutionary: it manifests the evolution of a rights-based vision of humanity, development, and political agency, aligning it with the theoretical ideas of Hunt (2007) and Sen (1999); it is revolutionary in that it confronts the dominant powers which relegate such ideas to preambular rhetoric, which, as Moyn (2010) demonstrates, commonly occurs in so many international covenants and constitutions.

My research is an examination of the disconnection between human rights theory and practice. That is, human rights theory makes emancipatory and universal promises including life, liberty and security, dignity, equality, and non-discrimination. These are articulated in such institutions as the United Nations, its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the roster of conventions, covenants, declarations and protocols which define international human rights norms. These norms provide a reference point against which (in)justice in a society can be measured. Theatre of the oppressed provides an empowering set of mechanisms which the oppressed use to reclaim their full human dignity. As such, TO communities model a way to overcome this disconnection.

I agree with scholars who protest the tendencies of global governance arrangements to marginalize emancipatory rights by reproducing oppressive institutions at national, regional and global scales (among others, Anghie, Pogge, Escobar, Stiglitz). In the face of these tendencies, I examine the degree to which the diverse and disparate actors using TO techniques model alternative conceptions of governance, giving life to networks working toward a counter-hegemonic globalization. To carry out such a study, I examine the ways in which its practitioners

(often called Jokers or facilitators, these include activists, actors, teachers and scholars who use TO mechanisms in the work they do through theatre organizations, development-oriented nongovernmental organizations, and even governmental organizations) are “globalizing” TO by taking it to locations around the world, and adapting it to local contexts. I study the nature of the relationships between practitioners, with the intention of forwarding our understanding of subaltern politics, network dynamics, and globalizations “from below”.

My theory of TO’s liberatory potential is somewhat abstract, in that emancipation occurs in the minds of those who use it. I did not find evidence that by participating in TO, participants are then able to put a stop to labour exploitation, police brutality, sexual violence, government corruption or other instances of structural injustice. I do not propose that TO offers a panacea to oppression. What I have found is that TO does change the way its participants identify themselves, and the way they engage with the various cultural institutions they inhabit. My evidence of sustained institutional change is indirect. I offer that TO communities manifest a rights-based vision of humanity, and that by globalizing their practice, and fostering a solidarity network, they are spreading their influence, and equipping oppressed people with an empowering set of tools for social and political analysis. But this is the extent of my claim. TO is empowering not because it liberates people from experiences of oppression, but because it equips people with the tools to alter the way they identify themselves, and the way they participate in political actions. By participating in theatre of the oppressed, people experience a form of ontological and epistemological revolution.

I examine the ways in which TO practitioners and communities envision and enact alternative social relationships, thereby embodying the emancipatory potential of human rights theory. I

caution that not all theatre of the oppressed is equally emancipatory. But where TO communities meet their liberatory potential, I demonstrate four ways in which participants manifest an empowering embodiment of cultural resistance:

1. Theatre of the oppressed practitioners engage with communities in processes of intentional praxis, equipping participants with the skills for critical social analysis.
2. Practitioners are developing a provocative meshwork of solidarity to collectively resist the subordinating effects of disparate cultural power.
3. Theatre of the oppressed communities construct an emancipatory discourse which resonates among socially diverse and politically disparate groups around the world. I propose that theirs is a manifestation of counterhegemonic globalization.
4. Theatre of the oppressed participants reorient their ontologies, and decolonize their epistemologies. By negotiating the terms of co-existence in innovative ways, they bridge the gap between human rights theory and practice.

1.2 Background

Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal were solidary compatriots and anti-oppression practitioners whose worldviews were framed in a Marxist concern for the welfare and dignity of the underclass. Freire developed a manifesto for an emancipatory ontology which he called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This model for popular education enabled participants to critically deconstruct society's institutions, and co-create liberating (rather than oppressive) relationships as a collective. In his thesis, liberation was the resulting outcome of the interaction between "conscientization" and transformational praxis. Liberation is a form of rebirth, possible only

when the subordinating relationship between the oppressor and oppressed is superseded by a humanizing relationship which enhances freedom. Liberation requires that the oppressed first become conscious of their context, to understand the nature of their oppression (“conscientização”). The work of praxis, then, is an intentional and sustained commitment to action informed by reflection. These two elements are co-constitutive of humanizing liberation, each one informed by and informing the other (Freire 2005 [1970], 64-69). It is not that change follows a simplistic, formulaic or linear logic, and that all we need is a moment of realization followed by disciplined mindfulness in order to bring about change; the equation is complicated by competing interests, changing contexts, and myriad endogenous and exogenous variables.

Using Freire’s liberatory principles, and repeating the call for a vocation of praxis, Boal applied these ideas to his theatre work, creating a set of practices which he used as mechanisms to trigger conscientization, and to facilitate dialogical knowledge co-creation. *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal 1985 [1979]) is a critique of aristocratic governance, in which a ruling class dominates the political sphere in order to protect its own interests. Boal characterizes Athenian democracy as “imperialistic,” exploiting the underclass for the social, economic and political benefit of the elite. When theatre artists are paid and directed by those in power, and charged with the task of reproducing societal norms rather than challenging them, then artists are complicit in the oppression of the underclass (xii). Boal’s thesis is that most drama today, including that found in theatres, on television and in cinema, is a continuation of Aristotle’s “extremely powerful poetic-political system for intimidation of the spectator” (Ibid., xiv). In response to this relationship between theatre and governance, Boal offers an emancipatory artistic methodology which he hopes is capable of overcoming oppression.

Having spent much of the past three years studying the work of TO practitioners, and experiencing first-hand the ways in which TO participants engage with one another, I now understand that contemporary TO activism not only critiques numerous assumptions about social and political relationships, but attempts to change the ways in which oppressed people enact their roles in these relationships. That is, theatre of the oppressed seeks to alter the norms constituting the relationships and institutions within which people live. While they often do not frame their work as relating to their role in “governance,” they do typically engage in discourses on cultural politics and/or the (many) cultures of politics, which means their activism has governance implications. It is my task to examine the governance implications of this work.

1.3 Governance Implications

At about the time I was starting to write this dissertation, my partner and I relocated our family from a for-profit rental housing complex in the corporate capitalist economy to a non-profit co-operative housing community. While I expected that the move would enhance our family’s quality of life in many ways, I didn’t expect the experience of living in an intentionally co-operative community would teach me much about governance. I have lived my whole life in liberal democratic cultures, and had grown to be cynical of society’s democratic institutions at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. I have participated in numerous community groups, but before living in what I now understand to be the co-operative “movement”, I had little experience of political norms beyond those that are institutionalized in the mainstream of first-past-the-post electoral democracies. I was used to partisan politicking, empty rhetoric, broken promises, evasive principles, and sloganizing debates performed in sound bites through the mainstream media. Politics amounted to an adversarial competition of monologues, rather than a

commitment to truly constructive and dialogue-based co-operation. I despised the presumed privilege of the governing elite, and the often juvenile exchanges between elected officials in the chambers of government. I was jaded by the political futility of the anonymous ballot box.

It was living in a dynamic co-operative, serving on its Board of Directors, and engaging in its radically democratic decision making processes which opened my eyes to the potential of alternative understandings of democratic governance. As one small example of the co-operative distinction, decisions affecting the life, culture and economy of the community were made by open votes, where all present are accountable to one another, rather than by secret ballots. This democratic innovation opens up the relationship between individuals and their community, forcing them to confront the collective to which all are accountable. Community is a phenomenon greater than the sum of its parts. It has its own distinct interests, constituted only partially by the aggregated self-interests of its members. I look forward to exploring these governance issues at greater depth in the future. But, alas, this is not a dissertation on co-operative cultures or democracies.

What I have learned from the co-op movement is that governance is distinct from management. Governance is about the wider political culture, the contested definition of norms, and the values which define the management agenda. Governance is about creating a collective vision for the community, and determining how the community will pursue its materialization. It is about providing oversight of the managers who perform their technically-specific responsibilities on a day to day basis, ensuring that their practices are commensurate with the overall vision and mission of the collective. Governance is about defining and strategizing where the community wants to go ideologically, culturally, economically, politically, and how it

intends to get there. In contrast, management is about the technocratic implementation of the strategy defined by this understanding of governance. Managers administer the community and perform the daily exercises necessary to sustain the life of the community (Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada 2014).

The people's power to contest, redefine and innovate norms is of important consequence to the oppressed. Using theatre of the oppressed, participants can script power in new and revolutionary ways. This power gives the oppressed a creative role to play in democratic governance which is more empowering than filling out an election ballot. The performance perspective itself is not a particularly novel innovation. I would argue that a lot of global governance is about scripting people's actions, and the politics of struggle within this process. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be understood as a script intended to govern how states institutionalize global human rights norms. What is novel about the performance perspective, is its accessibility to the oppressed.

All of politics, and all of everyday life, for that matter, are theatrics to a degree. We are all performing our roles, some trying to fit into society's norms, others trying to stretch or break through boundaries. The performance perspective allows people to confront the dramatic nature of human interactions directly, and can have empowering effects. Dan Friedman, Artistic Director of New York's Castillo Theatre, recalls an experience he had as a volunteer with a social theatre troupe when he had to canvass on the streets and go door to door, soliciting funds for the organization. He raised very little money, and felt humiliated and angry, like he was a beggar. He sought solace in Fred Newman, a social psychologist, who advised him that if he presented himself as angry and humiliated, no one would ever give him any money, because they

would be afraid of him. He had to perform something else, something inspiring: his enthusiasm for the work he was doing, his passion for the community, his confidence as an organizer, and his love for the people he worked with. “It’s either perform or die,” he said (Friedman 2012).

Life experience invests in each of us a repertoire of performance possibility. We all have a portfolio of experiences which influence how we develop as people, and which inform the decisions we make and the behaviours we enact. Performance is not merely an analytical framework, nor is it merely a tool for social action. Rather, performance *is* social action. Through theatre of the oppressed, participants can confront the performative nature of the characters they embody, enhance their capacity to analyze the politics at play in the relationships they inhabit, and expand their personal repertoire of performance possibility. Collectively, TO groups develop shared experience, co-create new forms of knowledge, and build empowering, solidary relationships together. By engaging with TO groups in these ways, the oppressed strengthen their capacity to change the way they identify themselves, and the way they respond to incidents of oppression. Done effectively, TO can change the political perspective from which its participants interact in the world, from subjugation to autonomous agency.

It is by engaging in the intersubjective and political activity of norm contestation that theatre of the oppressed participants play a role in governance. Governance is, of course, distinct from *government*. Government is a form of political organization with formal authority to implement constitutionalized rules, and is backed by legitimized use of force through its legal system, police and military. *Governance*, on the other hand, refers to a broader phenomenon. It includes government institutions, but also encompasses the activities and relationships of a wider range of actors. Its norms, including those meant to protect society’s vulnerable members, and those

meant to enable popular participation in decision-making processes, are not necessarily legally institutionalized, and may not rely on coercive force to legitimize its authority. Governance is “a system of rule that is as dependent on intersubjective meanings as on formally sanctioned constitutions and charters” (Rosenau 1992, 4).

Boli and Thomas (1999) refer to a distinct form of authority in governance as “rational-voluntary.” They argue that even though it is contested, there is an identifiable, empirically observable set of norms which constitutes a “world culture.” In a delicately nuanced theory of agency, then, they argue that actors (including states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, market actors, etc.) are “enacting” (conforming to this world culture) rather than acting (as autonomous actors). As such, an analysis of governance would be incomplete without consideration of the politics at play in the normalization of ideas and assumptions. Theatre of the oppressed plays a role in the contested politics of norm entrepreneurship and ideational change. By engaging in TO activities, non-governmental actors challenge and re-articulate the conventions of society that had hitherto rendered them vulnerable to oppression. By contesting dominant norms, the TO meshwork engages in governance discourse, even when not explicitly participating in the institutions of government.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to conduct research on those using theatre of the oppressed to resist dominant institutions and norms, and to manifest alternative realities, I address the following questions:

1. Can we say that the relationships between different sites of TO constitute a network? To what extent are these relationships involving groups in subordinate positions? What is the scale of these relationships (national, regional, inter-regional, global)?
2. What goals do these related groups have in common? Do TO participants frame their perspective and goals in terms of “human rights” rather than other ways of approaching emancipation? Do they share a commitment to building alternative, counterhegemonic globalizations? Would they characterize their common goals in these terms or in other terms? If the latter, what are these other terms? To what extent are there commonalities between the forms of oppression being experienced? To what extent are there differences?
3. Do the related TO groups engage with other counter-hegemonic social movements or networks? What is the nature of these engagements? Why have these engagements been built?
4. How does the cultural logic of the organization affect practitioners’ work with theatre of the oppressed? To what extent do organizational concerns, such as financial security or professional reputation, affect practitioners’ understanding of oppression and emancipation? How, and to what extent, do these concerns alter, limit, or expand the organization’s agenda for social change?
5. To what extent have the related TO groups achieved their goals? What explains their success or lack of success?

Overcoming oppression in our social relationships and our politics may not be as utopian as cynics will argue. It is a matter of political will. When we decide collectively to take anti-oppressive governance seriously, the clever defenses of injustice’s apologists will appear “as

grotesque as the defenses of racism, sexism, slavery, colonialism and genocide look today” (Pogge 2008, 32).

1.5 Theoretical Engagements

While it appears that the technical capacity and historic context exist to deliver on the emancipatory promises of Western modernity (liberty, equality, peace and solidarity, or what is contained within the norms of international human rights), to Boaventura de Sousa Santos it is “increasingly obvious that such promises were never farther from being fulfilled than [they are] today” (2005, vii). Neoliberal economic globalization, and its ideological counterpart, liberal democracy, are working to “desocialize” capital, “freeing it from the social and political bonds that in the past guaranteed some social distribution.” The result is a consolidation of power in the hands of the elites, and the widening gap between rich and poor countries, and the rich and poor within countries (Ibid. viii). But while this current trend characterizes hegemonic globalization from the perspective of governing elites, it is not the only manifestation of globalization. It is hegemonic, in Gramsci’s sense of the term, but it is resisted by others. Their movements for alternative globalizations endeavor to deconstruct the oppressive relationships within this political economy, to challenge dominant norms, and to materialize a more just world. This thinking and practice are manifest in the World Social Forum, which Santos (2006) offers as one of the most promising collective efforts to reclaim the possibility for social emancipation.

I use four bodies of scholarship to analyze the work of theatre of the oppressed, and its implications for how we can understand an anti-oppressive governance. I begin with the theory of TO itself, as it has evolved from a Brazilian strategy to resist an oppressive military regime, to becoming a more broadly applicable and globalizing mechanism for conscientization and

liberatory action. There is a globalizing community of scholars and activists committed to engaging with the ideas of Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire, and to applying them to various social, political and economic contexts. I leave the dramaturgical innovations to the theatre experts, and focus my study on the socio-political challenges, consequences and their implications for human rights and governance. I engage with network theories in order to understand how subaltern groups and actors like those using TO might articulate and pursue alternative, counter-hegemonic forms of governance and work toward political changes. In doing so, they would challenge existing global governance arrangements highly influenced by neoliberal and hierarchical thinking. I then analyze the work of TO communities from a critical globalization perspective, in order to develop an understanding of the complex inter-relations between the global and the local, supraterritoriality and the nuances of place, and the dynamics of power which are at work within. Finally, I use a lens of anti-oppression throughout my research, in order to privilege the knowledge possessed by oppressed people and groups, and to focus on the embodied forms of knowledge generated through theatre of the oppressed. This approach to research is an important part of the larger academic project to “decolonize” knowledge (Mignolo 2009).

1.6 Theatre of the Oppressed as a Theory of Emancipation

“Theatre is a form of knowledge: it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it” (Boal 1992, xxxi).

The reason why theatre of the oppressed intrigues me as a model for critically analyzing social context and intersubjective relationships is because of the way it attempts to level the

ground upon which all stakeholders engage in dialogue. It removes the barriers preventing access to power, and privileging certain people and interests in decision making. It is a creative mechanism intended to overcome dehumanizing subordination, and to construct rights-respecting egalitarian relationships. In ways similar to other innovative organizational experiments, such as the World Social Forum, and the General Assemblies of the Occupy movement, theatre of the oppressed offers an alternative way of doing politics which deserves critical scrutiny. If the theory translates into practice, then TO offers possible answers to the challenges of democratizing global governance, communicating across language and cultural barriers, and materializing the principles of human rights. Whereas oppressive colonial attitudes relegate alternative governance ideas to the realm of the unimaginable or the impossible, TO offers a pro-poor, rights-protective, bottom-up model of democratic engagement. I demonstrate that in many (but not all) cases, TO does have this effect.

We know that the arts play an important role in the reproduction and contestation of cultural norms and ideas. Lynn Hunt (2007) attributes the rights revolutions of the eighteenth century to the media of theatre and literature, which evoked empathy from audiences who would stretch the concept of the rights-bearing citizen to include more of humanity. Human rights as an evolving project, in this sense, continues even today. Theatre's persuasive power is evident in governments' treatment of drama as a subversive threat. The British legislated the Drama Control Act (1878) to suppress popular opposition to its colonial rule (Ganguly 2010, 5). The government of Singapore, though it was promoting the arts in general at the time, banned the use of theatre of the oppressed techniques in 1994 because of their connection to Marxist political philosophy, and its orientation towards social change (Peterson 2001, 33-50). As Galeano has

aptly observed in Latin America, the mechanisms of democracy (which would include the rights to assemble, speak, and form political opinions, all of which are embodied in theatre of the oppressed) are quickly framed as threats to national security whenever the privileged power of elites is threatened (1997 [1973], 274).

It was against the increasingly oppressive social conditions of the poor in Brazil that ideologues Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, among others, strove to conscientize society for the purpose of social change. Both were exiled from Brazil as a consequence of their “subversive” activities. In Freire’s theory, relationships are “distorted” whenever one’s capacity to be fully human is suppressed. Oppression is dehumanization. It is the task of the oppressed to regain their full humanity. In order for this to happen, the oppressed cannot merely invert the oppressive relationship. That is, if they aspire to become oppressors themselves, full humanity is restored neither to the oppressed nor the oppressor. The key to restoring humanity is to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor from such violent relationships (Freire 2005 [1970], 43-7). But this task of dual liberation, to overcome not only one’s own subordination, but also subordinating relationships altogether, is complicated by the deeply engrained cultural norms which value competition, hierarchy and dominance. Where success is measured by power and wealth, and nobility marked by condescending acts of charity, the deconstruction of such relationships and the reimagining of a society as one which enhances humanity is counter-cultural.

From Freire’s concept of oppression, liberation is a form of rebirth, possible only when the subordinating relationship between the oppressor and oppressed is superseded by a humanizing relationship which enhances freedom. Liberation requires that the oppressed first become

conscious of their context, to understand the nature of their oppression (“conscientização”), and then engage in critical praxis leading to affirmative humanization (Freire 2005 [1970], 64-9).

Theatre of the oppressed, a set of interactive drama techniques which Boal developed to facilitate this process, provides a mechanism for “conscientization.”

Like Erving Goffman (1959), Augusto Boal understood performance to be a quality innate in all humans. With the ability to observe ourselves in action, we are simultaneously protagonist and spectator, and have the creative capacity to reinvent the past and invent the future (Boal 1992, xxvi). Boal developed the techniques of theatre of the oppressed for the distinct purpose of using drama not for art or entertainment, but as a mechanism for engaging in politics. It takes the form of an interactive workshop, where participants meet to analyze situations of conflict. Actors act out a scene on stage, the group analyzes the relationships enacted and the forms of oppression embodied, then the scene is re-enacted with intervention from other participants experimenting with alternative courses of action. In this way, the audience is not a collection of passive recipients of a product, but empowered “spect-actors” (simultaneously viewers and participants in the scene and its discussion) who participate in a process which can be socially and politically transformative (Picher 2007, 82-3).

The democratizing effects of TO are exemplified in the work of Sanjoy Ganguly’s Jana Sanskriti in India (Ganguly 2010, Mills 2009, Mohan 2004, Da Costa 2010). Ganguly was a political activist, not a theatre practitioner, when he began his work in the villages of West Bengal in the early 1980s. Theatre became his medium for political dialogue, education, and social change, because it was accessible to the people. However, prior to his encounter with Boal’s theatre of the oppressed, Ganguly’s use of theatre failed to achieve the kind of substantive

social change he thought was necessary. Despite his efforts to break down the divisive barriers between artist and audience, privileged and excluded, Ganguly's use of theatre failed to overcome the subordination of oppressed people. All of the thinking and acting, all of the power, belonged to the scripters, actors and directors. Political theatre, as such, is propaganda: the delivery of its creators' message. Change depends on the empathy of the spectator, and the persuasive power of the message. The audience was diminished, told what to do, how they should feel, how to empower themselves, etc. It was only after exposure to Boal's TO that Jana Sanskriti was itself liberated, and that they could really work against oppression (Ganguly 2010).

In Chapter Three I examine in detail several of the theatrical mechanisms used by TO communities. I find that they are politically benign when used in isolation, but when integrated into the process of intentional praxis, they can be politicizing. I offer examples of TO work which does meet its liberatory potential, and I also demonstrate how some uses succumb to an emancipation deficiency. In examples of TO which do meet their emancipatory potential, I demonstrate how participants are able to alter the way they identify themselves, the way they view the world, and the way they experience social and political interactions.

1.7 Solidarity Meshworks

Network dynamics are an important aspect of how we think about global governance, and scholars are doing innovative research to better understand how and for whose interests they work. The cultural logic of the network is evolving such that it serves both dominant and resistant interests, revealing a contested politics. Slaughter (Slaughter 2005, Slaughter and Zaring 2006) examines states as disaggregated government offices which network with their inter-state counterparts to forward regulatory cooperation and standardization; Castells (2011)

envisions the networked society as comprised of nodes connected by flows of information and communication; Sassen (2001) considers the networks within, around and between what she refers to as “global cities.” Transnational advocacy networks, comprised mainly of nongovernmental and activist organizations, are networking from the bottom up to form the “conscience of globalization,” using modern information and communications technologies to engage in information politics, and intervening in status quo governance to protect the interests of some of society’s more vulnerable members (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Jacob and Neumann 2006). Whereas each of these studies take the existence of the network for granted, treating it as an object of study, a container within which ideas are circulated, and one of many global governance “actors,” critical networking scholarship requires a different approach. Juris argues that a network’s communicative interaction and discursive flows have a distinct and constitutive cultural logic. “Debates *about* social movement networks largely constitute social movement networks themselves” (Juris 2008, 298). The network is, therefore, less an actor of global governance which can or should be studied in its own right, and more a set of contested relationships and processes through which we can study socio-political context.

What sets theatre of the oppressed apart from other forms of political theatre is the way in which it democratizes political space and social relationships, thereby deconstructing hierarchies, and creating the opportunity, on the “safe space” of the stage, to engage in alternative relationships. It is intentionally cooperative, dialogical, confrontational and constructive. Its objective is not for actors to enact a script, but for all stakeholders to script their enactments. They do this not only in their interpersonal relationships, but also in the way they challenge the conventions of social organization.

There is a direct link between TO and other manifestations of the global justice movement. The Occupy movement, for example, is protesting against the monological culture of the neoliberal market economy. The idea of the “99 percent” majority versus the one percent minority, symbolizing the injustice of disproportionate power that certain corporate and financial elites have in politics today, represents what Doug Paterson calls the “monologue” of wealth, and its privileged position in governance (Holtmeyer 2012). The Occupy movement is working to disrupt this privilege, and change the dynamics of governance to make it more inclusive and dialogical. No longer willing to tolerate their subordination to elites who work to enhance and protect their own power and privilege, Occupy is a call, from the bottom-up, for economic and political structural adjustment (J. E. Stiglitz 2011). This is also the task of theatre of the oppressed: to create dynamic spaces of dialogue where dominant relationships are otherwise oppressive monologues.

In Chapter Four I examine the relationships between TO practitioners, and the dynamics of their networking. I contrast the characteristics of mainstream organizational networks, with those of the TO network. I find that whereas traditional networks practise centralized and hierarchical control over knowledge production and dissemination, the network of TO practitioners is comprised of a constellation of individuals and communities which are ideologically and organizationally counter-normative, and which uphold principles of equality and democracy in their managerial logic. I refer to the globalizing TO network as a “meshwork.” They not only engage the oppressed in embodied socio-political analysis, but also foster empowering relationships of solidarity in the process.

1.8 Understanding Counterhegemonic Globalizations

In Chapter Five I examine the ways in which the TO meshwork is globalizing its praxis. Globalization is a popular buzzword in discourses on world order, international political economy, governance, human rights and social movements. While it may seem that the analytical utility of the concept of globalization has been exhausted, its meaning and implications are usually asserted rather than analyzed (Jenson and Santos 2000, 9). And where analysis has been undertaken, it is often “conceptually inexact, empirically thin, historically and culturally illiterate, normatively shallow and politically naïve” (Scholte 2005, 1).

Globalization is a multi-faceted phenomenon which features complex economic, political, social, legal, cultural and ecological dimensions. Dominating the interactions between these various dimensions are certain global powers, including the transnational capitalist class, the G8 states, and global regulatory bodies. They institutionalize a “metaconsensus” based on sets of hegemonic ideas, including neoliberal economies, liberal democratic politics, and legal systems founded upon the rule of law (Santos, Globalizations 2006). Because the processes and relationships which we refer to as “globalization” are multiple, complexly interrelated, and competing, they must be analyzed in the plural. I open up our understanding of globalizations to consider this plurality. I dislodge myself from the dominant discourses in order to put counter-hegemonic globalizations at the fore. I consider globalizations from the perspective of resistance.

Where globalizations involve subordinating relationships, and the suppression of people’s capacity to live freely as full and dignified humans, we can expect to find resistance. To explore this so-called “politics of the governed,” and how theatre of the oppressed may or may not work

as a globalizing medium through which oppression can be critically analyzed and acted upon, I use the theoretical innovations of Arturo Escobar (2008), Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and a collection of scholars engaged in a discussion they call “subaltern studies” (Chatterjee 2004, Spivak 2010, Pandey 2010). As a body of research, theirs is concerned not only with the impact of dominant globalizations in certain local contexts, and not merely with how people in these localities respond to such globalizations. “It is about a complex, historically and spatially grounded experience that is negotiated and enacted at every site and region of the world, posing tremendous challenges to theory and politics alike” (Escobar 2008, 1). Among their intellectual contributions pertinent to my study are: that there are alternative forms of knowledge to the dominant epistemologies of Western modernity; that people use their own frameworks of knowledge to struggle against marginalizing globality, to negotiate the terms of globality, and struggle for control over the terms of existence in the face of hegemonic pressures. The legitimacy of their frameworks of knowledge, political engagement, and cultural meaning, and the existence of a multitude of local subordinate groups asserting their own identity, knowledge, and rights, means that we need to expand our understanding of globalization not only in its hegemonic forms, but also as strategies for resistance and for articulating alternatives. These groups materialize from the bottom up what are otherwise repressed ideas and norms. I locate theatre of the oppressed communities among these groups, and find that their emancipatory potential is in their capacity to alter participants’ ontological orientations, the way they give meaning to their experience, and the way they develop empowering relationships of solidarity among themselves.

One of the more important tasks of my research is to ascertain the degree to which theatre of the oppressed adheres to its anti-oppressive ideals. This concern is important because we know that nongovernmental organizations and social movements, even when they have the best intentions, can use the tools of human rights in ways which perpetuate an oppressive status quo. Civil society, as an actor in global governance, can simultaneously constitute and contest the hegemony of globalization (Brysk 2005, 20-1, Rajagopal 2006). The discourse of human rights has evolved from a set of emancipatory principles to “a core part of hegemonic international law, reinforcing pre-existing imperial tendencies in world politics” (Rajagopal 2006, 768). However, Rajagopal adds that this reality need not delegitimize human rights per se. Rather, it is an urgent call to reconsider whether and how human rights are institutionalized in ways that perpetuate or resist oppression.

My examination of theatre of the oppressed in the context of counter-hegemonic globalizations puts the focus on the subaltern in order to analyze the cultural politics they enact, with the expectation that this analysis will shed light on the human rights deficit, and help in the construction of a more pro-poor, rights-affirming governance. However, I find that not all practitioners of TO share the same understanding of oppression, nor do they all share the same commitment to restructuring institutions. Filewod (2011) notes that TO’s popularity has attained a “currency of legitimation” through its recognition by governance actors such as UNESCO, development NGOs, and local school boards (which use TO techniques for educational purposes), but that this popularity has caused a rupture in the movement. While activist communities and organizations hold onto TO as a set of tools for mobilization, political dissent and other radical justice-oriented purposes, actors representing hegemonic governance, including

government ministries and schools, use TO mechanisms as versions of “applied theatre” within established institutional frameworks. It is my task to dig deeper into the use of TO to develop a more comprehensive understanding, theoretical and empirical, of these tensions. As examples of the contradictions TO practitioners need to confront, I ask them to what extent organizational conventions may undermine the urgent task of deconstructing and radically altering social structures, institutions and ideologies? Does the cultural logic of the NGO or the education institution dull TO’s emancipatory edge?

1.9 Epistemic Decolonization

“In a world of imperial wars, crushing poverty, gender, racial and sexual oppression, and appalling exploitation, demand for these two things – ‘democracy, no more inequality’ – represents nothing less than a call for revolution” (McNally 2002, 273, paraphrasing the sentiments of Jose Perez, a captured Zapatista fighter.)

Under the influence of such critical scholars as Escobar, Santos and Mignolo, my project is to “de-colonize” knowledge of governance, justice, human rights, and social theory by examining what these concepts mean to the oppressed, and those working with the oppressed to envision and enact a better reality. This epistemic innovation is necessary because of the dichotomous limits of contemporary social science discourses, particularly in the West, which understand the world as either capitalist or socialist, neoliberal or leftist. While both are rooted in Western-centric experience, language, and knowledge, limiting discussion to these competing ideologies neglects alternative ways of knowing. Borrowing the slogan of the World Social Forum, “another world is possible.” So, too, is another knowledge (Santos 2008). In Chapter Six I

demonstrate that the alternative forms of knowledge contained in and produced through theatre of the oppressed provide a fertile source of creativity in thinking about governance.

The concepts of rationality and efficiency, which are the sustaining mantras of hegemonic technical-scientific knowledge, and which value certain (Western) forms of knowledge over others, “are too restrictive to capture the richness and diversity of the social experience of the world, and ... they discriminate against practices of resistance and production of counter-hegemonic alternatives” (Santos 2004, 13-4). Rather than discrediting or concealing alternative forms of knowledge and experience, it is imperative that they be given critical consideration. They may contain within them not necessarily utopic ideals, but realistic ideas which can be used to imagine and materialize more just social institutions and political processes.

Mignolo (2009), working with the concepts articulated and developed by Santos, proposes that knowledge itself needs to be decolonized. Hegemonic discourses, scientific, political, environmental, or other, privilege certain ways of knowing. For example, scientific and economic logics are routinely combined to provide the rationale for economic development projects, which, from these perspectives, appears logical. However, the same project, when viewed from the competing rationales of indigenous cultures, political autonomy, and ecological sustainability, can appear violent and imperialistic. The lens of decolonized knowledge is important in my effort to understand globalizations critically. Because globalizations are essentially sets of social relationships, they involve conflicts which result in the creation of winners and losers. The dominant ideas and manifestations of globalization are “the history of the winners, told by the winners” (Santos 2006, 395). Governance works to protect these winners’ interests at the expense of the subordinate “other”. It is imperative that my examination

of anti-oppressive alternatives focuses on the experience and knowledge of the subordinate other. It is from the perspective of the oppressed that I examine the anti-oppressive ideas, experiences, intentions and potentialities of TO. Here I am following Escobar's lead, "to study the embeddedness of knowledge in social relations, that is, knowledge being produced in dialogue, tension, and interaction with other groups, and how this knowledge is enacted and networked" (2008, 24-5).

This epistemological approach is especially important for myself, as a white, male, university-educated researcher, because I (like others in my position) am inclined to view the world from a perspective of privilege of which I am not even aware. Peggy McIntosh's (1989) enlightening essay on white privilege illustrates in vivid detail the way in which culturally reproduced norms are so deeply internalized that they are difficult to recognize. Privilege is easily mistaken for merit in a culture where dominant ideas and institutions protect the interests of some at the expense of others.

To work towards this de-colonization of knowledge, I think that theatre of the oppressed offers some strategic advantages. Dramaturgists, and scholars of theatre know that theatre itself is a form of knowledge. It is a process of communication which allows communities to draw on their own forms of knowledge, and their own performance traditions, as a way of engaging in dialogue, raising critical awareness, and developing capacity for change (Filewod 2011, 240). As such, theatre of the oppressed offers a source of epistemic opportunity which has yet to be substantially examined in the context of anti-oppressive governance.

Chapter Two Methodological Solidarity

2.1 Research as Resistance

The relationship between activist and academic can produce tensions and resistance. It is with good reason that the activist community may view the scholar with enmity or suspicion, given the troubled history of imperialism, the privilege of the academic within that history, and the insular perspective from which “objective” research is supposed to be carried out. Questions about how to negotiate the researcher’s political convictions and standards of academic rigor, and how to make academic research relevant to those whose experience is being studied, are notoriously challenging. TO activists are aware of the colonality of knowledge. Some view the scholar with a degree of apprehension until they are convinced of the scholar’s solidary politics. I have been put on the spot at times throughout this research, and as a result I am acutely aware of my privilege as a researcher. Andrew Burton, the director of Street Spirits theatre company in British Columbia, an outfit which works primarily with indigenous youth, indicated to me that it is often problematic to engage with a researcher because of the presumed authority of “expert” knowledge. The researcher, who is likely an outsider to the community being researched, tends to carry an assumed power, and tends to represent the experience and knowledge of the community being studied as objects, in ways that can be marginalizing, misrepresentative, or disempowering (personal communication, October 7, 2012).

Conscious of the colonizing effects of academic research, I have endeavored to ensure that my research is as participatory and inclusive as possible. I identify myself as a stakeholder in the

pursuit of anti-oppressive governance. My methodology adheres strictly to the belief that my research is *with* the communities and individuals engaging in the work of theatre of the oppressed, rather than *on* these people. As such, it is of central importance that my research is rooted in relationships of trust and critical alliance, and that I remain open to dialogue on concerns about my motives and intentions as a scholar. Not all practitioners are willing to cooperate, much less collaborate, on my research agenda. But for the most part, those using TO in their work and in their communities have welcomed my inquiry, and have generously shared their resources with me.

At times throughout my research, as I solicited participation from TO communities, I encountered individuals who acted as unofficial “gatekeepers” of the groups they worked with. Wary of the ways in which oppressed people can be exploited for a scholar’s academic gain, some sought to protect the interests of their peers by restricting my access to their communities. In one case, a practitioner objected to a line of questioning in my survey which requested information about respondents’ political, social and economic affinities, based on the popular spectrum of “right” to “left” ideologies. He appreciated the critical nature of my survey’s questions, but was “reticent to pass the survey onto others, because of the polarizing nature” of some other questions (email communication, July 28, 2012). I responded to him that I shared his concern about the futility of the traditional political-economic spectrum that is used so commonly. The reason why I included those cumbersome questions was to interrogate some of the assumptions people have about who uses TO, what they use it for, and how this may change between cultural contexts. I was also interested to learn how far TO has evolved from its Marxist origins. Given the popularity of the discursive binary of political liberalism vs

conservatism, and the tendency of many to brand certain beliefs and practices as “socialist”, “communist”, “leftist”, “pinko”, “neoliberal”, “colonial”, “imperialistic”, et cetera, I think it is important to give TO practitioners the opportunity to give a name to their political, social and economic beliefs. To facilitate the creative and critical thinker who defines their beliefs in terms outside of the mainstream, I provided a space for “other” identities. This step would enable me to either substantiate or disprove the assumptions that this particular practitioner and I both shared. Satisfied that I shared his concerns, and that my work was an effort to dislodge rather than reinforce dominant paradigms, this practitioner did, then, agree to share my research with others.

On another occasion, a practitioner challenged the ownership of my research. Before participating in it, she wanted to know what benefit I would derive from her participation, how others would benefit, and how other people’s experience and knowledge would be used and credited. Her apprehension appeared to be rooted in concern over the imperial nature of the knowledge economy, particularly as it can exploit vulnerable people and their diverse forms of knowledge. Her response reflected a general distrust of academic inquiry, and the counter-hegemonic orientation of TO work. Both of these practitioners acted as gatekeepers to their communities of resistance, seeking to protect the interests of the oppressed, and the liberatory work they are involved in.

To the fullest extent possible, I have taken steps to ensure that my research is carried out in solidarity with the communities whose experiences I am learning from. Solidarity is a reciprocal relationship, not a unidirectional transaction. It is defined by collective rather than individual interests. As “a practice and process of working together with proximate and distant others

engaged in struggles for social, political, economic, and environmental justice” (Routledge 2013, 251), it enables its adherents to confront the nature of their interconnectivity and interdependence in order to work collaboratively towards change. This is qualitatively distinct from relationships established on altruistic ideals (such as a belief in a standard of justice, or a theory of social equality). Routledge notes that while a notion of justice can generate sympathy and provide for some common ground upon which to build solidarity, the relationship cannot be defined as solidary until participants are engaging with one another towards a common cause.

Some academics argue that scholarship is an intellectual exercise separate from the individual academic’s political activism, as if scholarship is somehow “objective,” and as if scholarship doesn’t challenge, legitimize or reproduce oppression and injustice. In Casas-Cortés et al’s research, they argue that such methodological bifurcation “can actually perpetuate the problem of politically disengaged, underengaged, or, worse, irresponsible work” (2013, 205). This bifurcation ignores the diversity and complexity of social movements, and their relationships with other forms of knowledge production, including academic; it assumes that there is in fact a clear distinction between the scholar’s context and the context within which the movement works, when in reality these spaces are overlapping; it risks undermining intellectual innovation by denying the political agency of the researcher; and it underestimates the political implications of distinguishing between different kinds of knowledge production (Ibid., 205-6). There is a plurality of knowledge producers, each of whom engage in their own way, and all of whom contribute to dynamic, interacting and competing arenas of knowledge production. They form a complex web. “We need to figure out how to address the way movements, academics, and a coterie of others – each with their particular location, powers, and, of course, partiality and

limitations – together form a complex network of knowledge producers” (Ibid., 207). Some are working towards similar (if not identical) purposes; others compete. When the political cause is shared between variant knowledge producers, there is opportunity to forge solidary relationships. Routledge notes that encounters between scholars and activists can be one such site of solidarity building, even when connections are momentary (2013, 252).

I, as an ethnographer, am but one actor among many, all of whom have a stake in the outcome of our work. “The field” in which I conduct my research is replete with activists, actors and academics, all of whom possess and produce knowledge based on their own experience, their cultures, histories and contexts. We are all invested, to varying degrees, in the outcome of this research. This work is a collation of their experiences, collaboratively nurtured. At stake is our collective future.

Of course all social scientists must be aware of the ways in which power dynamics affect their research, the phenomenon being observed, and the consequences of their assumptions and practices. Research is not only about producing an intellectual product; it is also about building relationships. This responsibility has important political implications. I do not anticipate that my research will cause any harm to the people I engage with. However, if I seek only to accrue personal profit, or to secure my professional future, and give little regard to the lasting consequences of my research on those whose experience I study, then my work could have colonial repercussions. That is, without a commitment to engaging in a struggle to criticize and restructure society, I profit at others’ expense, while they are forgotten and their oppression goes on, as has been the case between the “knower” and the “known” throughout history.

Scholarship has the potential to engage in the politics of struggle, to resist rather than reproduce marginalizing, alienating, and oppressive consequences of academic research. Juris responds to the challenge of politicized research with a methodological approach he calls “militant ethnography.” It means breaking down the divide between researcher and object, so that the researcher is fully immersed in the movement being studied. A comprehensive account of the movement is possible only by developing long-term relationships of trust, collaborating in the planning and implementing of movement objectives, and engaging in the debates internal and external to the movement, so as to live the emotions, struggles, and politics of the movement. Anything less, including the traditional academic’s observation from a distance, hinders the researcher’s ability to appreciate and comprehend the rhythm and nuance of the social practice being studied. The key to attaining a quality of analysis which retains its value for the movement is in the collective nature of the analysis, when reflection and analysis of the social relationships, political processes, and network dynamics are developed in collaboration with the movement (Juris 2008, 19-24).

Paul Rutledge refers to this ethnographic approach as a “third space” in the social sciences, blurring the lines between activism and academia, where the researcher engages in critical collaboration with the movement actors whose experience is being studied. He argues that it is in this collaboration, in the development of relationships, the co-creation of knowledge based on shared experience that the researcher and the subject(s) of the research are able to challenge oppressive power relations. “Activist ethnography implies a concern with action, reflection, and empowerment (of oneself and others) in order to challenge oppressive power relations. It is

about forging solidarity with resisting others through critical collaboration” (Routledge 2013, 250-1).

This methodological approach requires that the researcher share the same political convictions as the movement. I argue that TO is not a movement of homogeneous actors; it is a distinctly heterogeneous “meshwork.” Its members do share interests in common, including a struggle against oppressive socio-political institutions, a commitment to humanizing dialogue, social criticism, and empowered political participation. So if the scholar aligns with these goals, then there is room to forge solidarity alliances. It requires the development of relationships, the building of trust, without which solidarity is impossible. Scholarship becomes a political lever which legitimizes their struggle, and gives it political weight. As Freire argued, a lack of genuine solidarity amounts to a form of false generosity, deception, condescension which undermines the process of critical praxis (2005 [1970], 44-45). So the activist ethnographer makes no claim to objectivity; rather, retains a degree of scholarly rigour sufficient to analyze what is being observed, asks critical questions of the movement, but does so in a way which furthers the movement’s cause.

2.2 Multidimensional Methodology

My methodological approach takes the experiences and concerns of Juris, Routledge, Escobar, Santos, Mignolo and Pogge into consideration, as I seek to build mutually beneficial relationships between myself (as a privileged white male Northern researcher) and the subaltern and activist individuals whose experience I am studying (each of whom live with their own complex identities of relative privilege and adversity). My purpose is not only self-interested. I am working to advance an understanding of governance which challenges the perpetually

disempowering logic of current systems, relationships and processes, and moves the discourse in a direction which is intentionally counter-hegemonic and anti-oppressive. I employ a diversity of ethnographic methods which put the experience and knowledge of those using theatre of the oppressed at the centre of my analysis. This approach results in a rights-affirmative, participatory, dialogical study which itself offers a prefigurative glimpse into an alternative model of social and political interaction.

I divided my study into three phases, each of which involved different research tactics. To begin, I address my first four research questions by analyzing the nature of the meshwork of people (activists, theatre practitioners, scholars, teachers, community development and conflict resolution NGOs) engaging in anti-oppressive work through theatre of the oppressed. I conducted a general survey of as many individuals (independent practitioners, scholars, and representatives of organizations using TO techniques) as I could. Using an extensive questionnaire, then following up with some respondents using short structured interviews, I analyze the nature of their work, their relationships (if any) to other practitioners, to Boal's theory, the context within which they do their work, their objectives, the nature of the oppression they address, their understanding of oppression, and their vision of alternative social relationships and political processes. I ask questions such as: What do Boal's theory and work mean to you? What are the forms of oppression addressed through your work? Where does your work diverge from Boal's? Where do the participants in your group find agreement and discord? How do you see your work as contributing to the larger global justice movement, or to the work of restructuring social institutions? A copy of this survey, which was available to respondents online, is attached as an Appendix.

In addition to the data collected through this initial general survey, I make extensive use of materials published by practitioners, scholars and organizations (theatre, education, community development), including books, academic articles, organizations' annual reports, case studies, newsletters, and testimonies, as well as coverage from news media.

I located two umbrella organizations which served as good starting points for such an analysis. One is the Organization for Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed (www.ptoweb.org), an international community of scholars and practitioners. They organize an annual conference to engage in discourse on Freirean and Boalian theory and which brings together members to share their research and experiences, offer workshops, etc. I joined the organization as an interested scholar, and attended its conferences in 2012 (Berkeley), 2013 (Oxford, Ohio), and 2015 (Chicago). These conferences proved to be sites rife with active networking, engaging TO and PO practitioners with a particular interest in theoretical debates, sharing their empirical experiences, developing their network, and spreading awareness about their practices. Another organization is called the International Theatre of the Oppressed Organization (<http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org>), founded by Augusto Boal. Their website contains several helpful resources, publications, and links to civil society organizations around the world. However, it is not regularly maintained, and some of its features and links are out of date. It now serves as an online portal linking to other resources. Between these two umbrella groups, I have compiled a database of more than 300 individuals and organizations from more than 60 countries. Connecting with some of these individuals, and attending sites where they were convening as a network, I was able to expand my database to include roughly 1000 people located all over the world, but concentrated mainly in North and South America, and in Europe.

In order to enrich my understanding and appreciation for the techniques of theatre of the oppressed, and to engage with communities using its methods, and pushing its evolution forward, I engaged in participant observation in four ways: by participating in workshops for participants, then training workshops for facilitators; by attending community initiatives where TO techniques are being applied; by attending and participating in local and regional meetings, including the annual conferences of PTO; and by following and participating in online discussion fora, where practitioners share their experiences, debate their ideas, and reveal the contested intra- and inter-network politics which are of interest to me. Throughout this process, I kept extensive field notes, which I use regularly for reflection and analysis.

Phase three of my study emerged out of the data collected in phases one and two. I selected three sites within the global meshwork to concentrate my efforts in a more incisive inquiry. One site was the North American conference circuit, where I attended three annual conferences organized by Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed, and one biannual conference organized by the East Side Institute called Performing the World. Each of these conferences was held in the United States, and was organized and attended by a mix of academics, activists, theatre practitioners and other professionals. I also spent time with TO practitioners in four South Asian cities: Bangalore, Kolkata, Delhi and Kathmandu. At the time I was doing this fieldwork, these locations offered a flurry of local and international TO activity that I was able to participate in. Finally, I followed the interactions of TO practitioners on online social media sites which serve as communication hubs for those looking to share their work and engage in dialogue on issues relating to their practice. The purpose of this phase was to understand with greater clarity the network dynamics and counter-hegemonic nature of TO work found at these sites within a wider

(global) phenomenon. I was able to conduct in-depth interviews with leading TO practitioners and community participants. I was also able to immerse myself in the politics of the organizations through participatory observation. The time I spent with community organizers, drama practitioners, and community members while engaging in their TO workshops and projects, provided a depth of experiential learning which would have otherwise proven unattainable. While observing participants' interactions and conversations, I kept detailed field notes in a diary to be analyzed along with the other data I collected.

Chapter Three

Scripting Change

Theatre of the oppressed (TO) is many things to many people: a set of games, tools and mechanisms for critical social analysis; a solidarity network; a movement; a creative and engaging model for instruction, both inside and outside of the classroom; a form of social therapy; politicizing theatre. Insofar as it is invested with emancipatory principles, and has qualities which galvanize communities to work towards progressive change, it can even be understood as an ontology: a liberating consciousness with which to engage with the world. But first and foremost, in all of its manifestations and interpretations, it is a methodology of reflective praxis intended to foster social change. Praxis here is key. Its intentionality, its critically incisive analysis, and its work towards transcending oppressions in their myriad embodiments, make effective theatre of the oppressed what it is: a method of social engagement with revolutionary potential. However, not all of the work using the name “theatre of the oppressed” holds the same promise. Some practitioners dull TO’s emancipatory edge by employing its mechanisms without principled praxis, reducing it to a series of exercises and games, or an interactive format for entertainment or instruction.

There are certain criteria which need to be met in order to understand theatre of the oppressed as emancipatory. First, it must enable participants to engage in the dialectical and decolonizing form of knowledge production which Freire termed “conscientization”. Second, the entire TO process must be rooted in a quality of praxis which is as prefigurative as it is transformative. By these measures, not all theatre of the oppressed work is equally emancipatory; not all communities of engagement are alike in their normative and prefigurative resolve. In this

chapter, I argue that where TO meets its emancipatory potential, theatre of the oppressed activists engage with communities in processes of praxis, equipping them with the skills for critical social analysis, and working collectively to challenge and change oppressive institutions. Their work is humanizing and democratizing, making it an important example of how we can understand anti-oppressive governance. By bridging the gap between human rights theory and practise, TO manifests emancipatory governance; not because of its legislative applications, but for the way in which it changes the politics of the oppressed.

3.1 Liberation through Conscientizing Praxis

“One does not liberate people by alienating them. Authentic liberation – the process of humanization – is not another deposit to be made in men (sic). Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.” (Freire 2005 [1970], 79)

What makes TO emancipatory, an embodiment of human rights, and a manifestation of change, is the nature of its practitioners’ praxis. Freirean praxis is a process of “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire 2005 [1970], 51). It engages participants in critically incisive socio-political analysis, and seeks to fundamentally alter the way they co-create their relationships. Liberation, when achieved ideally, would “humanize” social institutions, thereby nourishing the kind of social change which not only uplifts the dignity of oppressed people, but works to transcend oppression altogether. If TO work merely engages people in dialogue, or facilitates interactive activities, and it lacks the prefigurative elements that define liberatory praxis, it has an emancipatory deficiency.

Both praxis and conscientization are co-constitutive elements of TO, and fundamental to revolution. Each element informs and is informed by the other. Theatrical mechanisms, including aesthetic imagery and role play, are used to trigger conscientization, and facilitate dialogical co-creation of knowledge. It is through these two complimentary and interdependent processes that the oppressed and their allies work to humanize social institutions, thereby emancipating not only the oppressed, but also their oppressors. Revolution lives in the humanizing changes that the oppressed bring to social relationships, cultural institutions and political norms.

Part of doing praxis is developing collective knowledge, shared histories and social memory, and building solidarity. These actions are important in the context of an individualistically-oriented culture in which the myth of the personal perpetuates alienation among the socially and economically vulnerable, and promotes a sense of entitlement among economic and political elites. Naming oppressions, identifying structures of power and their beneficiaries, and understanding one's own place in complex systems, can work to bring the oppressed out of their isolation and into a collectivity working to resist and transcend oppression.

In Boal's demonstration of how this can work through theatre, he recounts the story of a female domestic worker. She had always felt invisible in her place of work. She had chores to do, expectations to meet. When the family she worked for carried on discussions, she was present in the room, but not permitted to join in the conversation, share her thoughts, or let her voice be heard. She got the opportunity to participate in a "forum theatre"¹ workshop with Boal,

¹ Forum theatre is one of the more well-known and widely theatre of the oppressed formats, distinct for the way it transforms spectators into "spect-actors." This practice encourages audience members to intervene in a play by

after which she broke into tears. Looking at herself in the mirror in the greenroom, it was the first time in her memory that she saw herself as a woman with her own identity. Until then she saw herself as a servant or a maid. In these respects she was an embodiment of others' perception of her (Boal 2001, x). Through engagement with TO exercises, she developed her own sense of consciousness, began to identify herself as a dignified human with political agency, and freed her conscience from the inferiority complex imposed upon her by her place in society, and by her relationship with her employer.

Theatre, introspection, and the practice of spectating oneself can be transformative in this sense. It can change the lens through which people see and interpret the world. Of course, this capacity is not unique to the realm of theatre. Other media can achieve the same form of conscious awakening. A compelling argument delivered through cinema, in print, or even in conversation with another can have a revelatory effect, can change a person's perspective and alter their understanding of an issue. But conscientization is more than this "A ha!" moment of enlightenment. Conscientization is a dialectical and decolonizing form of knowledge production. It is liberating not in an individual sense, but in the way it conceptualizes the collective nature of both oppression and knowledge. People are not mere consumers of knowledge, but its co-creators, giving meaning to their world through inter-subjective dialogue.

Enlightenment alone, while empowering as knowledge can be, does not guarantee emancipation. I argue that theatre of the oppressed's liberatory potential lives not in the moment of conscientization, but in the laborious work towards social transformation. Without a radical understanding of, and committed approach to, prefigurative change, TO lacks an emancipatory

stopping it and replacing the protagonist, changing the scene's course of action by altering the behaviour of the oppressed character.

edge. Theatre of the oppressed is an integrated process of praxis which can be enlightening for participants, but, more importantly, has empowering qualities which build capacity in communities. A work's emancipatory potential lives in a group's capacity to transform injustice into progressive change. The more incisive its analytical deconstructions, problematizations and prefiguration, the greater its potential to transcend oppression and engage in the work of building humanizing institutions.

The nature of oppression is paradoxical. While it is often experienced in an inter-personal context, it is rooted in social norms which perpetuate at societal and institutional scales. As such, there is a need to distinguish between oppression as a collective experience, and violence which victimizes people at an interpersonal level. Theatre of the oppressed works with groups to deconstruct oppression as it manifests in people's personal experiences. However, while this develops the consciousness of the oppressed, it doesn't necessarily offer justice in this interpersonal context. Praxis can do little to reduce the harm inflicted on individual victims of violence or injustice.

In the case of the domestic worker recounted by Boal, her experience of oppression was intensely personal, but her conscientization process did not necessarily offer personal redemption in terms of her relationship with her employer. Whereas the focus of anti-oppressive work is necessarily on the personal experience, and on conflicts manifest in inter-personal relationships, TO's scope for change, I argue, is at the institutional scale rather than the interpersonal. The conscientization attained through this process undermines the legitimacy of the institution of servitude, and the potentially dehumanizing effects of domestic labour. Challenging an institution, however, does not guarantee that the relationships within it will improve. On the

contrary, the oppressed may expose themselves to harm should they confront their oppressor. My research demonstrates why it is crucial to understand individuals as members of a collective. It is through collective conscientization that the oppressed have the potential to create change.

3.2 Playing with Power

“This is theatre – the art of looking at ourselves.” (Boal 1992, xxx)

As an art form intended to be used for revolutionary praxis, the theatre of the oppressed engages people through various interactive theatrical methods. Its games, imagery, and role play are constitutive elements comprising the tools of the “joker’s” trade. This is not a comedic joker, but, like in a deck of playing cards, a wildcard. The joker animates the proceedings, directing the drama, adhering to principles of anti-oppression. Boal offered that the joker’s role may be better understood as a “difficilitator” than a “facilitator”, for the way they should problematize an issue, drawing out and working through its complexity.

Having spent the past three years studying many TO applications in different parts of the world, I find that they comprise more than a skill set. As a whole, theatre of the oppressed is an embodied manifestation of liberatory praxis, characterized by a distinctly interactive and democratic methodology, and replete with a unique set of mechanisms for change. I do not question whether or not TO exercises provoke or promote change. In a world which is constantly in flux, evolving in some ways, and appearing to devolve in other ways, change is the only constant. Theatre of the oppressed is inherently change-oriented, and its practitioners share the optimistic consensus that although the status quo is oppressive, injustice can be transformed. My

challenge is to assess the nature of the changes occurring through theatre of the oppressed, and the efforts of its practitioners and participants.

Theatre of the oppressed forces participants to engage with the performative nature of characters we embody, and the ways in which we project our personas to the world. We do this in different ways according to different contexts. Using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis, we can imagine ourselves as spectators of our own lives, reflect on our beliefs and actions, observe ourselves as we interact with others, and alter the way we perform the character of ourselves. Yet, to confront the actor within oneself can be an intimidating and uncomfortable process. People have reservations about overt performance, even in the most benign of settings: singing in front of others, participating in theatre exercises, or delivering a public speech or a work-related presentation. I too would prefer to shy away from performing an alter-ego, risking embarrassment, and rendering myself vulnerable to the scrutiny of others. However, this fear pales in comparison to the gravity of fear experienced when the oppressed confront their oppressors, either through fictionalized characters on stage, or in a real word encounter.

You can imagine my discomfort when, working with a group in a mango grove outside of Kolkata, under the direction of a workshop facilitator from California, I was called on to step outside of my usual persona, and to act like a small rodent, scurrying around on the ground and trying to attract a mate. "We're going to have fun," the director said before proceeding to engage us in an exercise where we made exaggerated facial expressions and enacted animal behaviours. I felt more ridiculous than amused. These activities are only "fun" if you enjoy such theatricalized games. Some TO practitioners assume that participants will understand and appreciate the value of play in the same way that they do. This assumption is made in error, and

runs the risk of repelling prospective participants, and undermining its legitimacy as a tool for community dialogue. A basic requirement for successful TO work is the willingness of participants to engage in such theatrics.

This experience was part of a theatre game and, for the sake of research, collegiality, and cohesion of the group I was working with, I did manage to suppress my internal repulsion and scurry about the ground like a furry little mouse. Nonconformity in such a setting can be equally as awkward and counterproductive to the collective. Games are an integral – even inseparable - part of the theatre of the oppressed. As “warm-up” activities or “ice breakers” they invite participants to relax their inhibitions. As opportunities for expressive engagement they can help people to hone the skills necessary for acting (performing a range of emotions, creating a group dynamic and building relationships of trust, developing the complexity of characters to be used in subsequent performances, etc.). More importantly, for transformative praxis, they engage participants in the collective process of sharing experiences, social memories, and identities, while collectively writing a script which is unique to the given group.

For me, with limited experience as an actor on stage in a dramatic production, and with inhibitions that I am generally reluctant to let go of, I found that I never did completely “let my guard down.” The process of getting comfortable with this form of performance took longer for me than for others who already identified as actors, or were familiar with the concept of play in adult group settings. The need for social change evokes a sense of urgency in me, and playing games such as these can feel like an indulgent preoccupation, or a distraction from the important task at hand. I deflected the nagging voice in my conscience which said “no time for games; forget about mindfulness. Let’s get to the important work of debate and dialogue.” The

concepts of embodied knowledge and aesthetic creativity seemed indulgent and unnecessary. Initially I did not appreciate the ways in which performativity and embodiment could serve as empowering alternative approaches to knowledge creation. But in retrospect, as I honed my understanding of TO as a process, I began to understand the ways in which these ideas were central to the concept of liberatory praxis, and decolonizing knowledge forms.

In order for TO to be effective, therefore, the participant must be open to the possibility that there are forms of knowledge beyond what one is accustomed to. In addition, one must be willing to accept the challenge of taking a risk. To engage in dramatic exercises with a group requires that participants dislodge themselves from the centre of their attention in order to contribute to the collective whole. Entrusting the process, and the others with whom one is engaging, can be a risky endeavor for participants who lack experience with such creative and collaborative processes. It requires a level of trust that not everyone is comfortable giving to others.

The games played in a TO process are many and meaningful. They foster teamwork, develop a group identity, and nourish trust among group participants. While nominally competitive, they are meant to be about fun, laughter, co-operation, and generating a positive group dynamic. At the same time, they are intended to exercise one's ability to think critically and creatively. Some of the games are familiar from my childhood, like musical chairs, three-legged races, crab walks and wheel barrel races. Invariably they get group members working together towards a common goal, developing relationships and building trust between participants.

Some are meant to hone communication skills, verbally and nonverbally. For example, in one exercise, objects are strewn across the floor, and a blind-folded participant must try to traverse

the obstacle-laden floor space without stepping on any of the items. The rest of the group is tasked with coaching her through the endeavor. What begins as an uncomfortable experience for the blind walker becomes considerably more difficult when verbal communication is no longer permitted, and the group is left to conjure alternate communicative signals, which can be audible but must be nonverbal. This requirement results in the spontaneous creation of signals, some of which work more effectively than others. It requires the group to work creatively together, as too many people offering too many contradictory signals will only confuse the walker, making her less able to discern sound advice. A game like this demands and builds trust.

Playing this game at a workshop in Bangalore, the participant who was voluntarily blindfolded grew increasingly irritated, and eventually overwhelmed, by the rivaling signals she had to decipher from her overzealous would-be “helpers.” With each movement she made, she faced a barrage of signals coming from all directions, as the group encircled her in anticipation. Frustrated, she burst out, “You bunch of fools!” because, as she would later confide, she felt that the group, as a collective, was insensitive to her needs. The inflated egos of individuals compromised the group’s collaborative potential. Each individual was determined to have their signal heard and used, even if it meant competing with others’ signals rather than working towards a more co-operative outcome. The resulting aggregation of individuals’ ideas proved more chaotic than cohesive, escalating the level of stress in the room, and culminating in an explosive breakdown of the process. The vulnerable blind walker needed guidance and reassurance, but was given a mess of intellectual and emotional clutter. One dominant personality too determined to have their signal followed by the blind walker could break the trust

of the walker, could deny others the respect that their efforts merit and could cause a rupture in the group, defeating the purpose of the exercise.

Participation in such an exercise requires one to make a shift from individualistic thought processes, to one which places the collective goal at the fore of one's attention. This way of thinking poses a significant challenge to participants. To displace oneself from the centre of attention in order to serve the goal of the group requires a degree of selflessness and empathy which could be counter-intuitive, and even counter-cultural, to some.

Boal cautioned against this kind of ego-centric competition when he said that we must "try to be better than ourselves, not better than others" (Games for Actors and Non-actors 1992, xxx). The objective of TO communities is to overcome oppression, which, I argue, is necessarily a collective endeavor, rooted in values of constructive collaboration and co-operation. It is not that this work is apolitical or anti-competition. On the contrary, it is political in its essence. It is the politics of oppression which the oppressed, as a group, acting in solidarity with their allies, are working to overcome. Politics is, by definition, a competitive game. The concern for TO communities, however, is to have a collaborative and co-operative approach to building community, nurturing humanizing relationships among their members, while directing their competitive energy against the institutions and norms in society which inflict injustice against certain vulnerable people.

What is required in order to render the TO exercise successful (conducive to change), is a shift in the participants' thought patterns from ego-centric competition to collective co-operation. This intellectual shift enables the democratization of communication, as individuals discipline their own behavioural patterns. It also requires the time to adapt to new concepts, realities, and

ways of understanding the world. In the above game, the group came to a consensus the next time through the exercise that they would limit their communication to hand claps, thereby eliminating the potentially competing signals of the hummers. While not resolving all issues, this step did serve to make it easier for the receiver of signals. But both sides – the senders of the signals, and the receiver - still needed to develop the system of communication through trial and error. The only way to succeed in the task was to allow the capacity of the group to evolve experientially (Fieldnotes, Bangalore, November 25, 2012).

Without the use of sight, we are forced to rely on other senses in order to perceive and interpret the world we live in. A game called “glass cobra” is one of the more popular on Boal’s roster of TO games, one that I encountered at several of the workshops I attended. I played in larger groups, between 25 and 50 people, and each time it unfolded in the same way. I stood single file in my place in the circle, with my hands placed on the shoulders of the person in front of me, as instructed. The facilitator told us to close our eyes, and then get familiar with the person in front of us by knowing the feel of their head, hair, face, ears, shoulders and neck. After a short while, the circle was broken apart by facilitators, who relocated participants to different areas of the room. Participants were then tasked with putting themselves back in the order in which we stood in the circle, thereby re-assembling the broken “glass cobra.” To do this task, we had to feel our way around the room, making small steps, unsure of ourselves, and not permitted to open our eyes. We inevitably encountered others in our search, and had to use our sense of touch to try to recognize the familiar person who had been in front of us in the circle. Eventually, with enough time, we were able to reassemble the circle as it was before separation.

I played this game three times, in three different settings. Each time, the separation induced anxiety in me, as my instinct was to break the rules of the game, and resist separation from the group. Logically this act sounded reasonable, since the whole purpose of TO is to break away from society's oppressive conventions. However, my rational desire to trust the process proved stronger than my desire to break the rules, and I complied with facilitators for the sake of the group. The purpose of this game is to demonstrate that even a task that seems unlikely or impossible is achievable with enough diligence. Boal adds that the game is inspired by a legend in which the glass cobra is a symbol of the collective: its many pieces amount to little on their own, but, when united and solidified, they pose a formidable collective power (Boal 1992, 108). Pragmatically, it also develops one's cognitive abilities by engaging and communicating with unfamiliar and underutilized senses, thereby forcing people to think and act in unfamiliar and creative ways.

Intrigued by this game, it was not enough for me to know that our group always succeeded at reassembling the snaking line; I needed to know how it happened. How much assistance were facilitators providing to wayward wanderers? (Because, though no one needed to guide me, I was sure that not everyone could have found their way back into the line so independently). So I had a couple of sessions videotaped in order to review the process afterwards, and was surprized to see how little intervention was needed from the facilitators.

Games make up a large part of the theatre of the oppressed. Play is important to creativity. It expands the imagination, widens the horizon of the possible by making the brain think in different ways. This fact has important implications for how we understand the world we live in. "Imagination isn't about creating something from nothing. It's the capacity that moves us

forward as we take what we've already known and see it fresh, re-envisioned in new ways. If you can change the script – the one imposed by society or the one that runs in a seemingly endless loop inside your own head – maybe you can change your life” (Aristizabal and Lefer 2010, 250). Openness to change, here, is essential to TO's efficacy. So too is the need to respect the creative capacity of oneself, others with whom one is collaborating, and the group as a whole, which is comprised of individuals, but which also takes on its own dynamics, characteristics and qualities.

Games are also used as a mechanism for unlearning the familiar. Theatre of the oppressed seeks to expose and alter the mechanistic responses to information as a way of provoking change. This purpose is explicit in Boal's theory. Humans respond emotionally to a scenario according to certain enculturated mechanisms and deeply engrained cultural norms. Certain images or actions evoke varied responses in people, depending on their personalities, of course, but also on their social place.

One particular game which I played several times, had participants walking in random directions around the space. We were instructed by the facilitator to keep our movement constant and fluid, and to cover all open spaces on the floor as they are exposed with the movement of people. The facilitator would call out a series of commands, and the participants would oblige: stop, jump, shout your name, for example. Then participants would be instructed to change their responses: to jump in the air when asked to shout your name; stop walking when asked to jump; and to keep walking while shouting your name when told to stop moving. This is a clumsy endeavor, as people inevitably get confused over their responses to the various commands. However, its point is clear, and its lesson is easily discerned: our psyche is

conditioned to respond in certain ways to certain intellectual triggers. These responses are not innate in people, and should not be taken for granted. Words and symbols are invested with meaning, but this meaning is socially constructed, and as such, is subject to scrutiny and change. The games engaged in through theatre of the oppressed endeavor to alter the realm of the possible. Not necessarily to invalidate people's learned behaviours and ideas, but to facilitate processes of change, to alter the way we perceive situations, and to craft alternative responses to the contexts people face.

At times throughout the course of my research, it felt like the games were excessive. I thought I understood their purpose as serving multiple functions to the process of TO. Initially, they “break the ice,” loosening up the psycho-presence of the participant. Then, while enabling people to let down their guards and join in a collective process, they build relationships, and nourish the development of a group dynamic. However, the urgency with which I always wanted to get to the work of “changing the world” rendered me impatient with the leadership of some TO facilitators. I voiced this concern to Sanjoy Ganguly, a well-known TO practitioner in India. He replied that through these games, we are living shared experiences, and that collectively we are “scripting our play” (Personal communication, May 30, 2012). This concept has the most fundamental importance to the process of TO, because its very purpose is to transform society. TO endeavors to help communities break free from the confines of tradition, if that tradition is oppressive. It is about no longer accepting and enacting the roles that have become normalized, that people presume are scripted for us by our place in society. Rather, it is incumbent upon the oppressed to script new actions and new responses to scenarios of oppression or injustice.

The TO exercise which may be the most iconic of TO's repertoire is Colombian Hypnosis. In publications promoting the work of TO practitioners, there is often an image of workshop participants engaged in this activity. It tends to provide provocative pictures, striking for the way they embody oppressive power relationships. It is an activity most often done in pairs, though it can be altered to engage small groups. One participant raises their hand, with fingers pointed upright, a few inches in front of the face of their counterpart. The participant looking at the hand of the other is instructed to maintain their position and proximity relative to the other's hand, so that when the hand moves, their face must follow it. It is then up to the person with the raised hand to "lead" the other around the workshop space, trying to manoeuvre and contort their partner into different bodily positions, moving forward and backward, side to side, at the height of their upstretched tiptoes, or scraping across the floor. The purpose of the game is to simulate an oppressive relationship of power, and the "hypnosis" with which so many seem to conform to societal norms, even when they are irrational, unreasonable, harmful or oppressive.

I played this game many times, and after enough repetitions, found it amusing to try to alter the power dynamics. I found that as the hypnotized follower, I was never really hypnotized; in fact, I was acutely aware of the way in which I was being manipulated in ways that were uncomfortable for me. So, I resisted by using my face to push the hypnotizing hand away from me. By deciding not to follow the hand, and trying to change its course of action, I found that I was often able to make the hypnotizer move back – because they feel that it is their prerogative to keep their hand in the same space relative to my face. As a researcher examining relationships of power and oppression, I was hyper-aware of the ways in which the relationship is intersubjective: both participants are responsible for maintaining the space between one's hand

and the other's face, meaning that the oppression was not total and unavoidable – in fact, it was very much transformable. However, to the oppressed who may lack this analytical perspective, I can appreciate how their experience is like hypnosis. Prior to their engagement with TO, they do experience their subordinate positions as powerless. They may lack the class consciousness, and they feel isolated in their experience. It is through their engagement with TO exercises that they come to understand their experience as shared. This change in perspective opens the oppressed to the possibilities of identity change and relationship building.

It is often from a game such as this one that the group would engage in some collective reflection about their experience thus far. Sitting in a group formation, participants would be asked to express their feelings during the game: how did you feel when you were leading the other? When you were being led? What dynamics of power could you recognize through this exercise? Inevitably, there would be discussions about what it feels to be at the mercy of a character more powerful than oneself. Invariably people felt vulnerable or victimized; the act of getting down on their hands and knees to follow an oppressor's hand is humiliating.

Interestingly, despite experiencing feelings of resentment, not all participants wanted to change their situation. I shouldn't have been surprised to hear from some workshop participants that some people are not willing to assume the risk involved in confronting and resisting oppression. Whereas I expected group consensus in the co-creation of strategies to resist oppression, occasionally there were participants who had grown accustomed to their subservient existence. One man pleaded that while he understood the ways in which he was oppressed, he had lived under such conditions for so long that he had grown habituated to it. To confront his oppressor meant that he risked a condition even worse than the one he had grown accustomed to.

He was in his comfort zone, even if it wasn't ideal for him, and he did not want to try to muster the courage to transform it (Fieldnotes, Bangalore, November 25, 2012). Change, therefore, is not an inevitable outcome of one's participation in theatre of the oppressed, even when one has experienced the process of conscientization. Intentional praxis is equally integral to the process of change.

To be sure, resistance can prove costly; even deadly. In Hector Aristizabal's autobiographical account of the experiences as a theatre activist, he recalls his youth when he used political theatre to resist the Estatuto de Seguridad in Colombia, 1982: "It was dangerous to talk politics. Sometimes even more dangerous to create art. Friends of mine from the university had been seized and disappeared only to reappear as cadavers found in a ditch, bodies covered with cuts and burns, toes and fingers broken, tongues missing, eyes gouged out" (2010, 9). This is why some, even if they know of the ways in which they are oppressed, prefer to seek refuge in security. They accept their social place, and find ways to make do, consoled by the belief that their condition could be worse should they attempt to confront their oppressor (Freire 2005 [1970], 36). Both Freire and Boal were also arrested, tortured and exiled from Brazil in the 1960s for their work which threatened to undermine the ruling junta's authority. Not all are willing to pay the price of resistance if that price is violence, incarceration, torture or death.

It should be noted here that the revolution Boal and Freire were engaged in was not the armed insurrection propagated by Marx. Rather, they were engaged in an ideational struggle, and their targets were social norms and institutions. As such, their struggle, which is carried on today by practitioners still using their ideas, is long and arduous. Their focus on humanizing liberation means that they have little use for weapons or violence. The change they hope for is incremental

and social. Its implications for governance are important. They would value not merely a shake-up in the representative bodies of legislature; rather, they would like a qualitative change in the norms governing governance itself.

3.3 Embodying Conscientization

With the TO group's attention focused on issues relating to oppression, subjugation and vulnerability, they transition into "image theatre." Participants use their bodies to create aesthetic images out of the reflections and ideas generated in their discussions about oppression. This can be done in different ways. In one exercise, called "complete the image," all group members contribute to a transient, rapidly changing image open to the creative interpretation of each participant. One person begins with a particular body image, like, for example, a person with firmly planted feet, standing tall, one fist clenched and resting on their hip, and the other hand open and outstretched as if in dialogue with others. Without describing their intentions, or interpreting their image for the group, a second individual enters into the space, and embodies their own image, somehow relational to their interpretation of the first. In the example above, the second person raised their forearms to the side of their head, and placed themselves directly in front of the other's open hand, so it looked like they were being hit by the first person. Then, a third participant would enter the scene, replacing the first one, now creating an image which is a response to the second. In this way, the image is continuously moving and changing, though not necessarily moving in a logical, progressive, or continuous sequence. It should happen rapidly, with participants intervening spontaneously, based on initial reactions, and without thinking about how their image will be received, interpreted, or judged. Time doesn't allow for

critical thought, because if I spend time thinking, someone else will enter the image, changing it before I get a chance to do so.

Another important form of image play involves “sculpting.” This is less spontaneous, less fluid, more carefully thought out, and craftily designed. In my experience, small groups of between four and seven participants were tasked to think together about our own experiences with oppression. We were asked to recall an incident from our lives where we felt oppressed by another. Alternatively, some facilitators invite people to sculpt an image based on the feelings generated in one of the previous exercises, such as Colombian Hypnosis. The one requirement for an image of oppression was that the perpetrator had to be palpable and identifiable. It couldn’t be some abstract concept like patriarchy, or an entity like the state. It had to be an incident in which the oppressor was palpable. This requirement was always a difficult task for me, because I know that I carry a lot of privilege, and that the forms of oppression which I have experienced pale in comparison to the gravity of indignation experienced by others’ humiliating and dehumanizing incidents.

I was struck by this reality while working with an ethnically diverse group of Americans in California. The racism they encounter on a daily basis affects their relationships, their social groups, their access to education and employment, even their ability to walk or drive a vehicle in certain neighbourhoods. This group decided that the issue most pressing to them at the time was the social stigma around inter-racial relationships. The idea that they faced barriers in their lives because of social norms governing inter-racial relationships was striking to me because I live in an inter-racial relationship, and have mixed-race children. To sort out the logistics of our relationship, my partner and I had to think about international migration and its implications;

cross-cultural communication, and the inevitable complications resulting from different worldviews; and the occasional racist incidents that one would encounter, whether we lived in Canada, India or elsewhere. Our young naivety was strong enough to offset the inconvenience of racialized discrimination, and bigots' intolerance was nowhere on our socio-political radar. My cultural bubble was momentarily ruptured by this group of people who decided collectively that intolerance of inter-racial relationships was not only *an* issue but *the* uniting issue, grave enough to commit our collective conscience and intellectual resources to. My privilege was even more deeply entrenched than I had realized.

The gravity of racialized politics in the southern United States would become clear to me as that workshop progressed. At the time, the government of Arizona was in the process of legislating a ban on Ethnic Studies programs in its public schools and banning books which it deemed potentially "subversive" or fostering race-based "resentment" (PBS 2013). Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was among the banned books. In this context much of our workshop discussion was centred on cultural rights, and our actions were geared towards overcoming racial prejudice.

The images created by our group during this workshop were based on the controversies sparked when mixed-race couples meet in the presence of others, in public and private spaces, including urban courtyards, restaurants and family homes. To sculpt one image of oppression, our participant sculptor depicted a social encounter where a mixed-race couple entered a bar, and the white server interacted positively with the white partner, while snubbing, ignoring or intentionally disassociating with the person of colour. Another sculptor created a similarly racialized scene in a domestic setting, where family members of a young black adult rejected his

white lover, based solely on her skin colour. In other workshops I attended, groups chose to focus on homophobia (in Ohio), the right to gender equality and girls' education (in Kolkata). In all of these cases, the oppressors were members of society at large, and even family members; not agents of the state. This is important to our understanding of governance, as a phenomenon pertinent to individuals and communities, not exclusive to the realm of governments, or others who occupy seats at the tables of administration. The work of contesting oppressive norms happens in the everyday lived experience of the oppressed. They are working to alter their own politics in the face of oppressions inflicted by governing institutions, sure, but also social institutions, like families, places of employment, within religious groups, etc.

While TO workshops tend to follow patterns that are generally progressive from games and image theatre through to "forum theatre," there is considerable variety in the ways they materialize, depending on the facilitator. Having embodied images of oppression as a group, members will discuss the images they saw. There is an exchange of ideas between the scenario as it was sculpted (how oppression *is*) and the ideal type for that kind of scenario (how it *could be*, once oppression is overcome). These ideas could come from the original sculptor, or they could come from the other group members. It is not even necessary that the original sculptor expresses the intent or implications of their work verbally. The opportunity to take individual ownership over an experience shared with the group is often not provided. Group members are invited to interpret the image from their own perspective. They are also invited to "dynamize" the images, adding movement and sounds, as their work progresses towards the short skits more commonly associated with the term "theatre."

It is through this exercise of embodied imagery that participants hone their theatrical skills and aesthetic sense. Exaggerated facial expressions, hand gestures and body language convey the sculptors' thoughts without the use of spoken language. Their work expresses their "theatrical truth," or, an honest portrayal of the reality of the oppressed, through their eyes. "If the oppressed see their oppressors as monsters, then it is monsters that we should show, even if this means developing a visual style more akin to expressionism than realism" (Jackson 1992, xxii).

This approach to oppression is part of TO's liberating praxis. By communicating through embodied imagery and nonverbal improvisation rather than through conventional methods, participants can break free from the confines of the familiar. The collective nature of the task at hand requires that participants dislodge themselves as the centre of their attention in order to uphold a group-based orientation. This change, in turn, restructures the dynamics of power that they perceive in their relations. In the process of doing so, they democratize the way they analyze relationships, give meaning to their world, and redefine their identity relative to the institutions under which they have been oppressed. Participants are able to change not only the substance of what they know, but also the way in which their knowledge is generated. TO participants become active participants in the co-creation of relationships, and the processes of defining their experience and envisioning alternatives. These methodological innovations make theatre of the oppressed distinct as an embodied form of socio-political analysis. Yet, TO's liberatory praxis involves more than analysis; it also engages participants in rehearsals for behavioural change.

3.4 Enacting Emancipation

Building upon the analysis which emerged out of the games and images, TO participants then transition into interactive dramatic forms. They take the oppressive incidents they have experienced, and the aesthetic images they have created out of them, and work these into skits depicting complex scenarios of oppression. “Forum theatre” is a format for role play distinct for two reasons. Primarily, its plot is rooted in the experience of the performers, who have developed the scenes, the aesthetics, the characters, props, and other dramatic elements collectively. They own the story collectively, and have equal stakes in the outcome of the performance, as their experiences take on new meaning, and the context is transformed by the participants onstage. This is an inherently inclusive, participatory and democratic way of developing and delivering a performance. Rather than performing a script written by a playwright, and performing as per the directions of a particular individual (such as an artistic director or a theatre’s producer), the performers retain control over the entire production process.

Secondly, forum theatre is democratizing in the way it removes the invisible “fourth wall” which traditionally separates the audience from the performers on stage. In a forum theatre performance, the audience views the performance one time in its original entirety as spectators. Then the actors will perform the piece again, but the second time through, spectators are invited to stop the play when they identify an opportunity for the protagonist to respond differently to their scenario. So, for example, if in a play a character is being racially profiled by a police constable, and in the original script she resisted by shouting obscenities at the police, a spectator may have a different way of responding to such an incident. That audience member is invited on stage to become the protagonist, replacing the original actor on stage. The possible interventions

she can offer are numerous, but they should be realistic. All the accompanying actors on stage should respond as true to their characters as they can. In the scene of racial profiling by police, the protagonist could (for example) stand up for her rights, informing the officer that she is protected against such unwarranted harassment, and daring the constable to either arrest her, or let her be free.

Intervening in the action on stage in this way, the spectator becomes a “spect-actor,” and the performance transforms from one where the audience passively consumes the product on stage, to an interactive forum in which the actors and audience engage in dialogue through performance. This is one of the more widely employed mechanisms of the theatre of the oppressed. Among those polled in my research, 92.5 percent of practitioners use forum theatre, making it almost as popular as the roster of TO games, which 93.4 percent of practitioners use, and substantially more popular than other formats such as “legislative theatre” and the “Rainbow of Desire” (used by 28.3 percent and 55.7 percent of practitioners respectively). Image theatre is also widely practised, by 88.7 percent of respondents.

One possible reason why my data indicate a preference for games and forum theatre is that a majority of the practitioners in my survey are teachers (62.1 percent). As such, forum theatre (and the theatrical games) provides an entertaining model for engaging in discussion, working through complex issues, and building people’s capacity to respond creatively and critically to challenges. Almost all practitioners (99 percent of my survey respondents) use TO activities because they believe it offers an effective set of tools for engaging in the work of social change. It is forum theatre, with its role plays and improvised interventions meant to alter the course of oppression, which practitioners enthusiastically dub “rehearsal for revolution” (Boal 1985

[1979], 141). Interestingly, only 51.4 percent use the tools because they find them to be “generally enjoyable for participants.” Practitioners, and the communities with which they engage, take their work seriously; the role of the joker is not so much to bring comic relief or entertainment to a group, but to (di)facilitate problematizing analysis and creative conscientization.

There are theatre troupes which use forum theatre as a method of interactive drama production separate from a more comprehensive theatre of the oppressed praxis. Similarly, there are teachers who use TO games and forum theatre as a method of instruction because they offer interaction and entertainment, which can enhance the educational experience for students. They “forum” plays in order to get participants involved in a discussion about the issue in question. However, by removing these mechanisms from a more comprehensive approach to critical praxis, I argue, their work risks compromising its revolutionary potential.

I encountered one such scenario at the 2012 annual conference of the Mennonite Central Committee’s Ontario chapter. It was held in the “heartland” of the War of 1812, just outside of Fort Erie, in the year of the war’s bicentennial anniversary, on the weekend of Remembrance Day. This spacio-temporal context was set intentionally to foster critical reflection on Mennonite identity and *dharma*.² MCC had commissioned the Theatre of the Beat to engage the community in a dialogue on Mennonites’ pacifist identity using theatre of the oppressed techniques.

² Here I borrow the Buddhist concept which is often translated as religious duty, but which is better understood more broadly as the norms governing ethical conduct, virtues or vocation.

Convening at the Niagara Community of Christian Schools, I was struck by the grandeur of the campus: a vast expanse of picturesque land on the banks of the Niagara River. I perceived an air of elite exclusivity even before I learned that its international boarding students each paid upwards of \$38,000 a year for their education.³ With such a prestigious institute as their host, it was hard for me to imagine how the Mennonites gathering at the conference would identify as “oppressed.”

Theatre of the Beat is an emergent social justice theatre troupe whose members have grown up in Mennonite communities. The “beat” in its name carries a dual meaning, referring both to people who are oppressed or “beaten down,” and also to Jack Kerouac’s spiritual iteration of people who are committed to living out the teachings of the beatitudes. By both of these definitions, the “beat generation” evokes a politically astute conscience, and a commitment to a common social good. The troupe is distinct in the way it values community engagement over spectacular extravagance. They modestly aspire to keep performances “intimate,” and to build community relationships through their tours, by staying in people’s homes and sharing meals with locals, rather than merely performing for people (Theatre of the Beat 2012).

Their productions are definitively political, though most have been “agit-prop,”⁴ not interactive forum theatre. *Commemorate!*, the performance I went to experience, was their first experiment with TO techniques. Commissioned by MCC for the purpose of the conference, they hoped it would provide an innovative way to examine the norms and institutions governing Mennonite ethics, and to navigate some of the complicated issues which arise when certain

³ This is the amount payable for the 2013-14 academic year, as calculated on the Niagara Christian Community of Schools International Student Application Form http://www.niagaracc.com/sites/default/files/2013-14_international_applicationhow_to_apply.pdf

⁴ Agitation propaganda

religious values come into conflict with mainstream Canadian society. Two of the group's members were familiar with Boal's theatre work, and had spent some time recently with Toronto's Mixed Company in order to observe TO techniques in practice. A third member of the troupe was just reading Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* at the time of the conference.

Their intentions with the production were twofold: to add an alternative perspective to Canada's collective memorialization of the War of 1812; and to open a space of dialogue among pacifist Christians about how they can oppose war and militarism pragmatically. They used the mechanisms of forum theatre to engage the community in dialogue through spect-acting. After viewing the prepared play in its entirety once, the audience was advised that it would be repeated, but that they were invited to stop the drama as it unfolded, so they could offer an intervention which might alter the course of events for the play's protagonists. Those present were generally enthusiastic about the process, and encouraged their peers who stopped the action to volunteer interventions. The performance did generate discussion among participants, and their effort was commended afterwards by conference attendees who appreciated the opportunity to reflect creatively on the implications of their beliefs and behaviours.

However, at least two factors compromised the work's revolutionary potential. First and foremost among these is that control over the performance's means of production was retained by the troupe rather than shared among all participants. By opening the performance to forum theatre interventions, and turning spectators into spect-actors, they did effectively remove the "fourth wall" which traditionally separates the actors from the audience. This constitutes part of forum theatre's democratizing nature. However, merely "forum-ing" a play does not make it liberatory. The audience had not invested their energy in the creative process. Rather, they were

rendered consumers of its finished product, even if a few among them got to play with the direction of the plot by interacting on stage as spect-actors.

One of the troupe's members wrote the script of the play based on the research of a particular historian. It was intended to represent the experience of Mennonites living in Canada historically, and dealt with complicated problems still resonant today. In one of its more compelling scenes, two civilian characters were discussing the implications of providing care for an "enemy" soldier. One reasons that she can support the soldiers without supporting the war, while the other dismisses her logic, challenging her, "You think there's a difference?" Desperate to make sense of her role in the conflict, she pleads, "there has to be!" The scene draws attention to the complex ways in which civilians may be implicated in support for war and militarism, even if indirectly.

While it intended to *represent* a collective experience, it was not developed through a collective process. In a participatory theatre of the oppressed workshop, issues would have been discussed, problematized, and experiences would have been shared, leading to a collective conscientization and collaborative co-creation over which all participants would have shared ownership. In a TO workshop a group of oppressed people work together to decolonize knowledge, reclaim their humanizing identity, build relationships, engage with one another in new ways, all the while under the constructive scrutiny of their peers. This process incrementally alters the nature of their relationships and behaviour. They identify as a collective group, and seek to alter oppression at an institutional scale. Their efforts are rooted in principles of justice and solidarity.

Commemorate! offered opportunities for collective reflection. However, it was an individual effort, detached from the praxis that substantive TO processes offer. The most it could hope for in terms of social change is that participants were influenced by what they saw on stage, and took steps to alter their individual behaviour in the way they go about living their faith. This is not a regrettable outcome. On the contrary, this persuasive effect is what many artists aspire to achieve with their work. However, it is also not a particularly novel outcome, as it could have been achieved by any form of communication (artistic or not) which is emotionally compelling or intellectually persuasive.

A second problem which undermined the performance's revolutionary potential was the restraint imposed by its brief time slot in the conference programme. The collaborative work that goes into the preparation and performance of forum theatre productions consumes time. The task of working through spect-actor interventions, each of which requires a depth of discussion, deconstruction, criticism and change, is arduous. Theatre of the Beat had less than two hours in which the congregation would view the play and engage in performative dialogue through spect-acting. They did this twice through the duration of the conference: one time for the youth caucus, as part of an evening of entertainment which also included music performances, and once for the general assembly. In each case, the interactive components of the performance were so brief that they amounted to a mere preview of what could be accomplished if the medium was used with more rigorous intentionality. The revolutionary praxis of theatre of the oppressed requires an investment in time and a commitment to long-term normative struggle. In my experience, liberation cannot be condensed into a brief lesson. Participants may be able to

exchange ideas by “forum-ing” a play,⁵ but this act alone offers no instant emancipatory gratification. Liberatory praxis requires an investment in time, and a commitment to collective struggle.

In the workshops I attended that did invest in the liberatory struggle, facilitators spent long hours engaging with people in reflective analysis. Their processes of conscientization were interwoven with a quality of praxis as constructive as it was critical. Analysis of the scene being performed in a forum theatre piece requires deconstruction of the characters’ actions and thought. Facilitators isolate protagonists and antagonists in a scene to query their thought processes, and challenge their logic. For example, the oppressor can be put on the “hot seat,” where workshop participants are free to demand answers to their questions about the character’s motivations, intentions, goals, morals, etc. In this way, their integrity as an oppressive antagonist is challenged and strengthened. Having gone through such an interrogation, it is presumed that they would be able to perform their role authentically, and be better equipped to engage with the variety of interventions coming from spect-actors. Their job is, after all, to enact the role of the oppressors as realistically as possible.

The protagonist’s character is also strengthened in this way. As a composite of several people’s experience, the protagonist’s identity is infused with not only multiple individual sources of knowledge, but also the shared experience of the collective who defined it. The character is backed by the solidarity of the group, whose members are empathetic, and who envision themselves on stage as they relate to the ordeal being enacted. Scenarios of oppression

⁵ TO practitioners commonly use the word “forum” as a verb. It refers to the way in which forum theatre is open to spectators’ interpretations. Spectators are encouraged to stop the play and intervene on stage by replacing the protagonist and enacting an alternative improvised script. Boal termed this mechanism “spect-acting.”

are rich in complexity. Spect-actor protagonists strengthen their own capacity to respond to oppression by going through the motions on stage, a process which does act as a rehearsal for the scenarios that they will encounter in “real life.”

Boal argued that even though TO engages participants in fictitious scenarios, their interactions are concrete, and their interventions equip them with real experiences that they can build upon (1985 [1979], 141). I also maintain that this work is more than mere rehearsal, but I locate the potential for behavioural change in a different place. Whereas Boal sought interpersonal behavioural changes, I focus on norms and institutions as the scope for change. I have little hope that the oppressed can escape interpersonal violence in the immediate future. Change as I see it manifests at institutional levels. The very act of coming together as a collective, building solidarity, creating new knowledge is revolutionary, and I will discuss each of these elements in greater detail in chapters four, five and six.

Regardless of where one locates the scope for performative change, whether it is in the concrete behaviour of individual participants, or somewhere in the abstract realm of social institutions, the work of TO praxis does not end with the conclusion of a forum theatre exercise. It is incumbent upon participants to carry their experience outside of the workshop setting, interpreting and engaging the world through a new lens, keenly alert to the myriad ways in which they are affected by and implicated in various forms of oppression. Praxis is about a sustained movement towards change, which informs and is informed by conscientization. This approach to change is why it is important for TO practitioners to pay close attention to the intentionality with which they design their workshops, structure their organizations, and relate with other justice-oriented movements. Praxis requires constant and critical reflection. By participating in

my research, practitioners had an opportunity to assess the liberatory commitment of their own work. As revealed in the comments of my survey respondents, this practice is routine for some practitioners, but not all of them.

If the MCC conference had any emancipatory potential at all, it was not in forum theatre's capacity to rehearse participants' responses to incidents of oppression. Rather, the conference's general orientation towards evaluating one's identity and resisting mainstream cultural norms, particularly as they pertain to the relationship between Christians and war. Theatre of the Beat's use of role play, and the audience's practice of imagining their place in the scene enacted on stage, was conducive to critical reflection. However, the kind of conscientization TO engages in, as I have argued, is not merely about instigating a kind of intellectual revelation, or an "A ha!" moment. Rather, it is about the intentionality with which one's experience is interlocked with one's reflective processes, and the ways in which the creative energy generated through this process is used to build new relationships, challenging dominant norms and co-creating new ones. At best, the forum theatre session was connected to a larger project of liberation for the Mennonites assembled at the conference, but it was not revolutionary in and of itself in the way that theatre of the oppressed can be.

So, while Theatre of the Beat's performance of *Commemorate!* was undoubtedly political theatre, it was not necessarily liberatory. To be fair, the troupe achieved its goal with the production; it was an innovative format for engagement with their community. By all accounts afterwards, the performance was well-received, and it generated discussion amongst conference attendees. It served its purpose in the context of the Mennonite Central Committee's Ontario annual meeting. However, it lacked the collective qualities that a sustained movement for

change would have embodied. Having dislodged the mechanisms of conscientization from an integrated and intentional praxis, their work had an emancipation deficiency. Some TO practitioners refer to applications like this one as “Boal lite” (Fieldnotes, Oxford, OH, June 30, 2013).

Chapter 4

Experiential Interchanges: Networking for Solidarity

TO practitioners create spaces for experiential interchanges which empower individuals to envision and enact alternative relationships and institutions. By moving between communities of oppressed people, and adapting to their changing contexts, they are growing a provocative network of solidarity which strengthens participants' collective potential to affect normative change, and breathes life into movements for justice. The network of solidarity generated by TO practitioners manifests the emancipatory potential of human rights, and offers an alternative understanding of social organization. Through theatre of the oppressed, those who are traditionally pushed to the margins of society are able to enact their full human dignity, their capacity to engage in political dialogue as empowered and autonomous individuals, and participate in governance by redefining the norms constituting social institutions.

In this chapter I demonstrate that the TO network is less about flows of information than it is about fostering relationships, and cultivating a consciousness of the interconnectedness of people and experience. Of course within the network, stories, feelings, experiences and ideas are exchanged. But more important than the fact of these exchanges is the way in which these exchanges create opportunities for new directions, catalyze new feelings, and give birth to new forms of knowledge. The relationships generated through TO instigate new commitments among participants to work collectively towards change. Whereas other scholars conceptualize network relationships as a means to an end (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Slaughter 2005), my research demonstrates that the relationships between oppressed individuals in the TO network are ends in and of themselves. Networks enhance the cohesion of movements, build collective

identities, and strengthen the solidarity among participants. This cohesion is revolutionary because, as we saw with the domestic worker in the previous chapter, an individual in isolation lacks the conscientization required to resist oppression.

My research is not a quantitative account of the TO practitioners, nor is it a qualitative assessment of their networking logistics. Rather, it is an inquiry into the complex interplay between individuals and communities, all of whom have experienced varying degrees of oppression. They are working not only to resist the most dehumanizing consequences of society's oppressive institutions; they are pooling their energies, sharing their experience-based knowledge, and co-creating responses to oppression, as they seek to transcend it.

I characterize the relationships in TO communities as solidary, empowering and outreaching. Practitioners who engage in this form of work do so intentionally. Their work is focused less on strengthening the TO network itself, and more on working collectively with oppressed communities to resist injustice and empower the afflicted. I examine the networking activities of a sample of TO practitioners from around the world, and then I focus on particular manifestations in South Asia and in the Ukraine. I find that practitioners' connections to the global network are generally stronger and more intentionally maintained than their network connections at more local scales. I also find that for most practitioners, their primary concern is in engaging with communities of oppressed people, while developing the TO network itself is a secondary concern.

By organizing amongst themselves, and broadening the scope of their work's applications, TO practitioners and participants manifest a form of political organization with qualities distinct from mainstream organizations. They prefigure an inclusive model for engagement based on

horizontal relationships of power which can overcome the democratic deficit that unsettles so many. It is clear that people often feel isolated, neglected and/or alienated from governance institutions. A sense of powerlessness can easily pervade the human conscience. When it is facilitated with appropriate intentionality, and sufficient attention is given to the politics at play in people's experience of oppression, theatre of the oppressed can work as an antidote to political apathy and alienation.

Theatre of the oppressed provides a participatory and inclusive framework for social and political interaction. It enables people to participate in governance in meaningful ways; not only to approve or disapprove agendas determined by an elite political or economic class, but to engage in the very definition of agendas, and in the construction or contestation of norms and ideals. For those concerned with civic engagement, an empowered electorate, and improving the quality of democracy, TO offers a model which is distinct, even revolutionary. But, for those interested in protecting their position in the conventions of modern political society, the idea that there is a model which is empowering for subordinates is threatening, and therefore problematic.

4.1 Interpersonal Connections

My introduction to theatre of the oppressed came through Hector Aristizabal, when I was an undergraduate at King's University College in 2005. Hector is a torture survivor, exiled to the United States from Colombia. He uses applied theatre as a vehicle for socio-psychological therapy, collective healing, community building and political protest. Our local chapter of the School of the Americas Watch (SOAW) invited Hector to give a public workshop on torture,

militarism, and the movement to close the “School of Assassins.”⁶ This workshop was part of our group’s preparation for its annual pilgrimage down to Fort Benning, Georgia, where thousands gather annually outside of the school’s heavily guarded gates to mourn the deaths of those victimized by atrocities carried out by the school’s graduates, and to protest the training of “counter-insurgency” combatants from Latin American militaries. Hector took our group through a captivating performance of his solo *Nightwind*. He followed this performance with an interactive workshop where he introduced methods from a body of work which he called theatre of the oppressed.

The combination of his powerful performance with his charisma as a person, the participatory ways in which he engaged our group in embodied dialogue, and the urgency of the issues he was addressing made for a stimulating experience. I was intrigued by the concept of theatre as a form of knowledge, and a method for doing dialogue. I was eager to learn more about Hector’s work; I was excited by the prospect of fostering normative change through performance activism. I would meet Hector at subsequent SOAW demonstrations, and at performance festivals in New York and Ohio. It was by following his work that I eventually began to discover a wide-ranging community of theatre activists and scholars engaging with repressed and marginalized communities across the world.

I recall my encounters with him because they are indicative of the interpersonal nature of the work that TO practitioners do not only to resist oppression and transcend injustice, but also to build community and solidarity. These are not unintended, inadvertent or fortuitous outcomes of

⁶ Formerly known as the School of the Americas, this Department of Defense training facility in Fort Benning, Georgia, was renamed the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Co-operation in 2001, in response to pressure from the SOAW’s longstanding campaign to have the facility held accountable for its role in several Latin American atrocities. See www.soaw.org.

their work. In my theory, these are constitutive components of liberatory praxis. The degree to which practitioners pursue this outcome varies. Some do it more intentionally than others. I find that those who embrace a global perspective, and who are informed by a critical understanding of justice (as opposed to adversarial vengeance), are better able to create qualitative change in social institutions than those who reproduce or reinforce the “us” versus “them” dichotomy. TO’s revolutionary potential, as I have argued, lives in its capacity to change the cultural institutions which reproduce oppressive relationships.

4.2 The Cultural Logic of the Activist Network

As an organizational form, the network can embody a new way of doing politics. The conceptual framework of the network enables a departure from organizational logics which have privileged institutionalism, centralization and hierarchy. A network can create horizontal relationships of power rather than hierarchical ones; free and open exchange of information; autonomy; consensus decision making rather than majoritarian; and empowered participation from grassroots, rather than top-down power commands. However, networks can also reproduce existing social structures. As such, it takes an intentional commitment from network organizers and participants to uphold anti-oppressive principles, to enact progressive relationships, and to embody alternative social institutions.

Arturo Escobar distinguishes between dominant and subaltern networks by comparing the ways in which information flows through each. Whereas mainstream news media, on television and in print, operate hierarchically with top-down models for dissemination of information meant for popular consumption, activist networks organize, communicate, and share information dialogically. “Hierarchies entail a degree of centralized control, ranks, overt planning, tendency

toward homogenization, and particular goals and rules of behaviour; they operate largely under linear time and tree-like structures. The military, capitalist enterprises, and most bureaucratic organizations have largely operated on this basis. Meshworks, on the contrary, are based on decentralized decision making, self-organization, and heterogeneity and diversity. Since they are non-hierarchical, they have no overt single goal” (2008, 273-7).

Juris (2008) makes a similar qualitative assessment, although he doesn't use the term “meshwork” to distinguish activist networks from traditional ones. He argues that whereas capitalist networks strive for efficiency and profit maximization, and government networks try to secure order, activist networks have a different *raison d'être*. They are committed to egalitarian relationships, democratic process, and assign equal value to the ends and means of their objectives. Given these qualitative characteristics, the concept of meshwork denotes the activist network as distinct from hegemonic networks. I will use term meshwork because it provides better analytical utility for my purpose here.

A meshwork of activists is not as easily identifiable as mainstream corporate networks or inter-governmental organizations. It may not manifest as a united entity, nor as an actor with agency in discourses on governance. It is not primarily a structure or a container within which ideas are circulated; it is the communicative interaction and discursive flows which constitute the activist network and its cultural logic. As Juris argues, “debates *about* social movement networks largely *constitute* social movement networks themselves” (Juris 2008, 298, emphasis in original). Networking, therefore, or the fostering of relationships, the movement of ideas, and the collective generation of new knowledge is counter-normative. It is through networking relationships that participants are able to link to others, share ideas and experiences, collaborate

on various initiatives (including resisting oppressive social norms), create new forms of knowledge, and build solidarity.

Sites of activist meshworking serve as incubators for counterhegemonic norms. This approach was evident during the Occupy movement of 2011, when the need arose to co-ordinate actions, distribute information, and strengthen solidarity in order to resist police efforts to infiltrate and evict Occupy camps. InterOccupy emerged as a network for communication between the various general assemblies located in cities across North America and elsewhere in the world. Representatives of numerous sites communicated through telephone conference calls, rotating the host and agenda-setters of each call. Participants upheld the principle of horizontality so that they could ensure their growth spread outwards like a rhizome, rather than vertically. Participants from any Occupy group could request a call, and no one group's agenda was given priority over others'. In strengthening the movement's cohesion as a whole, it was important to also protect and enable separate groups to maintain their autonomy (Donovan 2012). What is striking about their collaborative efforts is that there were upwards of 100 participants on a given conference call, representing more than 40 Occupy sites around the world. Most of the collaborators had never met in person.

Marina Sitrin (2012) argues that this manifestation of horizontality is the most innovative concept that came out of the Occupy movement. The ways in which it opens up new relationships, creates spaces for inclusive dialogue, protects vulnerable members of a group, and seeks to build consensus rather than pushing for majoritarian rule are novel organizational principles. She notes that the concept did not originate in the Occupy movement, as it had already gained currency in the Zapatista movement, and in the Argentinian movement of 2001.

However, Sitrin argues that given the widespread popularity of the Occupy movement, and the ways in which it normalized horizontality, consensus decision making, and the notion of all people's right to participate, Occupy established that these norms had been institutionalized among new social movements.

So, the organizational structure and characteristics of meshworks are distinct, empirically observable phenomena. The ways in which they challenge dominant norms, and enact alternative relationships, make them intriguing entities from a governance perspective. They are complex webs of overlapping and inter-connected political spaces. I was eager to examine the meshwork dynamics at play in what I perceived to be a globalizing meshwork of theatre of the oppressed practitioners. A meshwork's constituent parts can be difficult to identify and study because membership may be unclear and fluid. For the purposes of my study, I considered any individual or group using theatre of the oppressed tactics to be a practitioner of theatre of the oppressed.

Despite their commitment to prefigurative change, and the way activists define their principles, I am wary of the human-ness of a meshwork's individual members, and the pathological tendencies of power. Without taking the meshwork's liberatory potential for granted, I examine the cultural politics at play in the workings of the TO meshwork, in order to determine whether or not, and if so, to what degree, there is a formation of privileged relationships, development of hierarchies (even if informal), etc. Theatre of the oppressed is anti-oppressive by definition, so I needed to test the degree to which its practitioners embody its anti-oppressive principles. By studying the cultural politics of its networking, I sort through its conflicts and controversies, and critically examine what appears to be a unified social movement.

4.3 On the TO Meshwork in My Study

While most scholarship on TO has focused on its applications for education and activism, and on its dramaturgical qualities and potential, few have studied the nature of practitioners' networking, and the implications for globalization, governance, or our understanding of networks. Ferreira and Devine (2012) use Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) metaphor of the rhizome to describe the expansion of theatre of the oppressed around the world. Forced "underground" because their work was perceived as subversive to the ruling military junta, both Freire and Boal were arrested and exiled from Brazil, enabling their influence to travel, and giving rise to the emergence of "offshoot" organizations around Latin America and Europe, then in other parts of the world. Their account of TO's mobilization does shed light on some of its network dynamics, but they do not critically analyze the work of these offshoot organizations or their foundational principles.

We can take for granted that theatre of the oppressed catalyzes activism for social change. This is the purpose of all popular and political theatre (Filewod, 239). My study is an examination of what (if anything) TO practitioners and their communities of engagement do to develop their meshwork, define their principles, build solidarity, and manifest alternative social institutions. I hope to answer the question, to what extent do TO practitioners prefigure the anti-oppressive changes it aspires to? I study the cultural politics of theatre of the oppressed in order to analyze more critically the nature of the oppression it deals with, its solidarities and conflicts, network unity and disjuncture, and its resulting implications for how we understand globalization, human rights, and justice. I find that practitioners work to dismantle oppression,

incrementally, by inserting themselves into communities where people experience oppression, and engaging at an inter-personal scale to contest behavioural and attitudinal norms.

Even though TO practitioners share a common set of practices, and work towards similar goals, there is considerable variation in the political convictions of these individuals.

Contentious politics can disturb collective unity. This happened when the annual conference of the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed organization, which was to be held in Toronto in 2010, was hastily relocated to Austin, Texas after a conflict between the local planning group in Toronto and the PTO Board could not be resolved. In a statement on PTO's website, the organization cited logistical concerns for the conference, issues with "fiscal responsibility," and, more importantly for my study, "the degree to which PTO should preserve some of its core conference features." The statement explains that "though we all definitely share the desire to promote critical thinking and social justice, ... [we] disagree about how to go about realizing that mission in the form of a conference. We feared that we would not be able to reconcile enough of those disagreements in time for us to offer a conference that honors our responsibility as stewards of the PTO membership's resources" (Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed 2010). This conflict demonstrates that a meshwork consists of challenging relationships, and friction generated by competing ideas and personalities. While internal conflicts pose challenges to a meshwork, they don't undermine its identity as a meshwork. On the contrary, I define a meshwork as a constellation of heterogeneous actors using a common set of practices to work towards a common goal. Arriving at this goal inevitably requires having to navigate through contested politics. It frequently is, as I have stated, the debates about the meshwork, and the contentious relationships within it, which constitute the meshwork itself.

It is clear to me that the globalizing collective of TO practitioners constitutes a meshwork. They share a set of practices in common, and are connected by varying degrees of strength and conviction to the conceptual framework developed by Freire and Boal. Many make intentional efforts to remain in contact with their colleagues, even organizing conferences and other events where practitioners can gather, share ideas, collaborate on projects, and disseminate their work, and debate critical issues relating to their work and their ontological beliefs. Some TO practitioners feel “excited to be part of a global movement of theatre of the oppressed”, while others are apprehensive about the nature of their network’s coherence. One Toronto-based practitioner laments what he perceives to be a lack of strong local networking efforts in his area, despite the presence of several practitioners nearby (Fieldnotes, Berkeley, June 1, 2012). I have since identified 23 TO practitioners working in the Greater Toronto Area. One has taken a leadership role in an international TO organization, and engages regularly in its networking activities. Others say they have an interest in staying connected to the global meshwork, but can only occasionally acquire the means to attend its events. Yet, even if they cannot attend network events, most TO practitioners still make an effort to follow other practitioners’ work, and engage with meshwork peers through social media and other means.

My data make it clear that TO practitioners feel a sense of meshwork connectivity. However, to determine the characteristics of their meshwork, and to identify how meshwork dynamics manifest in different socio-political contexts, required joining the meshwork in order to experience its relationships first-hand. Having attended meshwork locations across North America and South Asia, I have found that globality of the TO meshwork is more strongly identifiable than many of its local manifestations. This finding is interesting because, as I will

argue in the next chapter, the issues and struggles that participants engage with are definitively local in nature.

4.4 A Sample of the Global TO Meshwork

Using web searches, attending various conferences and festivals, and following certain social movements, I was able to locate roughly 1000 people, in different parts of the world, who identify as TO practitioners. I invited 550 of them to participate in my study by responding to a lengthy and in-depth questionnaire which was accessible online. These practitioners were based in 69 countries. I received positive responses from 130 of them, providing me with a wide-ranging sample of individuals based in North, Central and South America, Europe, Africa, and across Asia and Australia. Respondents included a mix of educators (including teachers of all levels of education, from early childhood educators through to college and university professors, and teachers of non-formal adult education), theatre people (actors and directors), community organizers and activists, and comparatively fewer social workers and community development professionals. A strong majority of participants in my study identify as “experienced” TO practitioners: 87 percent have experience as organizers and/or facilitators of TO workshops and activities.

Most TO practitioners actively network for the purpose of growing their practice, keeping current on the latest developments in their field, equipping others to use TO mechanisms, and, most importantly, reaching out to people who can benefit by engaging in their practice. While some TO practitioners work independently, or incorporate TO into a career such as social therapy or teaching and prefer to not engage with the TO community at large, most (72.5 percent) are affiliated with organizations, even if these affiliations are vaguely defined. Among

those who said they are not formally affiliated with any organization, several noted that they do attend the events of TO organizations, meaning that they have connections to these network sites, even if they do not consider themselves full-fledged “members” of that organization. Forty percent of the practitioners in my survey identify as members of the governing body of a TO organization, which indicates involvement in formal networking and governance. Eighty percent attend events such as workshops, performances and conferences pertaining to the theatre of the oppressed.

I used this survey to inquire about practitioners’ networking activities at various scales: local (within the community), municipal (within the same municipality, though perhaps not within what one defines as their “local community”), regional, national, continental and international. My purpose was to determine whether I could argue that practitioners’ interaction with others at the local level was more or less active and intentional than at other scales such as national and international. I examined a few different forms of networking, including basic communication for the purpose of sharing information, opportunities, ideas or resources; attendance at common meetings, workshops, conferences, etc.; and collaboration together on TO-related initiatives.

I determined that while practitioners do generally interact more frequently with local colleagues than national or international, the difference was not as stark as I expected it to be. About a quarter of all respondents reported that they interact on a weekly basis with other practitioners within their locality, while 14 percent reported that they never interact with others at the local level. Almost half of respondents interact with other local practitioners a few times per year. At the national scale, three quarters (75.3 percent) of respondents interact with their TO peers a few times per year, but only five percent reported regular weekly engagements with

others within their country. Extended globally, 3.7 percent engage with others on a weekly basis, while 68.3 percent interact a few times per year, and 18 percent say they never interact with practitioners from other parts of the world. The most common comment I received when it came to questions about practitioners' interactions with others in their communities was that they would love to engage with others, but that there aren't any other practitioners that they know of. Some admitted that while they knew of other practitioners, and they agreed that networking in terms of building relationships with them, sharing information and collaborating together on projects would be desirable, they regret that as of now, such initiatives have not been taken. It is, after all, up to its constituent individuals to make a network happen. The presence or absence of strong networking is a reflection in part of the ambitions and intentions of the individuals who make up the network. Because it is an intentional relationship, and doesn't occur inevitably, it requires not only a commitment, but real work and resources.

The frequency of intentional networking between practitioners is lower than I expected. One of the things I observed during my study of TO practitioners and their inter-relations is that they tend to place a proud emphasis on the cohesion of their group, and the tightness of the bonds between practitioners. Boal prioritized the concept of "multiplication," or, the responsibility of the practitioner to involve others in their work, and train others so that the liberatory praxis could spread as far and wide as possible. Given this intention, I expected to find more local networking than I did.

Meshwork connections are looser than I expected them to be. What this reveals to me is that practitioners commit more of their energy to engaging with community groups in their praxis, than in trying to develop the TO network, or increasing the capacity for TO-based dialogue by

training others. The mission to multiply the practice by training and supporting multiple practitioners appears to retain less urgency than the work to engage with communities to resist injustice and transcend oppression. The purpose of TO, after all, is to contest cultural norms and nourish social change. Its concern is centred on the experience of the oppressed. Consolidating a position for TO practitioners in society, or mainstreaming TO methodology are secondary concerns. As such, TO networking is geared towards collaboration with multiple stakeholders who share a common goal; their goal is generating social change, not reproducing a specific form of theatre activism.

In addition to this normative reason, there are also pragmatic reasons why TO networking takes a back seat to other forms of community engagement. My survey revealed that most practitioners do not earn enough income from their TO work to make their practice sustainable, or even to make ends meet. As a result, they often have to work at other jobs, apply for grant money from various agencies, and stretch their limited resources as far as they can. This is draining not only on material resources and money, but also on people's time. It requires a real sense of vocation to commit to building up the meshwork, particularly when it does not fall within one's job description. A teacher who uses TO as a tool for classroom instruction, or a theatre director who is responsible for producing performances that attract audiences and generate revenue has no professional obligation to devote their energy to network establishment or enhancement. It happens to be that many who do have the capacity to nurture the meshwork are employed as teachers and academics, and have access to infrastructure such as schools and universities, or other community agencies with which they are affiliated. They can use these facilities to host gatherings, conferences, workshops and performances. They can also use their

paid time to accomplish the required logistical work. Performance artists, in contrast, who often struggle from month to month to make ends meet, but who are passionate about TO as a model for dialogue and social change, are less likely to have access to the financial or institutional means to grow the meshwork.

For most practitioners in my study, the scope of their praxis is wider than their TO work. Only 13.9 percent of respondents can claim that they earn their entire living from the theatre of the oppressed. Most practitioners are able to integrate TO into their work, even if only half of the time, as was the case for 61.4 percent of respondents. It is noteworthy that while some of their work may not employ TO elements directly, all of their work is influenced by TO's emancipatory theory; they fully embrace TO's principles, and are committed to upholding its norms in their social and political behaviour, whether or not it involves specific TO activities.

Ninety percent participate in forms of community dialogue other than theatre of the oppressed. This finding means that while they appreciate the value of TO mechanisms, they may not always provide the best or most appropriate methodology for engaging with a community. To be sure, almost all practitioners (99 percent) find TO's applications to be effective for engaging in work geared towards critical social change, but only in the "right contexts," a qualifier to which 78 percent of respondents admitted. What constitutes the "right context" for TO work is regularly debated by practitioners. My survey respondents offer some variables, including the attributes of the facilitator, such as appropriate leadership skills and their ability to hold the group space in a way which is conducive to reflection and dialogue, and sensitive to the physical and emotional boundaries of participants. Practitioners are of conflicting opinions on important issues like how inclusive a TO group can be, and what (if any) role allies can play.

Some believe that only those who share an oppression should participate in the work towards their own liberation. Others find conceptual space for allies who may not have experienced the same oppressions, but who empathize with their cause, and wish to support their struggle solidarily. I will come back to intra-meshwork variance and conflict later in the chapter.

4.5 Participant Observation

My survey was sufficient for providing a snapshot of meshwork dynamics. It provided some data on trends, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours characteristic of TO practitioners, and of their meshwork as a whole. This information gave some width to my study, but not much depth. In order to dig deeper into the intra-meshwork politics, it was key to my research to learn the practice, and experience it as an engaged participant. I did this by attending training workshops, performances and conferences, and engaging directly through performances and dialogue with a diverse array of practitioners at varying stages in their experience and careers. This enabled me to develop a much stronger understanding of the practice and the politics at play within the different locations in the meshwork. It also gave me a rich understanding of the issues which cause tension within the community, allowed me to build trust with practitioners, and nourish relationships that would otherwise have excluded me.

As an example of the kind of exclusive knowledge I was able to access, I was invited into an online community that I had not found through prior searches. An invitation-only Facebook group of TO practitioners, called ToPnewmedia Forum had several hundred member users when I was invited to join it in 2012. Its numbers fluctuate as new members join and others leave. As of February 24, 2015, it had 1049 members. It has emerged as a primary site for daily interaction among TO leaders dispersed around the planet. The idea to locate a global

communications hub for TO practitioners on Facebook was born at Muktheadhara IV, a biannual showcase of theatre of the oppressed hosted by Jana Sanskriti in Kolkata. Its stated intention is to initiate a forum for discussion in which TO practitioners can use the Internet “in a liberating way” to share information and ideas, and discuss their practice (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ToPnewmedia/>).

ToPnewmedia Forum supplanted a prior effort to organize an online portal to the globalizing TO network in 2007. A website operating under the name International Theatre of the Oppressed Organization (www.itoo.org), and hosted by the Dutch organization Formaat, was a hive of activity between 2007 and 2010. It featured profiles of TO practitioners and organizations in locations all over the world, TO-related news updates, and a forum for discussing issues relating to TO. Its maintenance tapered off through 2011, has since been neglected, and much of its content is now outdated.

In addition to the ToPnewmedia Forum, there are other Facebook groups which have been established for the purpose of TO networking. A publicly-viewable group simply called Theatre of the Oppressed has almost 2500 members (as of March 19, 2015). It was started by a well-known British TO company called Cardboard Citizens. With more active members, it has more daily activity than the ToPnewmedia Forum, though many contributors post information to both sites. Another closed Facebook group was started in 2013 by an enthusiastic group of Sri Lankan practitioners in the wake of another international TO festival. Ambitiously named World TO Movers, this site quickly attracted some 400 international users, but content is dominated by news from the Sri Lankan theatre scene. It has yet to attain the global prominence suggested by its name, and the frequency of its users’ updates has steadily declined.

The work involved in networking is labour-intensive. Whether creating a central site for the exchange of information, like a website, or organizing a convention at which people will meet, network sustainability requires resources. A social media platform like Facebook offers advantages over a privately-hosted domain, such as ITOO.org. Facebook is provided free of monetary cost to users, and is generally accessible (even if access requires an invitation from an existing member or administrator). The logistical advantage of a Facebook group to the TO meshwork is that it requires minimal oversight or administrative burden. Anyone can submit content to the group, including articles of interest, events, and other links and comments; it is sustained by the collective effort of its active users. ITOO, on the other hand, required the labour of specific individual(s) with web publication skills. Further, the site administrators needed to keep current with knowledge of all the latest news, events, contact information that was featured on the site. Such a task is a burden to an organization with limited resources, and which is more concerned with the inter-personal work of theatre of the oppressed than with the promotion and sustenance of the TO meshwork.

The nature of the TO meshwork is distinct. It is not a single issue advocacy network exerting political pressure on governing bodies in the way that Sikkink (1998) theorizes. In conceptualizing the role for activists in governance, Sikkink argues that they come together on single issues to press international institutions to change legislation, giving rise to normative change. This can happen by widespread appeal, and pressure by popular support, or it can occur by her “boomerang” method. The TO meshwork does not engage in protest, legislative movements, etc. It has no centralized body with authority to speak on behalf of others. It is diffuse. Its members create spaces for community dialogue out of which such mobilizations may

or may not evolve. Their primary focus is on creating spaces of empowerment, where oppressed people can assemble, share their knowledge, challenge societal norms, claim their full human dignity, and enact alternative relationships. Normative change in the view of TO, is aimed at social and political institutions, but is approached at the interpersonal scale.

4.6 TO Meshwork Manifestations in India and Nepal

It was in India and Nepal where it became apparent to me that the TO meshwork has a global orientation which is stronger than its local manifestations. To be clear, TO practitioners have proven to be remarkably committed to the solidarity work that they do at the local level, and I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of their commitment to the communities they serve. The battles they fight are distinctly local manifestations, even if they are connected to broader phenomena like misogyny or labour exploitation. And while practitioners do engage in some intentional networking at various scales, as a whole, the meshwork is characterized by a distinctly global identity.

I had several reasons for wanting to explore the nature of the TO community's South Asian manifestations. Primarily, I have a particular interest in anti-oppression work in India. I have committed several years to poverty eradication and literacy work there, and pay close attention when I hear about innovative approaches to development there. When I discovered that there was a theatre of the oppressed organization boasting tens of thousands of members in India, I was immediately intrigued. Jana Sanskriti was founded by Sanjoy Ganguly, a political activist who used theatre to interact with the "illiterate but educated" peasants living in the villages around Kolkata. His theatre activism evolved into a distinctly Indian incarnation of TO as organically and inevitably as Boal's did in Brazil. By that I mean Ganguly began as a partisan

activist using agit-prop theatre to generate support for various political causes among Kolkata's peasant underclass. Ganguly was forced to confront the hypocrisy of his methodology in much the same way as Boal was. Despite his best efforts to break down the divisive barriers between artist and audience, privileged and excluded, his theatre activism remained an elitist project in that all of the thinking and acting, all of the power, belonged to the scripters, actors and directors. The audience was diminished, told what to do, how they should feel and how to empower themselves. It was only after Ganguly's exposure to the theatre of the oppressed that Jana Sanskriti was itself liberated, and that they could really work against oppression (Ganguly 2010).

I met Ganguly when I participated in his three day training workshop in Berkeley, California, prior to the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference in 2012. PTO hosts its annual conference in the US, serving as one of the busier and more formally-organized clusters in the global TO meshwork. Conference organizers were abuzz with raving reviews of Ganguly and his work in India. Working full-time with 30 theatre troupes in the villages around Kolkata, and boasting tens of thousands of affiliate members, Jana Sanskriti is considered to be the world's largest TO organization.

Jana Sanskriti organizes a biannual festival called Muktheadhara which serves primarily as a showcase of its members' theatre-based activism. At this festival, JS hosts dozens of international TO practitioners who travel from all corners of the world to engage in workshops and discussion groups, making the festival also an embodiment of the global TO meshwork. Ganguly takes advantage of the presence of international activists to leverage their collective political power, staging street demonstrations meant to catch the attention of the local government. I attended the festival with a colleague from India's private education industry in

December 2012. Jana Sanskriti hosted us and 47 other guests for three weeks, in an impressive community effort that required providing food and accommodation to all visitors, and delivering a dense itinerary of activities including daytime workshops, evening performances, and group travel which crisscrossed urban Kolkata and surrounding villages.

With a participant entry fee of €500, the festival was cost prohibitive for most Indians; the number of Indian participants external to JS could be counted on one hand. This is a reflection of the organization's interests, which include showcasing their work to the global TO community, and using international relationships to leverage political clout. Jana Sanskriti welcomes and accommodates Indian guests to its festival, but its efforts to develop or sustain a national, subcontinental or regional network are less intentional than its efforts to keep current in the global TO meshwork.

Given Jana Sanskriti's reputation among prominent practitioners, I expected it to have a sort of gravitational pull for others in the region. I met with one Delhi-based practitioner who was identified by Ganguly as a member of his network. He runs a labour rights organization, occasionally participates in the Muktheadhara festival, and had collaborated with Jana Sanskriti on some projects in the past. I was surprised to learn that he hadn't used TO mechanisms in his labour rights activism in the two years preceding my meeting with him. Managing a full-time organization overburdened by so much work, he found that the people his organization served could ill afford to engage through TO mechanisms. The urgency of day to day labour rights struggles depletes the organization's resources, leaving little in the tank when it comes to engaging in the long-term work of changing societal norms. His organization had used TO exercises when they could advance their immediate goals, however, their commitment to TO as a

methodology is merely utilitarian. This divergence of interests resulted in his gradual disconnection from Jana Sanskriti's TO network (Fieldnotes, Delhi, January 14, 2013).

I also met with another Delhi-based practitioner whom I expected would have been a much more prominent leader in the Indian TO community. She trained with Augusto Boal in person, and has published on the theatre of the oppressed. I presumed she would have a keen commitment to the methodology, like other notable practitioners I have met, and that this would have resulted in her efforts to grow her practice. However, though she is connected to the global TO meshwork, she has no interest in developing an India-wide or even a Delhi-based network of practitioners. She is actively engaged in several human rights and environmental justice movements, in different parts of the country. While she may contribute TO-based activities on occasion, she scoffed at the idea of pursuing the growth of TO for the sake of TO itself. For her, TO is a means to an end, not an end in itself (Fieldnotes, Delhi, January 12, 2013).

In Nepal there is evidence that some relationships within the subcontinental network are actually hostile rather than solidary. I was surprised to learn that some practitioners in Nepal feel excluded from Jana Sanskriti's network, despite having closely collaborated on works in the past. Practitioners from two separate theatre troupes in Nepal noted that they feel stronger alliances with Europe-based TO practitioners than with others in South Asia. They were introduced to theatre of the oppressed by field workers from European nongovernmental development organizations. The Nepalese practitioners identify first as theatre artists, and second as agents of social change. They use their art to draw attention to and generate discussion on social concerns, sometimes using TO techniques. However, their primary concern is not as much about justice in Nepal as it is about institutionalizing Nepal's burgeoning theatre industry.

They hope that their government will recognize theatre as a national institution, thereby legitimizing their work, and (hopefully) making some form of financial support available to them (Fieldnotes, Kathmandu, February 11, 2013).

It is interesting to me that while Indian TO practitioners maintain strong networks in the local areas where they work, as they build relationships with groups who identify as oppressed in various ways, the networking activity between TO practitioners at the local or national scale was not as integrated or cohesive as I expected it to be. I expected that practitioners' common interest in using TO as a mechanism for change would generate solidarity, which it does. However, I assumed that this solidarity would extend outside of the immediate communities of engagement, developing and strengthening strategic ties between communities. In this sense, the Indian TO meshwork cannot be considered a cohesive movement towards specific social or political changes. Rather, it is better characterized as a heterogeneous assemblage of individuals, each committed to anti-oppressive praxis, to be sure, but serving their communities in relative isolation.

Collaborative political campaigns have been attempted among TO practitioners in India. In 2006, under Jana Sanskriti's leadership, groups from 12 Indian states convened as the "Federation of Theatre of the Oppressed" for the purpose of consolidating their collective political power. The group opposed what they saw as marginalizing economic development plans, including the creation of special economic zones, and other industrial developments which invariably dispossessed and displaced poor and rural peasants. Concerned that the state was serving private capitalist interests at the expense of the common good, the Federation denounced the government's "liberalizing" policies and projects, calling for a pro-poor approach to

development (Federation of Theatre of the Oppressed, India 2006). This federation's political presence has declined since its inception, as its members are preoccupied with other pursuits. Practitioners more readily look to international relationships, valuing more their connections to the global meshwork of TO practitioners and leadership.

Between 2012 and 2014, over the course of my research in South Asia, I found more intentional, dynamic and engaged networking in Bangalore's emergent TO scene. One of its catalysts is Radha Ramaswamy, a retired teacher determined to use her TO training to intervene in myriad incarnations of oppression within her social circles. She founded the Centre for Community Dialogue and Change, and co-ordinates an email list-serve through which TO practitioners in different parts of India share ideas, events, publications and other items of interest relating to theatre of the oppressed. By good fortune I was able to attend a few different TO events that Ramaswamy was hosting and collaborating on during the weeks I stayed in Bangalore.

Some of the network activity happening in Bangalore at that time was spun off of Jana Sanskriti's Muktadhara festival that I attended in Kolkata (as described above). Bangalore-based practitioners connected with international visitors coming to the country for Muktadhara, collaborating on workshops before and after the festival. Perhaps the most exciting of these was Sahabhaga, a festival of "participatory performance" at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology. It was opportunistically timed. Organizer Evan Hastings was able to attract a handful of Muktadhara-bound travellers to stop in Bangalore and share their performance-based work with the community at Sahabhaga. It was an opportunity for students to showcase their work, for Bangalore's theatre professionals to establish and strengthen their ties, and for some

members of India's TO network to convene with colleagues from other parts of India, and from elsewhere in the world. Ramaswamy also facilitated one workshop at this festival.

She effectively built on the relationships generated through these meetings. In November 2014 her organization hosted the "Diversity Dialogues," a national conference for TO practitioners. She attracted practitioners from all over India, including some whom I had met in Delhi, some she had met through the Sahabhaga festival in Bangalore, and some of the leadership of Jana Sanskriti in Kolkata. With an agenda full of engaging discussion, and featuring the experiences of practitioners spanning the country, this conference served as a comprehensive examination of TO in India. Featuring a cross-section of Indian experiences, it was more representative of the "national" TO scene in India than Jana Sanskriti's recent Muktheadhara festivals. It remains to be seen whether the organizational initiative generated through the Diversity Dialogues can be sustained, and whether it will result in a "re-emergence" of a nation-wide TO network in India. The potential for such a network clearly exists.

Not all of Bangalore's TO work manifests in collegial environments. Whereas the Sahabhaga festival and Diversity Dialogues were assemblies of theatre artists and activists for social change, where participants had similar ontologies, the Mentor Conclave convened in a much more corporate and institutionalized environment. It was hosted on the campus of the Indian Institute of Science, in a plush auditorium with deep red velvet seats, and where participants connected to the campus Wi-Fi signal to tweet the event's proceedings from their iPads and smartphones. There I found myself immersed in a part of India I knew existed, but had never actually experienced before. I was attracted by one workshop which stood out to me as potentially contrary to the enterprising mission of the conference and its attendees: Ramaswamy was

offering a workshop on the “Importance of Theatre in Education.” TO is a distinctly critical, politicizing and confrontational process. As such, I thought it would work to undermine the efforts of conference organizers to consolidate the power and wealth of elite private schools and enterprising industries. It was worded benignly in the conference program. Without using the controversial language of the “oppressed,” Ramaswamy identified her problem as one of education reform: she proposed that in order for education to be the “life transforming experience” it has the potential to be, the teacher needs to be sufficiently prepared to take on the role as agent of change. She offered a skillset using “participatory theatre” which could put teachers in this position. Knowing that Ramaswamy was a TO practitioner, and reading between the lines of its conference program, I attended the Conclave in order to observe Ramaswamy’s workshop.

I attended with an air of emancipation skepticism. I had a gut feeling similar to the one I experienced while attending the event at the private Christian school in Ontario that I mentioned in the previous chapter. That is, I struggled to imagine how it is that its participants could identify as oppressed, given their apparent privilege. My experience of primary and secondary education in India had been largely rural, remote, and in underserved communities. I had volunteered as faculty at a small primary school in the Eastern Himalayas between the years of 2000 and 2003. Many of my colleagues at the school were undereducated parents, whose commitment to the school was justified not by their need for a career (since most were peasants, who survived off agriculture, or had small enterprises in their village); they were there because they were convinced that their children needed a better education than they had. But their school was impoverished. Its infrastructure included little more than the walls and roof that it was built

of. No multimedia, not even posters on the wall. We used chalk sparingly. The problems were plentiful, and need not be dwelled upon here. But, suffice it to say that after visiting some wealthier private schools, which included glass in the windows, libraries of well-kept books, sports facilities, music and drama programs – everything I would expect for world class education – the meagre village school perched precariously on the terraced hillside of the Himalayas seemed a very different reality.

At the Mentor Conclave, I entered into an entirely different educational realm. The conference was an opportunity for the elites of India’s private education industry (including private school owners, heirs, and administrators) to mingle with industry executives from educational film companies, book publishers and suppliers, and even some international governance professionals. A couple of Bollywood celebrities were added into the mix for good measure. I was able to find only one conference participant who enthusiastically embraced the revolutionary potential of Ramaswamy’s pedagogy. Even if they enjoyed the theatrical games, few would appreciate her effort to alter the power dynamics between teacher and student.

Vidya Shetty confirmed the pedagogical perspective of the conference in her opening address to attendees: it is the role of education to “give information to children.” While this hegemonic epistemology serves the purpose of publishers and film producers capitalizing on commoditized education, it is counter-intuitive to the anti-oppressive educator. Freire’s entire pedagogy is a critique of this mainstream “banking model” of education, as it limits the agency of the student to a passive recipient of the teacher’s knowledge deposits. Freire argued that this model was oppressive because it dehumanized both the teacher and the student. Re-humanization would require framing education as a relationship between teacher and student in which both have

identities, knowledge, and experiences to exchange. The teacher is as much a learner in any given pedagogical scenario as the student; both continue to discover themselves, have new experiences, and grow both intellectually and socially throughout the process of education. While the teacher may very well have to give some information to the student, Freire's pedagogy acknowledges and facilitates the reality that the teaching relationship is a reciprocal exchange; the student also gives to the teacher. Knowledge is co-created.

4.7 Meshwork Discord

For all of the good that meshworks can do, they are not necessarily empowering or enabling; they can also be suffocating and repressive. I gave some indication of discord in the relations between TO practitioners in South Asia, who may not be as strongly linked as the idea of a network suggests. I have found that TO practitioners are fully engaged with the communities they serve through their work. One of the core elements of their praxis is the way in which they create bonds of solidarity. By engaging in group-based TO activities, oppressed people are able to develop new relationships and come to understand their experience of oppression in new ways. This new understanding changes the nature of the social context in which oppressed people live. Not only are the oppressed able to locate their experience in a wider socio-political context, but they become aware that they do not endure their oppression alone. More importantly, they have the power to respond to scenarios of oppression differently than they had prior to their engagement with TO.

While the relationships between practitioners and the communities they serve are fostered with solidary intentionality, I found that at times, the relationships between practitioners

themselves can be considerably less intentional. They are generally collegial and solidary, but can be counterproductive, and even reckless at times.

The global TO meshwork is comprised of several collaborative clusters. I participated in a few of them through my research, including those found in India and Nepal, and the PTO organization in North America. A variety of clusters, or, spaces in which practitioners come together, allows for diversity of opinions, personalities, ideologies and practices. Such variety is important for meshwork resilience. Two prominent Canadian TO practitioners prefer to keep their distance from one particular assembly in the meshwork. They find that some practitioners adhere to a form of Boalian “orthodoxy” so strongly that their meetings tend to stifle creativity and innovation. Both of these practitioners tell a similar story, one which is shared by others; their experiences are not isolated incidents. They give full credit to Augusto Boal for the way his theatre of the oppressed influenced their own practise. They valued their personal relationships with Boal before he died; both note that Boal supported their work, commending them on the ways in which they adapted TO methods to their various contexts. However, because they ventured outside of oppressor versus oppressed binary discourse, experimented with more complex scenarios, and sought to alter the behaviour of the oppressor in addition to the oppressed, Boal insisted that their innovative work was indeed their own, and that they should not give Boal too much credit as an originator. Further, they both maintain that Boal advised them to give their work a different name.

One of these practitioners is Vancouver-based David Diamond. He runs a full-time organization using theatre for community engagement. He calls his modified practice “theatre for living.” In Diamond’s experience, he noticed that the dichotomy of oppressors and oppressed

was causing damage in indigenous communities of Canada, not for the way in which it was re-traumatizing victims of oppression, but in the way that it was tearing apart the social cohesion of the community. By isolating an oppressor within a community, rather than working to understand the complex ways in which one's actions and choices are constrained and determined by conditions and context, and the ways in which the so-called oppressor is also oppressed in many ways, the community suffers. Whereas communities require collective healing and building processes, the binary oppressed versus oppressor perspective caused division, polarity and vengeance in the community. So, he had to modify the work in order to change the way in which the world is viewed (Diamond 2012).

Diamond is convinced that his work exemplifies the revolution which so many people and communities need: to change the lens through which we see the world. He advocates a move away from the "us versus them" view of political posturing, towards something that he vaguely describes as "organic". What he means is something that better recognizes and appreciates the complexity of the world we live in, the decisions we make, and the way in which people define their interests. It is not the revolution that Boal or Marx had in mind, but it's one that will change behaviour, change relationships, and change the social and political nature of our institutions.

The conflict between Diamond's approach to social transformation and others' approaches is ontological. The same conflict manifested between Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire in their understanding of society's power structures. Boal had a state-centric understanding of power and oppression. For him, the oppressor was the dictatorial regime. Oppression was embodied in the brutality of security forces which would arrest, torture and "disappear" political opponents

and dissidents. Boal believed that this kind of power, once possessed by agents of the state, would not be relinquished voluntarily. Change would have to come from popular resistance; justice required a revolution. As he developed the mechanisms of the theatre of the oppressed, he allowed only for the protagonists to alter their behaviour. He firmly believed that in the plays his group workshopped, the antagonist's behaviour should not be altered because this would amount to enacting "magic," like a fairy-tale. Freire's understanding of oppression was more nuanced; he was concerned primarily with the reproduction of oppressive cultural norms, and the ways in they perpetuate through social institutions.

What counts as authentic theatre of the oppressed, where the boundaries of practice should be set, who can be included in TO processes, and what the limits of innovation within the parameters of the practice are, are frequently debated questions in TO circles. In Diamond's opinion, all of forum theatre is "magic." He distances himself from Boalian orthodoxy, arguing that all of the relationships in which we find ourselves can be opened to critical scrutiny. To emphasize this distinction, he calls his work "theatre for living" rather than theatre "of the oppressed." Marc Weinblatt and Cheryl Harrison (2011) take a similar perspective in their modified practice which they call "theatre of the oppressor." In their work, they focus on people with privilege, the ways in which they may be complicit in oppression, and the ways in which they may be able to alter their behaviour to become allies of the oppressed.

Boal did eventually expand his perspective and alter his practice. He had to adapt his mechanisms to European societies where he found that the nature of oppression was unfamiliar to him. In Europe at the time, people were more concerned with internalized forms of oppression. Psychological oppression was more prevalent than physical. Europeans were

concerned about alienation, and internalized forms of oppression (for example, they couldn't act freely because there was the constant voice of society nagging in their minds, repressing their freedom, negatively influencing their perception and behaviours). Oppression there was not in the form of a brutal police force targeting certain people for their ethnic identity or political belief; it was more of a psycho-social form of oppression, leading him to adapt his methods to engage with the "Cops in the head."

Another point of contention in the TO community is the degree to which TO work should invest in aesthetic presentation. David Diamond and Hector Aristizabal are among the TO artists who argue that theatre's persuasive power lives in the aesthetics of its performance. Jana Sanskriti in Kolkata, Theatre for Living in Vancouver, and Cardboard Citizens in the UK describe themselves primarily as theatre artists and take pride in their aesthetics. They market their work to theatre crowds, selling tickets and seeking legitimation from theatre critics and consumers. But this is not representative of all TO practitioners. Some are more concerned with conflict resolution, community building and healing, or inclusive processes of development, and lack the artistic expertise or resources to enhance aesthetic presentation. A survey respondent from Uganda commented that in their communities they do not have the "luxury" of committing their scarce resources to aesthetic perfection (Malloy, 2012, Theatre of the Oppressed Survey, Unpublished raw data).

Diamond argues that there is something fundamentally creative about the theatre-making process. It is invested with a politicizing power not present in other forms of political activism. Even though TO may not employ professional actors, it does pay attention to aesthetics, imagery, body language and sensory perception. It is essential for such activism to have good intentions

and good politics, of course. But intent and motive alone are insufficient to engage in creative processes. If these qualities were enough, then activists could just produce and distribute flashy flyers, or engage in sloganizing propaganda campaigns. But there is something more to theatre of the oppressed. Its aesthetics can facilitate dialogue and build community.

Debate over issues such as ideology, methodology, definitions and identity does not harm the overall meshwork of TO practitioners and communities, even if participants find some particular meshwork locations to be more receptive of their work than others. On the contrary, this plurality makes the meshwork what it is: a diffuse, decentred, and dynamic community comprised of a diversity of individuals engaged in various incarnations of practice. Its constituent members are connected to one another in horizontal relationships of varying strength. Discord between individuals is not dysfunction; the friction caused by ideas running up against each other sparks innovation, and can give new meaning to ideas. Even if a practitioner feels excluded from one space within the meshwork, they can be an integral part of another, and a vital member of and contributor to the meshwork as a whole.

Dialogue is essential to healthy communities, and it is a fundamental component of the theatre of the oppressed. TO is not about competing monologues. This quality distinguishes it from other forms of political engagement, which too often amount to competitions of opposing monologues. This is the nature of the meshwork. It is distinctly not a homogenizing or assimilating program. What unites practitioners, and what defines the TO meshwork, is their common set of anti-oppressive principles, most important of which may be solidarity.

4.8 Meshwork Solidarity

Some discord is to be expected in any form of social organization. People are attracted to some individuals or ideas, and repelled from others. I offer the previous examples of minor discord simply to demonstrate that TO practitioners are humans with flaws, and that there are anomalies to the norm of solidarity which otherwise characterizes TO relationships. The theatre of the oppressed meshwork is wide enough, and features enough diversity, that it absorbs such ideological variation and intra-meshwork tensions without compromising its overall dynamics.

What is more revealing about the nature of the global TO meshwork is the commitment to solidarity manifested in the relationships of its practitioners. I find two characteristics of this solidarity distinct: first, practitioners tend to be concerned primarily with the quality of their relationships, and the principles upheld through relationships. The quantity of network connections, and the rate at which their practice is spreading is of less importance. Its praxis is based on face-to-face interactions, and its methods require substantial investment in time. The processes of relationship building, developing trust between members, and working collectively to create new forms of knowledge all take time. TO is not a protest held in a fleeting moment, nor is it a viral video or an image from the news that catches the attention of millions within days. Secondly, practitioners' attention is concentrated primarily on the lived experience of the oppressed, rather than on the TO network itself. So, while many do engage in the work of "multiplying" their practice (transferring their skills to individuals and communities in the hopes that their influence will spread), I argue that the core concern of the TO practitioner is more outward looking than inward.

Building solidarity is key to the praxis of TO. It gives strength to individuals by enabling them to identify as part of a collective, a group of people united first by their shared experience of oppression, and second by their resolve to overcome it. Without naming this phenomenon “solidarity,” Manuel Castells (2012) argues that this was how the social movements of 2011, including Occupy and the Arab Spring (among others), were able to generate momentum and enhance their political power. “Individuals formed networks, regardless of their personal views or organizational attachments. They came together. And their togetherness helped them to overcome fear, this paralyzing emotion on which the powers that be rely in order to prosper and reproduce, by intimidation or discouragement, and when necessary by sheer violence, be it naked or institutionally enforced. From the safety of cyberspace, people from all ages and conditions moved towards occupying urban space, on a blind date with each other and with the destiny they wanted to forge, as they claimed their right to make history – their history – in a display of the self-awareness that has always characterized major social movements” (Castells 2012, 2).

What is important for me here is how the people’s engagement with these networks galvanized individuals, and built a base of support from which they could collectively envision alternatives and enact mass demonstrations. This is the process of building and institutionalizing solidarity. Theatre of the oppressed does its solidarity building in different ways. It relies on face-to-face encounters as participants work inter-subjectively to give meaning to their experiences. Some of it occurs in public, but some of it necessarily in private. While challenging dominant norms, creating new ideas, and working towards progressive social change, the TO meshwork doesn’t claim to be forging a new public space. Rather, through their

engagement in theatre of the oppressed activities, participants change the way they interact within cultural institutions.

The capacity of theatre of the oppressed to foster relationships of solidarity is a central tenet of its humanizing mission, and foundational to my theory of how TO praxis exemplifies an approach to anti-oppressive institution building. TO effectively alters the identities of its participants, and re-orientes their conscience from one of isolated individualism to one of collective mobilization. By understanding their experience as shared rather than isolated, and by collaborating with others to rescript their responses to oppression, participants are empowered to act as political agents in ways they had not prior to their engagement with the theatre of the oppressed.

What solidarity means, who can engage in it, and how it can manifest in people's relationships are questions which practitioners grapple with; lacking consensus on these issues, practitioners follow their own convictions. They recognize the contentious nature of these issues, and embrace the notion that creating space for dialogue is a core function of not only their own work, but also the TO meshwork itself. Their work amounts to a form of resistance against marginalizing and dehumanizing socio-political relationships, but TO practitioners do not attempt to define alternatives. They transform social institutions from spaces of monologue into spaces of dialogue, but leave the task of articulating alternative institutions to the creative ingenuity of participants. Participants can, should, and do define their own interests and aspirations. It is the task of the TO practitioner to create the conditions necessary to enable the solidarity building necessary to support oppressed people's vision for change.

For Boal, his most profound experience with solidarity was the moment which led to his abandonment of agitation propaganda theatre, and caused him to experiment with more authentic forms of dialogue. He was adept at rebel-rousing theatrics. He would sloganize so persuasively that in one defining incident, a peasant called him on his revolutionary rhetoric, and expected Boal and his peers to take up arms in their struggle against the state. Boal then realized the propagandistic nature of his work, and was forced to reconsider what solidarity meant. He recalled Che Guevara's words, that "solidarity means running the same risks," and realized that he was in fact not willing to run the same risks as those he was propagating to the peasants. Boal had to backpedal, and reconsider how to act in solidarity without actually putting one's life on the line. From that point onward, he was careful not to advocate for causes he himself couldn't stand for, and not to encourage any actions that he himself could not stand behind (Boal 2013, 1-3). The incident led to a sharpening of his critical conscience, as the sloganizing support for armed insurrection was easy, and may even allow for small victories for the oppressed, but would not work to transcend oppression in the way he and Freire believed in.

The TO practitioner is well equipped to build solidarity because their skills readily adapt to new and different contexts. Wherever there are people suffering an injustice, theatre of the oppressed can be used to engage oppressed people in the work of transforming their situation. Marc Weinblatt comments that the TO is versatile because its facilitators don't need to have a rich understanding of the context in which they are working. This is because the experience is known and understood by the people living it. So, rooted firmly in anti-oppressive principles, and equipped with moderation skills, facilitators can insert themselves into complex problems. The oppressed own and author their experience. It is the role of the facilitator to engage the

participant in critical reflection and analysis, encourage the sharing of ideas, and the co-creation of new knowledge as a group works collectively towards resolutions. This is not naïve idealism; it doesn't mean that the outcomes of their work will be satisfactory. It means that those who are oppressed may become better equipped to respond to the oppressive scenarios they encounter going forward. Through conscientization, or the critical understanding of the context within which one lives, and praxis, or the collective work to re-interpret the world, building relationships of support and transcending the oppression which is produced and reproduced through social institutions, TO communities resist injustice by changing the politics of the oppressed. The people who experience oppression “know what they need to know,” believes Weinblatt. “We bring skills, compassion, and hopefully an ability to hold the space in a good way for the people to do the work that they need to do” (Weinblatt N.d.).

As a decentred, horizontal meshwork of autonomous actors, the TO network manifests solidarity in the way it responds to injustice. The network is even able to enact a form of emergency response, offering alternative interventions where social movements posit the discontent masses against the repressive force of the state. We saw an example of this in the Ukraine in the winter of 2014, when protesters occupied Kiev's Maidan to challenge what they perceived to be the corrupt, oligarchistic and oppressive rule of president Yanukovich's government. Hjalmar Jorge Joffre-Eichorn was a TO practitioner with experience in several conflict zones around the world who happened to be working with human rights activists in Ukraine at the time of the unrest.

Joffre-Eichorn mused to his colleagues that the movement in Ukraine might benefit by some international solidarity, and that maybe they could generate some by inviting TO jokers

(facilitators) to engage the public using theatre of the oppressed. It was only a few days later that the protests on the street escalated to hostile violence between protesters and government forces. Joffre-Eichorn's group responded by taking his thought and running with it, appealing to the global TO community for a "Joker Tsunami" to come to the Ukraine, engage with the discontent public, and work non-violently towards a better outcome for Ukraine. He recounts, "My activist friends called for more creative, horizontal and participatory ways of discussing the increasingly intractable state of affairs, including a seemingly growing number of disenchanted and tired protesters" (Joffre-Eichorn 2014). Within three days of their call-out seven practitioners committed to come to the Ukraine from different corners of the world, at their own expense, and dropping whatever engagements they were involved with at the time. Dozens of others sent their words of solidarity and support by email, and by video messages broadcasted online (Theatre for Dialogue 2014).

Six workshops were co-ordinated in five cities over three days, spanning the geographic entirety of the country. About twenty participants in each place assembled to analyze the crisis, to imagine collectively the Ukraine that they want to live in, and to rehearse strategies for transitioning their society towards a better ideal. Their work was billed by the organizers as "Theatre for Dialogue" rather than theatre of the oppressed. It challenged the civilians of Ukraine to question the actions of their government, the cultures of corruption and repression which were rife in their country, but also to question the devastation caused by the violent protests, and the government's responses to it. It is an example of an engaged civil society surviving despite the state's efforts to repress it; activists were resolved to challenge institutionalized norms, daring to dream of a better society. Visiting TO practitioners brought

with them a wealth of community building experience from conflict and post-conflict settings in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine, Mozambique, Rwanda and around Latin America. While serving as a form of protest against the Ukrainian state, it also provided a counter-normative alternative to adversarial protesters' street demonstrations. People attended because they were attracted by the prospect of community-based dialogue.

This response was organized spontaneously. The meshwork of TO practitioners does not generally prepare for international crisis interventions in this way. Yet, as individuals, practitioners are equipped with a skillset that they can adapt to conflict situations. In the absence of network infrastructure such as a governing body, a centralized communication system, or stock of financial and human resources ready to disperse on command, independent TO practitioners were able to respond to the call from one particular conflict area during their time of crisis. Using their own resourcefulness, and empowered by their solidary relationships, individual practitioners mobilized spontaneously to generate the support they needed. They were able to insert themselves into a conflict situation, offering communities an alternative way to diffuse a tense situation, and a collaborative way to envision and enact an alternative society.

One of the jokers who came to the Ukraine was Hector Aristizabal. He acknowledged that he didn't understand the conflict in all of its complexity, but that he followed the news, and had the maturity of intellect to know that there was more going on than a binary conflict between the pro-European Union capitalist democracy supporters and those who wanted to revert to Russian-style governance (Aristizabal 2014). Olivier Forges (2014) also responded to the call, and broadcasted a message of solidarity to the people. Recognizing the volatility of the situation, and the potential for people to feel animosity towards outside interveners, he wanted to ensure the

Ukrainian people of his intentionality as an anti-oppressive practitioner. He claimed to bring no political ideology; nor did he have a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the issues facing the people in the Ukraine. What he could offer was a set of tools for creative expression, reflection and dialogue that might be of help. He affirmed that theatre offers another language, a new way of interpreting the world by activating the senses in creative ways, allowing his groups to fill their collective intellectual space the people's experiences, stories, hopes and desires.

The purpose of the workshops was to create spaces for community dialogue at a time when tensions were escalating, and it appeared that the standoff on the streets, where protestors and government forces were clashing, was not achieving the kind of results they felt were needed. The conflict was not being transcended; rather, its hostility was escalating.

Workshop participants included mainly young adults, many of whom had a yearning to develop the democratic culture of Ukraine. By that term, Aristizabal says, they identified a need for spaces in which their voices could be heard. People want to be able to speak freely, without fear of incarceration or disappearance. But they also want to be able to dialog, because they recognize that there are others with different opinions, deserving of the same freedom. They were disillusioned by the predominance of a monologue-based political culture.

Workshop participants adhered to principles of dialogue and nonviolence, engaging with their peers using creative expression. Attendees were concerned about the condition of society, but had reservations about demonstrating in the streets. Some appreciated the opportunity to engage more actively and directly in dialogue, and had found that on the streets, in the protests, they had difficulty finding comfort, or believing that their participation was making any contribution to

change. Others felt empowered by their realization of TO's efficacy for engaging people in processes of behavioural change. Others found healing through the TO work, as the tensions in society arising out of the protests, and the government's crackdown against protesters had heightened people's anxiety, and even inflicted trauma on the people of Ukraine (Aristizabal 2014). For those participating in the Ukraine workshops, theatre of the oppressed effectively opened a forum for interactive engagement. People harnessed their creative energy, exchanged experiences and ideas, developed a collective consciousness, and worked together to co-create alternative visions of society. In these ways, TO serves as an incubator for social change, which appeals to people with the emotional discipline and intellectual maturity to participate in a collaborative and performative process.

The international jokers who responded to the call for a "tsunami" demonstrated that TO is an effective and transplantable model for community engagement. Its mechanisms for facilitating processes of critical reflection and analysis, and for working collectively to challenge norms and enact change, are applicable to groups in various social, political and geographic contexts. The principle of solidarity renders communities accessible, as oppressed people share an interest in liberatory change, even across cultural boundaries.

4.9 Solidarity's Gatekeepers

I demonstrated in my methodology that engaging in TO work requires an intentional commitment to solidarity, and that because of the colonality of academic knowledge production, the scholar is often viewed apprehensively by the oppressed, and their solidary allies. Anti-oppression work in general requires careful consideration of allyship, and places rigorous demands on solidary processes. It is not just academics who attract suspicion; so too do other

actors and activists whose motivations or intentions are unclear. TO communities are decentred and heterogeneous; their meshwork functions by organizing around common goals, but is not centrally controlled, and features multiple locations, organizational structures, etc. It is up to the meshwork's constituent individuals and communities to govern themselves, and protect their interests. In their effort to protect the interests of the oppressed, and to reinforce the intentionality with which they foster relationships of solidarity, some perform the role of gatekeeper to discern who is granted access to communities of engagement.

There was one group of proscenium actors who had come from the Middle East to join in the Muktheadhara Festival I attended in Kolkata in 2012. They had pleaded with festival organizers to grant them some financial concession so that they would be able to attend the festival. Because they were poor, and it would cause them great hardship to travel to India, they would make the effort to attend only if their participation fees were reduced. Organizers graciously accommodated them, allowing them to participate free of charge, rationalizing that it is more important to provide opportunities for the globalizing community to establish connections, foster relationships, and engage in collective reflection than to generate a monetary profit through the festival. These individuals were not theatre of the oppressed practitioners, but were interested in learning about the practice.

All of the other (approximately 50) international participants were being accommodated throughout the festival at family homes, rented flats, and community centres. My colleague and I had arrived prepared to keep the burden on our hosts to a minimum. We carried our own sleeping bags, and had our meals at the Jana Sanskriti headquarters, where staff of the organization prepared three meals a day for all festival participants. The logistical task to

accommodate so many people with so many needs (safe drinking water, food, mosquito nets, etc.) was considerable. Most of the guests, myself included, slept on a foam mattress on the floor. Organizers ensured that we had a sufficient supply of treated drinking water, as our bodies were not accustomed to the local tap water. Meals were hearty and plentiful, with special attention paid to vegetarian requirements, and accented by thoughtful compliments, such as the occasional cake to celebrate the birthdays of those among us at the time, and treats like ice cream.

I found the hospitality of our hosts to be gracious and generous. “Normalcy” for their community was disrupted by a whirlwind of activity for the three week-long festival, as participants assembled in their community to share in their work, convene, exchange ideas and experiences, etc.

The group from the Middle East was less than appreciative of the organization’s humble offerings, modest accommodations, and communal approach to life and solidarity. They arrived on site, had a look around, treated one of the hosts like a servant, and informed the leadership of the organization that they could not stay in the space offered to them, which they felt was “not fit for a human being.” Further, they refused to eat the food provided to them, and insulted the community members serving it (Fieldnotes, Kolkata, December 7, 2012). Their contempt for the community they were visiting was as appalling as it was dehumanizing.

The nature of the global TO meshwork is solidary, but not rigid. It is fluid enough to respond to challenges such as this one. Strong in its conviction to resist and transform injustice, it is also malleable enough to adapt to changing contexts, and porous enough to allow for the exchange of information into and out of it. TO practitioners have strong political convictions, but also are

sensitive to the needs and controversies which inevitably arise when working with diverse and differing groups of people. Their focus on fostering empathy means that even if one does not share the same experience, behaviour or belief, one can still understand the feelings and oppressions of another. An atheist, for example, can understand the religious person's belief in a deity, and feel empathy when this belief subjects a religious person to persecution and injustice, even if that atheist does not share the same religious conviction. Theatre of the oppressed does not endeavor to indoctrinate participants with a particular ideology. Rather, it creates spaces for the exchange of ideas and experiences, while upholding anti-oppressive principles of selective inclusivity, freedoms of opinion and speech, and freedom from discrimination and violence.

Feeling offended, angered, and perplexed as to how to respond to such challenging guests, the leadership of Jana Sanskriti approached the international guests as a collective, in the absence of the offending visitors. We had assembled in Kolkata in order to learn about the exciting work that JS does with oppressed, marginalized and disempowered people. The international participants present at the festival were acutely aware of the issues relating to cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. They also understood the complications which arise when trying to collaborate with people representing such a diversity of cultures, beliefs and experiences. Participants' general openness to the plurality of human experience and interpretation is as essential to the work of theatre of the oppressed as one's capacity to think critically. Theatre of the oppressed is not only about conflict resolution; it is also about creating opportunities to learn from one another, grow together, and bring the unique dynamism of each individual into the collective identity of the group.

Upon hearing about how the JS community was treated by this one small group of visitors, the larger group of festival participants felt a collective sense of indignation. Their elitist attitudes and behaviours seemed contrary to the spirit of the theatre of the oppressed, and to humanity in general. Ganguly wanted to discuss the matter, and come to a group consensus about how to proceed in dealing with the visitors: to allow them to participate in the festival, or to expel them from the group. How would we approach them, relate to them, interact with them going forward?

After conscientious deliberation, the group came to the decision that the visitors should be welcome to join in the workshop, not as outside “observers” or visitors, but as fully engaged participants. There is a general agreement among TO groups that observers complicate the work of theatre of the oppressed, bringing into a group a dynamic of spectatorship which compromises the emancipatory work which is supposed to be done. Knowing that one is being observed or evaluated can inhibit the ability of the oppressed to share freely, engage honestly. Establishing that a workshop environment is a “safe space” in which people can exchange and interact in confidence that they are among equals, and among empathetic supporters, enables participants to engage more openly and constructively.

On this occasion, the larger group decided collectively that it is important to ensure our own humanization (and hopefully that of the guests in question, too). We decided that this could be achieved by welcoming the small group, learning and growing with them together, dialectically, as equals. We decided that excluding them from the opportunity to interact and exchange ideas would only serve to further distance the perceived gulf between “us” and “them.” This raises a critical question for me: is it patronizing or condescending to position oneself as humanizing,

while reserving the right to determine others' corresponding merit? In this case, the visiting artists were traditional proscenium actors, not specialists in theatre of the oppressed. As such, the group approached the scenario as a teaching opportunity. The group wanted to engage with the visiting actors with the hope that it would be a mutually beneficial experience, an opportunity to learn and grow, and to share with them what it means to engage in the radical work of theatre of the oppressed. To be sure, the offending guests showed no indication that they had any solidarity with oppressed populations, nor did they demonstrate much empathy. On the contrary, they presented themselves as oppressors, making no effort to conceal their elitist attitudes, appearing to not even recognize their own positions in our community as problematic.

Excluding them from the group would have been a logical decision, as the rigors of solidarity allow for selective inclusivity. However, the collective made the decision that our solidarity could extend to participants whose presence might pose a threat to some people's dignity, if taking such a risk would enhance our own humanity. This humbling consensus was arrived at with the hope that the offending guests might experience some sort of anti-oppression revelation by participating as equals in our group.

The humanization of the oppressors in this case would have been a novel outcome for theatre of the oppressed. I noted earlier in this chapter that there is debate among TO practitioners over the role of the oppressor in a TO exercise. The majority of practitioners deal only with one side of an oppressive relationship: that of the oppressed. They focus on understanding and analyzing the experience of oppression from the perspective of the oppressed, to the exclusion of the oppressor. Efforts to build solidarity relationships, for the most part, also concentrate solely on oppressed people (and their allies, but generally not their oppressors). Any hope that Freire's

intention for a reciprocating humanization of both the oppressed and the oppressor is left to chance. That is, the oppressed engage in this anti-oppressive process to change the way they understand and enact their experience. However, their capacity to alter the behaviours or opinions of their oppressors is admittedly limited. It is hoped that the oppressed will be able to alter their own behaviour when confronting oppression in everyday life (outside of the context of the TO workshops). But for justice to prevail, the oppressed rely on the persuasive capacity of their own humanity, the protection of legal institutions, and the empathetic potential of their oppressor. As such, those looking for evidence that oppression has been erased from a cultural institution as a result of theatre of the oppressed will have difficulty finding any. I do not judge the merits of the method by this criterion; oppression, vengeance, competition and opportunism are traits of humanity that perpetuate historically. Instead, I measure the impact of TO by considering the ways in which those who experience oppression can change their political perspective, engage in new forms of relationship and institution building, and deconstruct the conventions of knowledge.

4.10 Prefiguring Institutional Change

As a theatre form, the theatre of the oppressed is dramaturgically distinct. Its interactive and dialogical qualities set it apart from other forms of political theatre. They are foundational to and inseparable from the model. Without this dialogical foundation, without an effort to create a space for the co-creation of knowledge, political theatre is propaganda theatre. This is not to dismiss the political utility of agit-prop theatre as a genre; its power as a persuasive medium is evidenced by the elite political class's efforts to suppress theatre of dissent, and support theatre which perpetuates dominant norms. But theatre of the oppressed has an entirely different raison

d'être. It is a set of tools not for propaganda, persuasion or indoctrination; rather, it is a tool for interactive social analysis and dialogue. This qualitative distinction is highlighted in the ways in which TO practitioners engage with each other, but more importantly, how they engage in the critical work of transcending oppression and working towards social change.

Because TO stands for a different way of doing politics, it is uniquely positioned to alter the way in which relationships are developed. This uniqueness can be reflected in the structure of TO organizations, as is the case with Theatre for Living in Vancouver. David Diamond, its Artistic Director, points to the role of his organization's outreach co-ordinator to demonstrate the difference between traditional Eurocentric theatre and a TO organization. His organization employs a full time outreach co-ordinator whose job is to nurture the relationships with a broad network of stakeholders. These include other social service organizations, activist groups, people who are homeless, aged or infirm, sexual minorities or otherwise "othered" in society, past participants in the organization's work, and those with an interest in their current projects. Recent projects have included work to open dialogue about care for mental health patients, to resist corporate influences in people's behavioural patterns, beliefs and consumer choices, and to respond to the provincial government's austerity measures. Whereas a traditional theatre company hires a publicist for the purpose of generating interest in, and revenue from, a production, Theatre for Living employs an outreach co-ordinator whose job is to make community connections. This enhances the organization's capacity to facilitate dialogue, catalyze movements, and develop collective knowledge. "In any given main stage project," Diamond explains, "we may have between a hundred and a hundred and fifty organizations from lots of diverse sectors legitimately involved in helping us." Theatre for Living's network

includes hundreds of individuals who have participated in the organization's training workshops over the past fourteen years, who are now located all over the world, and engaged in various forms of work which may not employ TO practices, but are informed by the same train of anti-oppressive thought, and work towards building a better, emancipatory world.

Diamond argues that the critical work of developing community responses to injustice through theatre is a collective process. It cannot be orchestrated by an individual working alone. In order to harness the collective capacities of communities, Diamond organizes his groups into committees of diverse stakeholders. This approach intentionally generates a collectivist perspective by integrating knowledge from multiple sources.

Theatre of the oppressed has intersubjective qualities which make it an inherently social process. It works by situating individuals in face-to-face relationships, requiring them to collaborate on the creative processes of analyzing their context, envisioning alternative possibilities, and enacting change. It develops relationships of solidarity, one of the key manifestations of liberatory praxis. As such, theatre of the oppressed lends itself to networking organically, but not inevitably. The work of making community connections, fostering relationships, establishing trust, and consolidating collective political power requires intentionality. As I have found, many do engage in the kinds of activities we recognize as networking, like organizing events or virtual platforms through which people can share experiences and debate ideas.

Theatre of the oppressed tends to be learned about experientially, through inter-personal contact. When asked where and how TO practitioners first encountered TO, only 30 percent said they first read about it in Boal's writings, or the writings of another practitioner. Seventy percent

either encountered it first when they participated in a group which used TO practices, took a course which involved TO activities, or heard about it by word of mouth from peers and practitioners who spoke highly of it as a method for applied theatre, or dialogue. As a practice, TO is reproduced through participatory workshops, community consultations and performances, and instructional internships.

I have observed several TO practitioners begrudging the ways in which ideologies pervade mainstream institutions, as if their own practice and beliefs are somehow “value neutral.” Many believe that their role is to create autonomous spaces so that the stories dealt with and processes engaged in are wholly owned by the participants. I do not disagree that the oppressed are the owners of their experience, and the authors of their fate, but I argue that using TO in the work of conscientization and liberatory praxis is a politicizing endeavor. Theatre of the oppressed is unapologetically invested in a political ideology rooted in justice. Adrian Jackson (2014) agrees, and confronts the politics of the theatre of the oppressed when he explains the need to identify one’s politics for the sake of building solidarity. He argues that “we’re not social agents *with hidden agendas*. The lives of many of our audiences are already affected by the agendas of outsiders: staff from the benefits office; social workers or agencies hungry to achieve their employment and progression targets. We are genuinely on the side of those on the margins of society, and we want this to be visible” (emphasis mine). The TO practitioner *does* have a politicizing social agenda. By engaging with communities and individuals to contest oppressive norms, and by working to empower people by collectively scripting and enacting new relationships, the theatre of the oppressed is decisively political. To deny this political agency is to betray the solidarity and interconnectedness which defines the work of TO. Rather than

denying this reality, the practitioner can benefit by confronting it. Declaring one's politics is essential to establish the trust required to build solidarity, community, and to work constructively against oppression.

In the early stages of my research I was prodding the TO community to gauge its sense of collectivity. I had a hunch that practitioners identified as a network, and wondered if they might have enough ontological and disciplinary cohesion to consider themselves a sort of epistemic community. Some like to envision themselves and their work as part of revolutionary social movement. Others feel a unifying sense of "family." I refer to the globalizing TO community as a meshwork because it is comprised of heterogeneous actors in different places, doing work which is as local as it is global, context specific while manifesting universal phenomena. There are homogenizing elements of their praxis, such as the ways in which they institutionalize anti-oppressive principles, but there is also substantial variation in their practice.

The concept of meshwork situates diverse actors on a horizontal plane, and allows for fluidity, motion. Those who I wanted to identify as an epistemic community because of their ideological unity occupy one particular space in the meshwork, but there are others. As a collective whole, the meshwork has wide-ranging influence, enabling practitioners and participants to find some sites ideologically comfortable, even if they feel repelled from other sites or groups. Those whose work had been deemed "not quite theatre of the oppressed," or who admit that their innovations resulted in an evolutionary trajectory that diverged from traditional TO, are still active contributors to the meshwork's dynamics, even if they feel excluded from or unattracted to certain other practitioners or spaces within the meshwork.

It is a solidarity meshwork despite its variance of opinion on several important issues. It lacks consensus about what oppression is, and therefore its members are conflicted about what liberation is or should be. Similarly, they have different ideas about what revolution is or could be. It is a meshwork of people who agree that there are problems with the way the world is organized, as institutions tend to perpetuate or reinforce injustice rather than transcend it. Despite this ideational variance, the meshwork is rooted in solidarity. Diversity of experiences and opinions within the meshwork allows for healthy debate and catalyzes innovation. Without this vital characteristic, the globalizing community of practitioners may risk ideational stagnation or even complacency.

From the perspective of global justice, and counterhegemonic normative change, I argue that people share forms of oppression more frequently than they realize, or would like to admit. We all live in a world structured to privilege certain interests at the expense of others', and we may be, to varying degrees, both beneficiaries of, and victims of, oppressive norms and institutions. I don't think it is particularly useful, desirable or possible to isolate certain groups of people and say that their form of oppression is particularly unique. As a believer in solidarity, community, inclusivity and justice, I think it is incumbent upon ourselves, as empathetic beings with a thirst for justice, to find ways to foster solidarity rather than animosity, unity rather than division.

As such, there is much to learn from the ways in which TO communities organize to resist injustice and affect progressive change. Its meshwork of practitioners spans the globe, but does not fit comfortably into the traditional understanding of networked agency in the context of globalization. That is, its members generally do not mobilize as a single issue network to leverage political pressure against a particular governing agency. Nor do they constitute a

centralized or hierarchical structure for decision making, command giving or dissemination of information. While practitioners may avail themselves of modern technologies, they do not rely on these for their sustenance or rapid advancement in the same way that other movements do. Theatre of the oppressed involves a form of communication which is distinctly interactive, co-creative, dialogical, and, perhaps most importantly, embodied.

As much as theatre of the oppressed amounts to a protest against oppressive cultural institutions, it is also a proactive and prefigurative manifestation of alternatives. The TO meshwork is a network of practitioners and communities unto itself, but it is constantly in interchange with other networks, movements and communities. As a manifestation of liberatory praxis it couldn't exist in isolation, because its proponents are engaged in a praxis which is collective by definition. It is by collaborating together that groups of oppressed individuals are able to use their shared experience to deconstruct oppressive institutions, and embody alternative relationships in solidarity with one another. In following chapters I will turn my attention to the ways in which TO practitioners and communities counter hegemonic globalization, and how they decolonize knowledge as they embody the emancipatory potential of human rights principles.

Chapter Five

Manifesting a Counterhegemonic Globalization

TO communities construct an emancipatory discourse which resonates among socially diverse and politically disparate groups. These groups can be spatially distant, and have heterogeneous social, economic, environmental and political identities, but they share certain interests in common. They experience forms of oppression which are not accidental or inevitable, and may not be widely acknowledged or even commonly understood. Sharing this dehumanizing condition, they unite with the belief that they can overcome it. They embody the guarantee of human rights promised to them in the meta-consensus of the International Bill of Rights by the virtue of their humanity, but then renege on by a constellation of actors at different scales of authority. As a form of collective resistance, and an assertion of rights, TO communities manifest a humanizing counterhegemonic globalization.

I established in the previous chapter that TO practitioners around the world constitute a meshwork. The qualities of this meshwork, including the horizontality of the relationships within it, the principle of equality to which all participants have a claim, its decentred flows of information, and anti-hierarchical communication structure are all distinct from mainstream network organizations. There is an intentionality in the way that TO practitioners go about their praxis, as they try to open spaces for politically excluded and marginalized people and to engage in activities which challenge dominant assumptions, and enact alternative possibilities. The solidarity generated through TO activities has empowering effects.

I have made the distinction that the globality of the TO meshwork is more convincingly defined than the local clusters which comprise it. In Kolkata, at Jana Sanskriti's Muktheadhara festival, we were a global assembly of TO practitioners, having come from Europe, North America, South America, Australia, the Middle East, and elsewhere in Asia. We embodied the globalizing TO meshwork because through us experiences were shared, ideas were exchanged, and relationships were established. Our temporary encounter strengthened the bonds of interconnectivity between participants, and was followed by the dissemination of experiences and knowledges back to the home communities of each participant.

Boal pronounced a globalizing mission for theatre of the oppressed when he used the organic metaphor of the fruit tree to describe the way in which he hoped the work of TO would bear fruit, the seeds of which would sprout in fertile soil to grow new trees, thereby multiplying the practise (Boal 2006, 3-4). Ferreira and Devine kept the organic metaphor, but described the globalizing nature of TO as "rhizomatic" in order to connote a "decentred" and "non-hierarchical" structure which forges a nonlinear and unpredictable trajectory (2012, 12).

The International Theatre of the Oppressed Organization dreams "of exchanging knowledge, of creating an international group of *Flying Jokers*, who can go anywhere in the world to help groups to organize themselves" (International Theatre of the Oppressed Organization n.d.). Rather than formalizing the network's organization, centralizing a system for knowledge exchange, and trying to exert control over how, where and by whom TO is used, the globalizing TO community manifests a meshwork of diversity in practitioners and praxis. As a meshwork of independent practitioners, TO activists are adept at organizing spontaneously, maintaining close relationships, and responding to challenges as they arise internally and external to the meshwork.

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, by mobilizing spontaneously and independently, availing interpersonal networks and social media, the TO meshwork had enough creativity, enterprise and decentred leadership to facilitate some form of emergency response when violence gripped communities across the Ukraine in 2014.

TO practitioners have a vocational disposition towards globalizing their work. What is less obvious about the nature of TO's globalization, but what I find to be more important than its geographic spread, is the way in which TO globalizes a counterhegemonic ontology. At the risk of contradicting myself, I argue that though the meshwork is global, the work of resisting oppression is local. Locality is not restrictive or exclusive; nor is it fully deterministic. One's experience is defined, in part, by the context in which one lives. Here I align myself with Arturo Escobar's (2008) thinking. To complicate the equation of oppression, the cultures in which we live, and the political institutions which structure our lives, are human constructs subject to contestation and change. And so, our immediate socio-political-economic-environmental context not only defines us; we define our context, individually and collectively. It is on this side of the reciprocal relationship that TO practitioners engage in their praxis. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the theatre of the oppressed meshwork manifests a socio-political globalization of resistance.

5.1 Plural Globalizations

The idea of globalization induces fear, anger and resent, even sparking an "anti-globalization" movement. However, globalization is not a singular phenomenon. Those who protest globalization are opposed to some of its specific manifestations, which often include its tendencies towards cultural homogenization and economic imperialism. For Boal, globalization

is not only an inevitable outcome of the advancement of technologies and the integration of economies. It is also a distinctly imperial project, driven by inseparable industry and state interests. Hegemonic power seeks not to secure the wellbeing of people, to propagate cultural diversity, or to protect the rights of the vulnerable; rather, it is “cannibalistic,” motivated by exploitative financial profit, and while demonstrating little, if any, concern for sustainability or human welfare. “I would be in favour of globalization,” Boal writes, “if its object was the promotion of health, education and science. But what has been globalized instead is the search for profits” (2006, 57-62).

Against the threat of a globalization which he perceives as politically imperial, economically monopolizing, and culturally homogenizing, Boal argues that theatre is a “martial” form of art. It is culture that defines people’s humanity, and it is through creative art that people define, give meaning to, and contest the worlds in which they live. Theatre, therefore, can be both a creative tool and a weapon. But when globalizing norms integrate the interests of the artist with the incentives of the market, Boal believes that the artist’s critical ingenuity is compromised. Globalization can even be “the death of the artist.” Boal pleads, “let us sing with our own voice, even if it is hoarse, let us dance with our own body, even if it is dodderly; let us speak our own speech, even if we are uncertain” (Ibid.). His is a plea to maintain the integrity of human cultures, and to protect the vulnerable among us.

Even those resisting globalizations’ marginalizing effects are globalizing their movement. Those communicating by cellular phones or through the cyber webs of the Internet rely on globalized infrastructure, resource extraction industries, transnationalized corporations which produce and distribute the technology, and inter-governmental financiers and regulators. While

Boal and others are correct to cast a critical gaze on enterprising manifestations of globalization, it is my imperative to come to an understanding of the ways in which activists use their own globalizing work to counter exploitative tendencies of hegemonic globalizations. Practitioners who engage with these vulnerable communities through theatre of the oppressed are globalizing a particular form of resistance which is critical, constructive and creative.

The task of social criticism is not only to break out of the confines of traditional epistemes; it also demands opening up our ontologies to allow for complexity, and alternative ways of seeing and knowing the world. Arturo Escobar (2008) helps open our understanding of globalization by venturing “away from the kind of ‘liberalist trajectories’ that fetishize flows, freedom of movement, and ‘absolute deterritorialization’ at larger scales”. In doing so, he looks to open our ontological understanding of globalization to alternative conceptions which can challenge the “established state-centric, capital-centric and globalocentric thinking, with their emphasis on ‘larger forces,’ hierarchies, determination, and unchanging structures” (290). The fact that dominant globalization discourses privilege the interests of an elite political class does not mean that its hegemony is uncontested. Escobar raises important critical questions about the nature and politics of the network in the context of globalization, hegemonic or counter. I borrow from his theoretical framework in order to assess the work of theatre of the oppressed. As a meshwork it is working to change social and political institutions, but this objective doesn’t necessarily make it “counterhegemonic”. Are its practitioners merely working to overcome oppression within the confines of existent liberal-democratic institutions? Or does it envision alternative socio-political arrangements which defy such conventions?

Some practitioners confront hegemonic institutions directly, while others prefer to focus their energy on interpersonal relationships, as if these are somehow separable from larger social constructs. Sanjoy Ganguly, Artistic Director of Jana Sanskriti, argues explicitly that in the current era of globalization, the globalization of capital, governance systems are changing in ways that restrict people's ability to develop intellectually, and to engage politically. Governance power is vested in a political economy which privileges the interests of powerful states and corporate actors, while marginalizing weaker voices. This development is why TO is so necessary in the struggle. TO is a process of knowledge generation, of conscientization, through introspection and analysis of one's context. It is an empowering process. Working with affected groups, scripting plays, and confronting oppressive scenarios enable the oppressed to alter power relations in their own way (Ganguly 2010, 99).

Ganguly says the reason why he published his book documenting Jana Sanskriti's origins, experience, and politics, is because he wants to spread the word as broadly as it will travel. He published it in English rather than his native Bengali. His target audience is global. He makes the point that working towards the end of oppression is a universal value, a struggle that everyone is or should be engaged in, even if the struggle manifests locally in varying ways (Personal communication, Berkeley, May 31, 2012). Over the past three decades, Ganguly and his team of "spect-activists" have effectively changed the political landscape of the peasant communities with which they have worked (Da Costa 2010).

I noted in Chapter 4 that David Diamond, a Vancouver-based practitioner, integrates his TO work with complex systems theory. He calls his work Theatre for Living. He argues that human societies are made of complex individuals and complicated relationships. Those who are

oppressed in one context may also be oppressors in another context. As such, we ought not to be so quick to judge the individuals who play roles in oppressive institutions, like the police constable or the banker. Diamond treads cautiously through the relationship between adherents to hegemonic and counterhegemonic forces, as he works to unpack interconnectedness. He acknowledges that he is not a “militant leftist,” which means he is less than popular among some activist circles. Because he works intentionally to transcend the “us versus them” discourse, he loses favour with those who invest all of their energy in a politics of protest. Even the political spectrum of left to right ideologies is of little utility to Diamond. This is Diamond’s criticism of the Occupy Movement, which he commented had “eaten itself alive.” The 99 percent versus the one percent, even if it lends politicizing salience to a resistance movement, is still entrenched in an ideology of us versus them, denying the interconnectedness which more accurately characterizes society. Reflecting on some of his recent work, he recalls how he

“ran a workshop just a couple weeks ago, with human rights activists and CEOs of mining companies from all over North America, investigating ways to actually take steps towards sustainable mining, in a true sense. Well, if you believe that the mining CEOs are just assholes, and the enemy, you have no way to move, you have no way to create real change other than to say, ‘We should stop all mining.’ Well, look around the world. I don't think we actually want to do that. We're only being able to communicate with each other right now because of mining - all the circuitries in these computers.” (Diamond 2013)

Not all practitioners share Diamond’s constructivist understanding of complex interdependence. He justifies his position by arguing that “it’s the difference between working

against the world we don't want and deciding to work towards the world we do want. I got really tired of being in negative reaction mode" (Ibid.).

Rather than stifling progressive dialogue by taking adversarial positions, Diamond seeks to better understand the nature of interconnectivity to see how it can work for the oppressed. As an ontological paradigm, his is inherently creative, empowering and optimistic. When this hope-giving constructivist ontology is a defining characteristic of theatre of the oppressed, its nature as a globalizing phenomenon is distinctly counterhegemonic. It renders globalization not supraterritorially encompassing, but intimately personal; not an ideational metaconsensus, but an intersubjective process. Globalization can thus be understood not as an imposition on the vulnerable, but as a phenomenon over which they can exert some agency.

I have demonstrated that theatre of the oppressed is a unique model for community dialogue. It uses theatricalized performance to engage participants in embodied, image-based, nonverbal and improvisational interactions. Rooting their work in principles of anti-oppression, TO's globalizing catalysts and organizational leaders invest in the creative capacities of participants. In most TO workshop and performance settings, participants engage in old-fashioned face to face dialogue and interaction. The globalization of TO, as such, has a distinctly intimate nature. Its potential to generate change relies on the ability of its participants to build relationships of trust. Effective, liberatory theatre of the oppressed, then, enables its participants to push back against marginalizing and oppressive manifestations of globalization. For example, where globalizing education norms involve technocratic pedagogies and authoritarian suppression of school teachers' creative capacities, theatre of the oppressed can be used to envision an alternative educational paradigm, and embody a more humanizing role for teachers. Radha Ramaswamy

made this vision her mission when she conducted a workshop for teachers and school administrators at the Mentor Conclave in Bangalore.

Theatre of the oppressed equips participants to respond differently to experiences of oppression. Where police forces globalize dehumanizing practices like racial profiling, theatre of the oppressed offers a venue in which vulnerable civilians can rehearse responses to discriminatory state violence. I participated in workshops addressing this phenomenon at workshops in Berkeley and New York. Participants may not be able to change the violent brutality of individual police constables, but they can come to understand their experiences as part of endemic structural injustice. They can learn that they have civil rights as human beings living in the United States, and they can rehearse how they will respond to scenarios in which they are the target of racial profiling.

In the Ukraine, as discussed earlier in this chapter, people frustrated with state corruption and rights repression can use theatre of the oppressed to create a venue for critical dialogue, thus offering an alternative to street demonstrations and other forms of protest. Participants in each of these cases used theatre of the oppressed to push back against manifestations of globalization which limited their capacity to live as free and equal humans in their societies. They claimed their rights to act as causal agents in the determination of their lived experience. They rejected the ways in which their human-ness was compromised. They rendered globalization a struggle in which they could engage, with a chance to alter its outcomes.

5.2 The Political Profile of the TO Practitioner

As TO practitioners globalize their praxis, they do so with a political ethic that is refreshingly counterhegemonic. I have found that in their work for human rights, TO practitioners share an incisive political conscience, and an impressive commitment to cultural critique and counter-normative change. I surveyed practitioners to gauge their political-economic ideological beliefs, and to determine whether TO is used across various spectra. I asked some questions which were admittedly cumbersome, but provided revealing responses. I wanted to determine whether TO practitioners could be pigeon-holed as ideological hippies, anarchists, liberals, or any other group which would be taxonomically efficient for my purposes. I also wanted to know whether the mechanisms and ideas of TO are being used by any unlikely or ironic actors. A religious group using theatre of the oppressed to counter the normative movement towards marriage equality rights would be one such example.

I asked the question “On a spectrum, where the left side is liberal and the right side is conservative, how would you define your socio-political beliefs?,” to which 95 percent of respondents identified as left of centre (33.7 percent “extreme left” and 61.2 percent “moderate left”). In a similar survey of political-economic beliefs, I asked “On an spectrum, where the left side represents communism, the right side represents laissez-faire capitalism, and in between are varying degrees of welfare systems, how would you define your political-economic beliefs?,” to which only 67 percent identified as left of centre, and 29 percent placed themselves in the centre. Finally, to explicitly merge political and economic beliefs, I offered respondents a chance to place themselves in a quadrant of either “dictatorial socialist,” “democratic socialist,” “democratic capitalist” or “dictatorial capitalist”, to which they responded, respectively, 1.1

percent, 90.4 percent, 8.5 percent, and none. (Malloy, 2012, Theatre of the Oppressed Survey, Unpublished raw data).

These responses suggest that TO is used almost exclusively by groups and practitioners who value systems in which freedom is nurtured, but where personal freedoms are balanced against a notion of the common good. More important than free enterprise is the protection of vulnerable people's freedom from exploitation. This finding affirms my prior assumptions. What was surprising to me, and encouraging given the urgency of the need to improve the ethics of anti-oppression in our cultural and political institutions, was the depth of incision offered in the critical responses of several participants. Indicative of their long histories of struggle for liberating institutions, and reflecting their apprehension over mainstream taxonomies which serve to perpetuate rather than transcend a disillusioning status quo, a third of all respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the categories offered, criticizing the traditional paradigm I used (the left to right spectrum, and the capitalist or socialist ideologies) as outdated, irrelevant, and symptomatic of dominant ideologies and institutions which they are trying to transcend through their work. To be placed in such a category, several noted, is to admit defeat in their movement for liberation, and to negate the work they have done to construct real and revolutionary alternatives.

Respondents' strong indictment of traditional institutions, whether socialist or capitalist, because of the ways in which they reproduce oppressive relationships, and because of traditional institutions' failure to materialize the promise of inclusive prosperity (which includes those identifying as oppressed), indicates a harmonization of critical consciences across geographic, cultural, and socio-economic spectra. What TO activists share in common is a politicized ethos

which distrusts mainstream political, economic, social and cultural institutions. While they may be reticent to name a current political ideology to which they do adhere, what they are convinced of is the fact that they locate themselves somewhere outside of the dominant paradigm. To the left side of centre, to be sure (because the TO activist is unlikely to identify as an ideological adherent to the fiscally and socially conservative “right”); but somewhere beyond the traditional paradigm, identifying themselves as “progressive,” “radical,” “humanist,” “anarchist,” “feminist,” etc. There is unity in this diversity which stretches around the world. Their reticence to name alternatives is not for a lack of effort, but is rooted in their ontological belief that naming the world as such, or creating such knowledge, is a collective endeavor, achieved through dialogue, not opportunistic opining. Theatre of the oppressed creates the space in which such a creative-intellectual discussion can happen.

As a globalizing manifestation of resistance to dominant norms, TO is more revolutionary than Boal gave it credit for. He provided a sort of disclaimer when he said that “Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!” (1985 [1979], 155). I have found in my research that even though it may not cause the upheaval of oppressive institutions, theatre of the oppressed does alter the political identities of its participants, and it does change the nature of the relationships within which they live. In these ways, it is revolutionary. It embodies the promises of human rights, including the notion of political equality, the right of people to live free from violence and discrimination, the right to economic and cultural survival, and the right to be active determinants of the political culture within which people live. Ganguly notes that even those who one might not expect to be fluent in the language of human rights, like the rural, illiterate and indigenous peasants he works with,

have internalized these liberating values (Ganguly 2010, 98). The fact of oppressed people's human-ness, and the rights to which all people have a claim by virtue of their human-ness, provide an empowering logic to TO participants.

5.3 On Human Rights

The socio-political, geographic, economic and environmental conditions of the communities using theatre of the oppressed vary. Practitioners, while sharing certain political convictions in common, come to their work from a diversity of cultural contexts, life experiences and personal interests. The globalizing TO meshwork is comprised of individuals and communities as variant as the forms of oppression they experience. Practitioners also vary in their hopes for the outcome of their work. Some are entrenched in an adversarial politics through which they invest their beliefs and their work in a struggle against formidable political-economic mainstreams which profit off the exploitation of vulnerable people; others take a more inclusive problem-solving approach, seeking to transcend oppression. Where practitioners have remarkable similarities is in their political resolve to respond to and enact the promises of human rights which have either eluded them or been used against them until now. It is remarkable because while they work to resist oppression, and they embody affirmative action towards rights, many don't acknowledge, or are even intentionally opposed to the idea of human rights. With good reason, the critical joker may despise international regimes which articulate, codify and institutionalize human rights. Yet, I have found that TO engages participants in exercises aimed at empowering them to claim the rights guaranteed to them by their humanity, even if they don't work in the "language" of human rights.

The rhetorical value of human rights discourse makes it a politically opportune set of norms to the oppressed. Rights have attained a cultural currency and normative legitimacy rendering them akin to the conscience of globalization. They can be used to measure the social progress of states, communities, organizations, international regimes, or any other form of organization. However, to those living in the margins of society, or belonging to oppressed social groups, human rights norms are more aspirational than experiential. Human societies have never been as inclusive or just as the privileged few like to claim. Social, political, legal and economic structures position some with relative and perpetual affluence and social security, but it has historically come at the expense of others who endure impoverishment and insecurity. Freire took aim at the human rights regime, noting how the world order privileges some, granting riches to elites while so many others endure a meagre existence with no food security, education, and not even a dream of being able to travel. In this context, rights take on a stratified meaning, as elites protect the right to their privilege, while the rights of the poor are relegated to mere survival, and granted only because their subsistence is necessary to sustain the privileged lives of the rich (Freire 2005 [1970], 57-58).

Oppression along lines of social identity, geographic location, political beliefs, and biological attributes has persisted throughout the changing international orders (Anghie 2005). Although they may be invoked for ambiguous purposes, human rights are not inherently colonial, or otherwise oppressive; they are a contested social construct, but born out of the struggle of society's underprivileged and marginalized groups.

Practitioners use theatre of the oppressed as an analytical toolkit to separate human rights norms from competing political ideologies. Jiwon Chung, former President of the Pedagogy and

Theatre of the Oppressed Organization explains, “We take the fundamental dignity and equality of human beings as a starting point. Not as a goal to be achieved, but as a starting point. We believe that through dialogue and reflection, and analysis and action, we have the tools to continually change the world. And the way that we do this is we look at the world that we live in, exist in, we codify it, and then we use that codification in theatre to create a theatrical representation that is not merely a description of what is the case, but a question and a challenge. We say, ‘this is the state of affairs. Is this okay? How can we change it if it’s not okay?’” At that point, then, the theatrical space is transformed into a “laboratory” and spectators begin to experiment with social scenarios by enacting alternative outcomes to the problems that are presented (Chung 2012).

Hector Aristizabal works in the language of human rights, though he defines his own rights. He argues that “the most basic human right,” the right from which all others extend, is the right to imagine freely. It is our capacities to think, to symbolize, to play with ideas, to transform and to be creators which make us human. And when we as a society create institutions which stifle this creativity (as our public schooling systems do, for example), we are killing our imaginations, destroying our humanity (Aristizabal 2012). The “right to imagine freely” has yet to be codified into international human rights law, but the intention of Aristizabal’s idea is rooted in a logic that does have current political salience. That is, people should live with the freedom to fulfill their human dignity. They should not be targets of discrimination, and their freedoms should not be arbitrarily or unjustly withheld or impeded. The belief that oppressed people are rights-bearing humans equips them with an empowering determination to claim their full human-ness.

Amartya Sen's (1999) *Development as Freedom* forwards the theory that holistic human development requires an integrated rights-based approach. His point is that in order for societies to enhance individuals' capacity for free agency, and in order for people to be able to "effectively shape their own destiny", they need to have their political, economic and social rights protected. Contrary to popular belief, it is not that economic and social rights are "conducive to development"; rather, rights are "*constituent components* of development" (5-11, Sen's emphasis).

Sen's theory has the potential to radically alter the dynamics of global power, economies and governance. He reaffirms the interdependence of all human rights, and identifies the goal of development to be the removal of all barriers to economic, social and political freedom. Theatre of the oppressed communities mobilize around this theoretical framework to assert their humanness, and to claim the rights pursuant to their humanity. They manifest the principles of political inclusivity, equality, participation and nondiscrimination; they work to equip participants to claim their right to live free from identity-based persecution and violence. While their activism is concentrated on interpersonal and community-based scales, their justifying logic is rooted in what are universal human rights principles.

Sen's effort to connect people's capacity for development to a rights-based vision of humanity reclaims the primacy of the interconnectedness and inseparability of economic, cultural, social, political and civic rights. This thinking is how rights were conceptualized when the United Nations began deliberating on them in the 1940s. Throughout the negotiations over the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, social and economic rights were fundamental to overall human rights, as food and health were understood to be essential to other rights.

Accordingly, it was understood that the state had to intervene positively to set up the institutions for social security, just as it was obliged to uphold the law in order to protect civil rights. When the time came to codify human rights in legally binding covenants, civil and political rights were separated from economic and social rights for technical reasons; they required different mechanisms for implementation, not because one set of rights was more important than the other (Whelan 2010). In the ensuing transition through decolonization, and Third World countries' struggles to assert their sovereignty in the world order, many did privilege economic rights above civil and political rights, while industrialized countries neglected economic rights (Whelan 2010, Burke 2010). The UN's 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development was an effort to bring back together the rights which had been separated in the Covenants, in recognition of their interdependence. By putting humans rather than states at the centre of the development discourse, any violation of human rights was therefore a barrier to development (Ibhawoh 2011, 82-4).

Aristizabal's logic is rooted in the same principle: people's ability to live, think, and create freely is essential to their humanity. Where people's freedom is impeded, their human dignity is violated. Poverty, inequalities of gender, race, ability and other categories of difference, government policies and social norms, then, can all cause and reproduce "unfreedoms" (Sen).

By engaging in human rights discourse, all of society's members play an active role in governance. Before human rights are codified in law, they are legitimized as moral principles. They are justified not by legal institutions, but by human needs and social persuasion. As such, it is a misplacement of credit to think that a state, or a culture, can "give" people their rights. Justice demands that all are owed the objects of their rights (Orend 2002, 67-100). To have a

right to something means that its object is not merely desirable, but that one is entitled to it. If someone is prevented from receiving their right, violators are subject to remedial claims and sanctions. Therefore “rights empower, not just benefit, those who hold them” (Donnelly 2003, 7-8).

International human rights are universal in two ways: they are held by all people by the merit of their being human, and they are universally approved, as almost all countries have committed to them in principle, even if not all have ratified the International Human Rights Covenants (Donnelly 2003, 1). The ideas underlying contemporary human rights have historic and cross-cultural roots (Ishay 2008), but they were never institutionalized as *human* rights, universal, indivisible and inalienable, until taken on as a project of the United Nations in the aftermath of World War II. While other cultures in other times valued freedom, dignity and participatory governance, human rights as a qualitatively distinct and conceptually narrow socio-political construct, granting to all people equal status and treatment, was a new and innovative approach to political organization (Donnelly 2003, 71).

As political constructs, human rights are relational, and hence contestable and contingent. Because they have been normalized in the defining logic of contemporary governance institutions, the struggle over articulation of new rights, and the meaning and application of existing principles, gives oppressed communities a significant role to play in governance. The definition and contestation of norms are key facets of what governance is.

Not all TO practitioners frame their work in the vocabulary of “human rights,” even though the logic of a rights-based humanity informs their fundamental objective. Sixty-nine percent say they do use human rights principles in their work. Among those who deny their use of human

rights norms are some who assert that instead they frame their practice as working towards “self-determination” or “participatory democracy,” “community development” and “peace processes,” or working against sexism, racism, and other forms of violence and discrimination. Given that the principles of self-determination, inclusion in political processes, and freedom from violence and discrimination are tenets of human rights theory, it is apparent that those who choose to work with a vocabulary other than human rights do so not so much because they oppose the idea of human rights, but because they are not familiar enough with human rights theory to be able to engage with it.

Some actively oppose the idea of human rights because they see it as a Western construct which is irrelevant to the communities they engage with. Some survey respondents noted that because human rights have been co-opted by such actors as corporations and non-governmental organizations, their liberatory utility has been diluted. Their reservations are well-founded. Despite the existence of an international human rights regime, social and political institutions are structured today on male-biased, neo-liberal, state-centric and legalistic assumptions. Those looking to re-envision and re-create organizational structures still have to contend with dominant norms which privilege status-quo assumptions such as the value of hierarchy, and the inevitability of inequality. It is not surprising that activist fatigue might cause one’s hope in the emancipatory potential of human rights to fade.

Notwithstanding these skeptics, and the historical realities which justify their positions, human rights still do contain emancipatory potential. Niamh Reilly proposes that an emancipatory understanding of cosmopolitan feminism can reclaim the principles of equality, nondiscrimination and non-oppressive relationships promised by the concept of rights (2009,

18). Her hope is that a more critical interpretation of human rights might be able to deliver on their promise in ways that have so far proven impossible. Moyn (2010) is much less of an optimist. Understanding human rights as a political invention which has yet to prove its worth, he rejects the inevitability and necessity of human rights altogether. He is entirely open to the possibility that human rights will fail as an organizational principle, only to be replaced by something else. Conceived as the “last utopia,” and born out of the failures of other utopian ideas, Moyn cautions that the future of human rights is anything but secure. The theory of human rights, as universal and emancipatory promises, has the potential to radically reorder society. However, materializing these rights such that they have meaning to those who need them most is evidently easier said than done.

I find that theatre of the oppressed communities, in general, are sites in which participants can enact their rights and embody their full human dignity. Sanjoy Ganguly upholds a rights-based vision of humanity in which dignity is defined by the degree to which one can enact their rights, and embody their full humanity. Like Aristizabal and Boal, he connects human-ness to intellectual capacity, and argues that “the worst kinds of oppression possible on human beings” are those that restrict a person’s access to knowledge. The right to think is a necessity for humans; it is what makes a person human (Ganguly 2010, 53).

Ganguly believes that this rights-based understanding of humanity is counter-hegemonic, as dominant political norms privilege structures which undermine rather than reinforce the human-ness of vulnerable people. His concern for the humanization of vulnerable people is demonstrated in the way he talks about his engagements with rural peasants. He recalls how he learned what he knows about theatre activism today from the “illiterate educated” in the villages

of West Bengal. They are educated in life; experts in their own experience. Ganguly stresses that “you can’t teach them [how to resist oppression] or script their lives for them. They do it themselves.” He came to this understanding through his own experience with partisan activism. He recalls how in the early stages of his political organizing, he “violated [peasants’] rights.” He didn’t respect their personhood, their knowledge or their experience. His use of propaganda theatre dehumanized the people to whom he tried to deliver his message. Realizing this, he accepted that he needed a process which enabled participants to utilize the experiential knowledge that they had so much of (Personal communication, Berkeley, June 2, 2012).

By invoking the principles of human rights, if not the language of human rights, TO practitioners ground their theoretical approach to Freire’s original liberatory premise: that “any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders a person’s pursuit of self-affirmation is one of oppression. Such a situation constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual’s ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human” (Freire 2005 [1970], 55). Theatre of the oppressed has a distinctly humanizing mission. Whereas hegemonic globalizations neglect human rights as ideals, TO embodies a rights-affirming definition of humanity.

5.4 Theatre of the Oppressed and Translocalization

The popular concept of globalization evokes a sense of large-scale, supraterritorial, meta-consensus. The concept is feared enough that it has even provoked an “anti-globalization” movement, as activists try to stave off cultural appropriation, or worse, extinction. I argue that theatre of the oppressed communities manifest an alternative form of globalization: one of

humanizing resistance. It has potential applications wherever people's capacity to embody their full humanity is restricted by legal, cultural, social or political constructs.

But in paradox to the globality of TO's applications, and to the globality of oppression and resistance, the actual work of engaging with communities to respond to the marginalizing effects of globalization is local. The nature of TO work is intimate. It involves interaction at the inter-personal scale. The knowledge produced through TO is created intersubjectively. Engaging through interactive analytical tools, TO communities consolidate the collective power of a class of people unwilling to accept that their condition is inevitable or tolerable. Participants work in close proximity, collaboratively, to cultivate solidary relationships. They enhance individuals' capacity to respond to oppression, and alter the political landscape of oppressed communities. It is not about spectators consuming a dramatic production packaged, paid for and delivered as a finished product. It is not agitation propaganda, where its creators use theatre to deliver a message. It is about engagement. It is intensely intimate; it requires members of the community to touch and feel one another, to play with creative body imagery, and to express feelings that are deep and personal (as well as collective). It is an emotionally demanding process, requiring sensitive intentionality from its facilitators.

The emotional or psychological weight can be too much for some people to bear, particularly if their participation recalls one's experience of trauma. TO workshops involve a full range of emotional responses, including tears, anger, love, support, frustration. Some experience grief. They expose raw emotion in ways that require diligent care from the others involved in the process. They reveal incidents they have experienced in their pasts, including physical,

emotional, sexual, racialized, violence. They must expose these experiences and bear the weight of reflection in order to share them with their peers.

The very phenomenon which TO is working to deconstruct and alter is the individualization of victimhood. It is because a victim of domestic violence has internalized their subservient identity that they feel incapable of or unqualified to resist. It is because communities struggle in isolation that they lack the political leverage of a larger movement for rights-based change. So, it is in the interest of both the oppressed and the solidary ally to find ways to bridge the distance separating people from such varying yet interconnected identities. This interconnectedness is an integral component of hope, giving purpose, strength and possibility to the oppressed.

In addition to building collective solidarity, there is a pragmatic individual reason for de-personalizing oppression. Hector Aristizabal uses his background in psychotherapy to criticize the way in which victims of oppression confer too much power on their individual oppressors. He argues that to think “my torturer, my abuser, my oppressor” is making our relationship with oppression more intimate than it needs to be. While we are victims of oppression, to individualize that oppression by identifying oneself in such an intimate relationship with the oppressor is to alienate oneself. This can deny victims the opportunity for solidarity, and prevent their ability to recognize their membership in an oppressed group. This empowers oppressors, and allows oppressive institutions to perpetuate by limiting the victim’s capacity to resist. Aristizabal argues that individual oppressors are agents of larger institutions, whether they are soldiers in a state’s army, or father figures in a patriarchal family. Rather than holding on to trauma and allowing it to define the identity and experience of the oppressed, Aristizabal works to create ways for victims to re-imagine themselves, and see their experience through a new lens.

“The wound can be both tomb and womb... Something was killed within me, but something else was born. What dies needs to be mourned, while what is newly born demands recognition” (Aristizabal and Lefer 2010, 100-5).

To locate the struggle, and to manifest resistance in, the immediate interpersonal context is counterhegemonic. It is an intentional move away from the individualization of oppression which hegemonic institutions reproduce. It is a paradigmatic shift which enables oppressed communities to control or contest the way in which people give meaning to ideas and norms. This is a form of power which can be both uniting and destabilizing.

Most TO practitioners engage in their praxis at the “local” scale. My survey data reveal that 79 percent deal primarily with “intra-group” (conflicts within a community or social group), or “inter-group” (conflicts between social groups at the local level) contexts. Only 30 percent of practitioners in my study identified the conflicts they deal with as having international implications. This finding indicates to me that many TO practitioners work within defined communities, but that they don’t necessarily connect local struggles to global institutions. Restricting one’s identity in such limited terms may come at the expense of more systemic analysis. Participants lose the opportunity to connect their struggles to those of people in other contexts, resulting in lost opportunities to develop solidarity. They risk missing the opportunity to challenge what are global norms, such as patriarchy and capitalism. Some respondents to my survey commented that it is the core of their work to tease out these multi-scalar relationships, and the complicated ways in which different forms of oppression and groups of oppressed people are inter-related. I have found that one of the limits of TO work is that it is dependent upon the critical understanding and analytical skills of its facilitators. To be clear, the central role of

knowledge production belongs to TO participants; it is their experience that theatre of the oppressed responds to. However, analytical depth and critical incision require TO leaders to have a degree of expertise.

While I have been generally impressed by the political conscience and analytical astuteness of TO practitioners, it is evident that not all practitioners are comfortable embracing the globality of the issues oppressed people are faced with. To understand the ways in which people's experiences are local, but also how they are integrated into global systems, affected by global norms, requires a degree of analytical skill that not all practitioners have acquired. Each community in which people experience oppression is local, of course, but it is also connected to cultural and social norms which transcend the boundaries of a given immediate vicinity. The local experience may actually be a translocal experience; that is, a local manifestation of norms which extend beyond that particular locality. I have established that human rights norms provide a mobilizing logic which is universally accessible, and which justifies the rationale for much TO work. While the remedy for oppression transcends boundaries, so too do the various phenomena of oppression that TO communities work to counter.

For example, the oppressor in India is a local manifestation, but is invested in ideas of gender, race, caste, religion, capitalism, etc., which connect Indian oppressors to others. As much as the fight is against an individual oppressor in any given context, so too is it against the institutions within which their behaviours and ideas are embedded. Oppressors do not enact their role by their own ingenuity alone; they are backed by traditions, customs and norms. The ways in which local manifestations of oppression are inextricably connected to norms and institutions which transcend spatial boundaries renders them not only local, but translocal.

This understanding of translocality has important implications for the ways in which groups respond to oppression, envision alternatives, and enact change. It creates opportunities for solidarity which may otherwise have been suppressed, or evaded recognition. It opens avenues for redress which otherwise would have remained closed. In the same way that TO “conscientization” can bring the individual out of their isolation, so too can it enhance the collective’s understanding of interconnectivity. It is translocality which gives all collaborators a common ground from which to resist. Without this cause for collective indignation, TO would risk morphing into a form of cultural imperialism, or a theatre for advice, situating the oppressed below the spectator, rather than engaging all in a collaborative effort to own experiences collectively. This is also the foundation of justice.

5.5 Anti-oppressive Ontology

It is one thing to resist forms of oppression, and push back when one’s humanity is being subverted. It is a different challenge to work proactively and constructively towards alternative institutions. David Diamond, reflecting on Freire, notes that “winning the revolution is the easy part. The hard part is not becoming the very thing we were fighting against” (Diamond 2013). Here he is referencing Freire’s conviction that it is not enough for the oppressed to seek their liberation, if these people are simply going to invert the relationship and become the new dominant power. The oppressive structure remains intact, albeit with a reversal of roles. The hegemonic norms remain unchallenged. To heed Audrey Lorde’s cautionary words, “the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations that we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us” (1984, 123). It is the

task of theatre of the oppressed to deconstruct social institutions in order to expose, critique and alter the manifestations of interconnectedness.

As an approach to constructive social change, theatre of the oppressed needs to nourish a critical and dialectical ontology which can account for the ways in which local issues are connected to global institutions. I attended the 2012 conference of Performing the World in New York. The theme for the conference asked, “Can performance save the world?” It was a follow-up to the conference’s previous incarnation, which asked “can performance *change* the world?” Participants made a playful refrain of the causal conundrum, does society change because its people change, or do people change because society changes? This refrain provided for some comic relief when people spun in intellectual circles trying to make sense of social change. The relation of self to society mirrors the relationship of the global to the local social institution. To solve problems which transcend spatial boundaries, it is imperative to target the social institution itself, and it is opportune to begin where we find ourselves. If we can understand the way in which the local is global, and the global is local, then we can also understand the ways in which the collective is individual, and vice versa. Our spheres of social interaction, and the institutions within which we live, are multi-scalar and interconnected. As such, the best place to focus our critical and creative energy is in the here and now.

David Diamond offers that one of the reasons why unjust institutions are able to perpetuate is because critics take on only a partial assessment of their nature. As a result, they direct their activism to only a part of the problem which needs to be challenged. This act undermines their corrective efforts, and dooms them to failure. He argues that “we get tricked... into thinking that we are prisoners of the structures that we inhabit, and so our activism tends to focus on changing

the structure. But nature teaches us that it is patterns of behaviour that create structure, not the other way around. So, when we work to change the structure, and neglect the patterns of behaviour that create the structure, we're doomed to recreate the very same structure all over again" (Diamond 2013). This is also Freire's caution.

There are two levels of analysis herein, both of which are critical for change. One is the individual behavioural level; the other is the structural-institutional level. For what it's worth, Diamond invests his hope in people's capacity to change themselves. "My hope is that we have the courage, in a way, not to look at how to change that thing out there, but how to change ourselves. Because it is through changing ourselves and changing our behaviour that we will change that thing out there. It's harder work" (Ibid.). Diamond localizes the work of changing societal norms. Such introspection is an integral component of the liberatory praxis of theatre of the oppressed. It is about the interweaving of action and reflection. It provides a powerful, perspective-changing and potentially behaviour-changing experience to participants, which is why the model is popular. However, its effect on social structures and institutions is difficult to measure.

Freire, like Boal, believes in the impermanence of oppression. It is a social condition enabled in part because of the complicity of the oppressed, who subordinate themselves to their oppressors. Conscientization is key to their liberation because it is by understanding their place in oppressive systems that the oppressed are able to identify opportunities for resistance, and possibilities for transformation. Their oppression does not exist in a closed or predetermined world from which there is no exit, but as a socially constructed and thus changeable condition

which they have the agency to transform (Freire 2005 [1970], 49). Praxis, then, integrates reflective analysis and intentional action.

5.6 Cross-Cultural Questions in Kolkata

Among the most politically enabling qualities of theatre of the oppressed is its capacity to build solidary relationships. The power dynamics at play in the building of relationships mean that communities engaging in TO activities need to exercise careful intentionality, so that vulnerabilities are not exploited. Appropriately, many TO practitioners have an acute sense of cultural imperialism. This is generally a positive and politically progressive attribute. It is rooted in the problematic histories of indigenous assimilation, and a neo-coloniality which perpetuates through contemporary institutions which are more capitalist than democratic, recreating societies of social, political and economic hierarchy. However, as I have observed, some practitioners' sense of cultural imperialism is so acute that it becomes a barrier to constructive dialogue and interferes with solidarity.

This problem manifested through one particular performance I was involved with in Kolkata. During Jana Sanskriti's workshop, a group of women who were victims of human trafficking were invited to perform a short skit for an exclusive audience of workshop participants and select NGO representatives. The women had been working with Jana Sanskriti team members, using TO exercises to transition out of enslavement. The group had prepared a play about the multiple and complex forms of oppression they had endured. It was not only about trafficking, but also about the myriad issues which afflict women and girls in Bengali culture, including caste structures, dowry, domestic violence, and preferential treatment of boy children over girl

children. Violence against women, like it is in so many places, is so normalized in their patriarchal social institutions that even the female characters embodied patriarchal norms.

They performed their play, and then invited interventions from the audience. It was not a genuine forum theatre session because we weren't dialoguing to resolve conflict, or engaging in concrete community building. It was more like an exhibition, where the women on stage were sharing their experiences of working with TO, for a sympathetic audience. It was an opportunity for these particularly vulnerable women to demonstrate to an international and solidary audience how, and for what ends, they were using theatre of the oppressed. Only two interventions were offered by spect-actors. Both were "token" in nature, intended not to actually engage the women in dialogue, but to co-operate in a demonstration of how TO can work.

The only two people to volunteer as interveners were men: one, an experienced TO practitioner from Italy, the other a theatre artist from Nepal. This development caused numerous problems for several of the international workshop participants, only one of which was the irony of men stepping in to address women's issues. One challenged that by putting us in that position, being presented with complex issues of gendered domestic oppression, and asking us for our interventions, it placed the foreigner in a position of intellectual superiority, as if we are in possession of the knowledge to solve the complicated problems of another. A different respondent, also an international woman, shared that she felt she could not identify with the women portrayed in the play. She felt too far removed from the issues of human trafficking, dowry-based violence and injustice, and patriarchal definitions of the role of women in the family. She felt "out of place" because she understands her role as a spect-actor in forum theatre not to be someone who tells other people what to do, or how to solve their problems. Rather, one

must have an ownership stake in the experience being workshopped. Anti-oppression discourse says that to own a story, one must have experienced it.

One American woman commented that she felt overwhelmed by the scenario presented. She was unfamiliar with the local context, and therefore found it disabling for her as a potential intervener. She couldn't think of a way to intervene which was culturally appropriate. She didn't want to offend anyone. She could identify with a woman's subordinate role in the family, and she could appreciate framing domestic servitude as a form of slave labour. Gendered and domesticated oppression resonated with her experience. Yet, even knowing these forms of oppression, her cross-cultural sensitivity inhibited her intervention and dialogue.

Two female participants from our group noted that they couldn't identify any potential allies in the play, calling the scenario "total oppression," and classifying the protagonist as a "victim" rather than an oppressed person. Their Boalian observation was meant to underscore the distinction between oppression and victimization. Boal argued that forum theatre's liberatory potential relies on oppressions which offer opportunities for resistance. A lone individual at the mercy of a violent aggressor may have no recourse other than a desperate scream for help. As such, this is not a scenario which can be transformed through reflective action; liberation from such desperation is impossible (Boal 1992, 225). Contrary to the perception of these participants, I could identify other characters in the play as potential allies, including the women's family members. They may not have been obviously or immediately forthcoming as allies, as they offered no criticism of, or resistance to, the oppression faced by the protagonist. However, this situation doesn't render them incapable of critical reflection, and empathy. I believe that the international audience members' failure to identify potential allies, or avenues

for critical discussion, resulted from their cross-cultural sensitivity causing a form of intellectual and creative paralysis. The fact that certain norms and attitudes dominate in a culture does not render that culture's people incapable of critique, dissent or intellectual innovation.

Another participant used cross-cultural sensitivity to caution the group about the potential dangers of well-intentioned but poorly informed ideas. Not only did he feel ill-equipped to offer an intervention because of his unfamiliarity with the woman's specific context, but also he suggested that his intervention could prove dangerous, even fatal, as, should the woman try to stand up for her rights, she might be subjected to a violent reaction, even killed for her defiance. His concern made him feel "impotent" as a spect-actor.

This perception of creative paralysis is understandable, but not necessarily justifiable. While some participants were uncomfortable with certain cross-cultural exchanges, others argue that the very purpose of theatre of the oppressed is to engage in this discussion. I add that if culture is a constellation of hegemonic norms, ideas and practices which can and do oppress, then it is incumbent upon TO practitioners and participants to use their skillsets, their experience, and their collective capacity for resistance to push back.

Dialogue can be a challenge in the most ideal of conditions. Across cultures, and through language barriers, it is even more so. But difficult is not impossible. Participants use theatre of the oppressed to analyze their experiences then perform for an audience in order to generate discussion, solicit moral support, and build solidary relationships. As such, if the audience members want to reciprocate the relationship, it is important to respond affirmatively, creatively and constructively. By choosing not to participate in the discussion, even if we feel incapable of sharing ideas in a given context, it is like refusing to play with the performers, declining their

invitation to enter into a productive relationship. The perceived gap separating groups would then be reinforced rather than bridged.

The purpose of theatre of the oppressed is not to find solutions to isolated incidents. If it was solution-oriented, and if its solutions worked, then it would be a panacea for all forms of social conflict. It is, rather, a methodology for reflective praxis, aimed at supplanting oppressive hegemony with a liberating commitment to humanization. Dialogue can begin from the cultural misunderstandings which are inevitable when working with heterogeneous groups.

One of the elder participants in the Kolkata group offered that, while the context being analyzed was in India, and while the characters portrayed all lived within complicating traditions, their capacity to act as agents of change should not be undervalued. India is not immune to social change. Jana Sanskriti's history is a history of politicizing activism, resistance to oppressive norms, and collaborative construction of alternative knowledge. Resignation to inaction is akin to condemning a vulnerable group to perpetual oppression. As one female participant noted, it is our societies' collective and historic silence around gendered violence which "is killing us" (Fieldnotes, Kolkata, December 7, 2012). Once one is aware of an injustice, silence "becomes as political an act as speaking out" against it (Roy 2001, 7).

The tension between those in Kolkata who felt comfortable exchanging ideas, and those who felt excluded by their lack of familiarity with cultural norms and nuances, was palpable throughout Jana Sanskriti's workshop. People's caution was well-intentioned, as it was conscientiously rooted in concern for the agency of the oppressed. However, it compromised dialogue and interfered with the development of solidarity. By undermining the liberatory pillars upon which TO is founded, hypersensitivity stifled the emancipatory process in this case.

5.7 Cross-cultural Solidarity

The fundamental unifying element in all anti-oppression work is justice. Theatre of the oppressed provides a rights-upholding response to injustice, and a movement towards the building of more just relationships and institutions. In that sense, the victims of oppression in all of its forms share something in common. The racialized young male who is profiled by police and subjected to pervasive brutality shares something in common with the young bride in India who is forced into a marriage that becomes a life sentence of domestic servitude and/or gendered assault at the hands of her family's patriarchs and matriarchs. Their oppressors are different, but their experiences of subjugation within institutions validated by mainstream society are similar. Both have an interest in freedom and security.

Solidarity crosses cultural boundaries, and is defined by the variance of its adherents. Judy da Silva, an indigenous mother and rights activist from Grassy Narrows, reflects on the transboundary nature of solidarity: when people from different communities stand together, the issue(s) they are dealing with are no longer confined to a certain community. They become "human issues" rather than merely "Indian issues" (Wright 2013, 18). Transboundary solidarity gives wider-reaching political salience to an issue.

Some of the actors from the Kolkata performance commented that they are grateful for the way in which theatre empowers them to reflect on their life and condition. A spectator participant noted that after they had completed their performance, she saw some of the actors on stage with tears in their eyes after receiving our applause. This told her something about the power of being seen and having their stories heard. It was a "beautiful moment" for her, not so

perplexing. And she was intrigued by the females' oppression of other females, and looking forward to discussion on this phenomenon.

Sanjoy Ganguly, Artistic Director of Jana Sanskriti, advised workshop participants that some were getting too caught up in the issue of cross-cultural sensitivity. Trafficked people, commercial sex workers, domestic labourers, women, and all people in general live complex lives. We can relate to complexity. Forum theatre is a method of unpacking that complexity, but it is not a venue in which participants can offer solutions to individuals' problems. Rather, it is about creating relationships and building solidarity. We all struggle against patriarchy in different ways. We can and should engage in this dialogue, and offer our interventions, because we all have experiences from which we can speak. It is not patronizing; it is engaging in dialogue, even across cultures (Fieldnotes, Kolkata, December 8, 2012). Our task is to develop an understanding of the interconnectivity of our experiences.

Ganguly's feelings here resonate with my own. I argue that what unites us is our common understanding of (in)justice, and our commitment to the progressive realization of people's rights. We can agree that women should not be forced into exploitative relationships against their will. When a woman or a girl is forced into economic or social servitude, her rights are violated. Her experience may be validated by some people's opportunistic interpretation of patriarchal and capitalist norms, but as political activists engaging in dialogue through theatre of the oppressed, we can engage on the common ground that we object to the practice these women were subjected to, and we also have experienced forms of oppression within the same patriarchal and capitalistic beliefs.

Ganguly added some important insights about the performance we witnessed. He was commissioned by a nongovernmental organization to work with the women who were victims of human trafficking. All of them have experienced personal trauma. They are using forum theatre as part of their process to integrate back into society. The NGO wanted the women to perform for an audience, but Ganguly and the woman were hesitant, until they agreed to perform for our group. They believed that as an international group of TO practitioners, we would provide an empathetic audience, and present a low risk for re-traumatization. Ganguly noted that it was important for the women to have their stories heard, and their experiences validated (Fieldnotes, Kolkata, December 8, 2012). Participation in this process offers the oppressed an opportunity to enter into a relationship of solidarity with other participants. Having their experience validated through theatre of the oppressed is a source of empowerment for participants. By engaging with others, they are able to change the way they analyze and understand their experience.

5.8 Performing Translocalization

Theatre of the oppressed, as an exercise in creative redefinition of experience, should not have induced such crippling anxiety amongst workshop participants in Kolkata. Our capacity to give meaning to our experience is what distinguishes humans from other animals. Using creative ingenuity, people can build from their experiences. As multi-dimensional beings, people can choose the attributes they wish to define themselves by. If one has experienced oppression, or any undesirable incident, they need not permit that experience to be their sole identifier. Identities are constantly changing and evolving. Our enactment of a scenario need not be confined to the way we would have acted in a given scenario in the past. Rather, we can dream and imagine an alternative outcome because change is possible. We are not only who we are at

this very instant, just like we are not only who we were at some arbitrarily designated point in the past. We are also who we can be, and who we are becoming. And it is in this moment of becoming that we have the agency to play creatively. Who we are becoming is a vast horizon of potentiality limited only by the confines of our own imagination (Friedman 2012). Yet, as the response of some Kolkata workshop participants indicates, people's creative capacity is not always at the fore of their consciousness. Engaging creatively to confront oppression is difficult for individuals, and also for groups working across cultures.

Dialogue requires considerable intellectual labour and procedural rigor. Improvisation can be reckless where vulnerable individuals deal with collective trauma. It can be emotionally exhausting, even intellectually oppressive. I have demonstrated how the Kolkata discussion around the forum theatre performed by the group of trafficked women generated intense discussion, concern and debate among workshop participants. I heard from some of the women who stayed together in a local ashram that they were up late into the night debriefing their experiences spontaneously, in informal small groups. Pockets of people scattered in various places at various times were consumed in an emotional and ideological struggle to process what they had seen and experienced.

Workshop director Sanjoy Ganguly provided patient leadership when he joined the large group for a debriefing "gripes" session, in which participants aired their feelings and concerns. It proved to be a long and arduous process to open a sharing circle in which 40-plus individuals of diverse identities and disparate emotional needs could reflect on what they had experienced and how it has affected them. Even as a scholar trained to engage in such discussions, I found it to be exhausting. After Ganguly felt he had allowed the discussion sufficient time, he pleaded

that we not discuss anything further until a date towards the end of the festival, almost two weeks away. This was because he had a packed itinerary planned, with other things that we needed to be focusing on, and he needed to ensure that we would give our due diligence to the rest of the program. There would be time for a more wide-angle debriefing, review, or summarizing session at the end of the workshop, he assured participants. But this proposal did not sit well with participants intent on staying with their discussion (Fieldnotes, Kolkata, December 8, 2012).

The heavy emotional-intellectual burden experienced by participants reflects the complicating nature of translocalization. Participants faced several potentially aggravating factors, including culture shock, jet lag, changes to their routines and diets, group living, concerns about security, health, sanitation and food safety. Most were experienced TO practitioners, but for many it was their first trip to India. The prolonged TO exercise, nearing three weeks in duration, was demanding in its own right. It was not only full-time immersion into a new site of TO work; it was also a complete immersion into a physio-cultural context which was unfamiliar to many. All of this caused heightened anxiety, which manifested in emotional outbursts. I observed several participants in conditions of distress at various times throughout the workshop.

I had a degree of experiential privilege which facilitated my participation in the workshops. Having spent a considerable amount of time in Kolkata previously, and having adapted to the normalcy of life in India, I did not experience the culture shock that my peers did. In addition, I was a native English speaker, which made my ability to process group dynamics much easier than it was for some who did not speak English. There were participants from Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, Spain, Italy, France, and other places, for whom English was a second or third language, far removed from their comfort zone. One mentioned that actively participating in an

English language debate is intellectually exhausting, as they have to work harder than native English speakers to interpret what others are saying, craft their responses, then try to translate back into English for the sake of the discussion. For several, this compounded an already draining experience. One even noted that they felt oppressed by tendency of such international assemblies to treat English as the default common language (Fieldnotes, Kolkata, December 6-8, 2012).

Translocality does not imply fluidity of process or permeability of cultural context. Individuals' competing interests can cause friction, and can derail the work of cross-cultural solidarity building. This occurred in the small focus group I worked with in Kolkata, when strong personalities clashed, and our group was forced to spend more time dealing with interpersonal damage control than the creative task we had been assigned. I believe it was the culmination of stressors, including cross-cultural immersion, the power dynamics involved in the workings of a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multinational group dealing with complicated issues, which caused an outbreak of hostility in our group. We were a group of ten creative artists, each with our own ideas about how our project should take shape. We were scripting a short play which integrated some members' experiences of oppression. Our group seemed to be progressing, though I felt the process was painstakingly slow. This slowness is inevitable, particularly when working with a group of artists, several of whom want to put their personal touch on the final product. Progress is impeded not by the complicated nature of the issues being addressed, but by the egotistical need of individuals to contribute their own experience or anecdote, even if it is not relevant, productive or expedient.

In this particular focus group, an entire day was scheduled to develop the concept, plot, script, and dramaturgy of a short play which would last mere minutes. Personally, I invested little of myself into the process. I was more interested in observing the group dynamics, and participating alongside the others, without exerting any effort to direct the process. Some others had invested their creative enterprise fully, using their long histories of theatre experience to create a product they felt adequately represented them. Understandably, they wanted it to be a production they were proud to perform. I can empathize with this feeling from an individualist perspective. However, from a collectivist perspective, this can be a counterproductive, even potentially harmful conviction.

After lunch that day, a female member of the group stopped our work in order to express some frustrations that had been bothering her. She had tried to lead our group through a short reflective exercise as part of the development of our script. To her despair, her intervention did not materialize as she had hoped it would. Some in the group felt this intervention was a digression, that it was not particularly productive, nor was it an efficient way to spend the group's limited time. She was concerned about something more substantial: she expressed to the group that she was feeling oppressed as a woman. She felt that because she was a woman, her ideas and intentions were devalued. She said that she felt if she were a man, she would have commanded more respect, or been listened to more readily. She felt that some men in our small group were granted more respect than she.

The struggle of this participant to come to grips with a challenging process is indicative of a larger set of struggles that constitute the work of translocalizing resistance to oppression. She, along with every other workshop participant, arrived with certain expectations: about her

experience in India; about her engagement with the community in Kolkata; the forms of TO work she would be able to participate in; and the kinds of people she would be working with; their values, attitudes and assumptions. These complicating variables are multiplied by the amount of individual participants, each of whom arrived with varying experiences, ideas, and expectations of their own. It amounts to a conflict of enormous complexity, not all of which is reconcilable. While this particular participant struggled with internalized sexist oppression, others dealt with oppressions of their own, internally or externally, with varying degrees of efficacy. To conclude that this individual experienced difficulty because she was a woman in a relationship which privileged men is an overly simplistic response to what were multiple complicating variables. There was more going on in this particular context than gendered dynamics alone.

In addition to the competing and conflicting expectations of numerous individuals, stress was created by the nature of anti-oppressive work itself. Theatre of the oppressed is a struggle by definition, as it posits vulnerable people in confrontation against dehumanizing cultural forces. Group work is also a struggle, as it forces individuals to compromise personal interests for collective interests. Even if an individual has strong leadership qualities, and is permitted by the group to play a leadership role, others expect to be able to participate in meaningful ways, have their thoughts respected, and their experiences validated. Given the diversity of individuals present in any collaborative group process, certain struggles, whether interpersonal, ideational, ideological or creative, have to be expected. One must also be prepared to relinquish a certain degree of control over the group process, and the knowledge co-created through it. Because all members of a group have equal ownership over this process, no one member should feel entitled

to more persuasive power than any other member. It is incumbent upon all participants to relinquish their individual ego in order to co-create and uphold a collective ethos.

5.9 Globalizing Resistance

In the summer of 2013 I was on the front lawn of Parliament Hill in Ottawa, watching Mosaika's sound and light show. Marshall McLuhan's voice echoed off the walls, "The global village has become a global theatre, with everybody on the planet simultaneously participant as actor." Taken out of context, McLuhan provides a metaphoric soundbite which demonstrates the performative nature of humans' social interactions. The clip was taken from a summer radio series entitled "The New Majority", which ran on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's network between 1970 and 1972. McLuhan was explaining his perspective on the rapid technological changes occurring during that period of globalization. The world, in his eyes, was shrinking rapidly, meaning that the farthest reaches of the planet were no longer remote, disconnected or inaccessible. With the increased speed of travel and communication, people became more closely inter-connected and better informed about the world in which they lived than ever before. However, McLuhan cautioned that increased interconnectivity also meant increasing homogeneity of people, cultures, and interests (McLuhan 2011).

The erosion of cultural diversity as a result of hegemonic globalizations has not materialized to the extent that McLuhan cautioned it would. Wherever there is a threat to people's culture and livelihood, we can expect to find resistance. Theatre of the oppressed provides one such venue in which participants enact alternative realities. Rather than enacting their roles as they had been, they imagine the world through different lenses, and enact their roles as they could be.

Where homogenization does materialize today is in the claims that oppressed people make for their rights. Against ominous hegemonic powers, diverse actors from heterogeneous cultures and conditions do share certain struggles in common. They experience similar relationships with the political, economic, social and environmental norms perpetuating through globalizations. Human rights provide the discontent with a discourse that is both accessible and empowering, offering a political salience that gives leverage to their claims. Participants use theatre of the oppressed to analyze their condition, and to work towards transforming it.

Theatre of the oppressed communities manifest a counter-hegemonic globalization in two ways: they engage in a form of resistance which seeks to expand a set of ideas, beliefs and practices designed specifically to challenge dominant norms and behaviours. Participants embrace new norms that are non-hierarchical, participatory, reciprocal and co-operative. TO communities, therefore, defiantly resist dominant globalized norms which privilege competition, hierarchical stratification, individualistic capitalism, and protectionism. As TO applications and influences move from community to community, they comprise a globalizing force of their own, which transcends territorial boundaries, and which counters certain other dominant globalizations.

Theatre of the oppressed as a globalizing phenomenon is also qualitatively counter-normative. It occurs in the local context, and it engages people inter-subjectively. This engagement renders globality intimate and malleable rather than imposing and intractable. It embraces liberatory values that are universal, but seeks to embody them locally. That globalization can comprise a localizing logic, and equip people to alter the nature of their interpersonal relationships,

challenges assumptions which portray globalizations as supraterritorial and totalizing phenomena.

I have demonstrated in this chapter that the work of globalizing theatre of the oppressed is challenging but empowering. Participants are able to embody human rights norms and alter the way they engage with others in any given context. But this outcome is not arrived at easily. The work of developing solidary relationships, understanding the translocal implications of oppression, and overcoming cross-cultural differences constitute a formidable challenge. Empowering for some, it can be anxiety-inducing and conflict-laden for others. As a meshwork of diverse and decentralized participants who intentionally organize horizontally, such tensions are predictable. It is the political struggle to redefine norms and reconstitute conventions which characterizes the meshwork as such.

Communities engage in the work because emancipatory praxis demands that the oppressed claim human rights as their own. Their task involves no less than changing the ontological perspective of the oppressed, from vulnerability and victimhood to empowered agents of change. By changing their place within oppressive institutions, the oppressed can also change the nature of those institutions themselves.

I am able to make these claims about the counterhegemonic nature of theatre of the oppressed in part because of the inclusive and participatory nature of my research methodology. Observing practices and engaging with communities as an activist ethnographer proved to be empowering to the oppressed because it allowed for the development of relationships, the reciprocity of solidarity. Those whose experience I studied became active participants in the co-creation of knowledge. By deconstructing individuals' experiences and making connections between them

and the larger institutions within which relationships are intertwined, participants nourish their understanding of interconnectivity. Theatre of the oppressed places a collaborative emphasis on knowing the world, sharing experiences, understanding context, and envisioning alternatives. It engages with all participants as dignified humans, through horizontal, participatory and respectful dialogue. This approach is distinctly empowering because it allows for solidary reciprocity, and manifests an alternative way of relating to others. It works to legitimize people's experiences, amplify the voices of the oppressed, consolidate people's indignation, and strengthen their collective resolve and commitment to change. It is inspired by the belief in alternative possibilities, and empowered by a creative energy which is unique to the collective whole. Routledge (2013) notes that this approach to knowledge production is distinct from competition-oriented research which may aspire to consensus or hegemony, but which arrives there not by collaboration and empowered participation, but by the intellectual victory of the most persuasive argument.

Chapter Six

Epistemic Decolonization

“The world will always need revolution. That doesn't mean shooting and violence. A revolution is when you change your thinking.”

José Mujica, President of Uruguay (Watts 2013)

I have demonstrated up to this point that theatre of the oppressed practitioners are spreading their work globally, multiplying the quantity of practitioners, their communities of engagement, and the variations of practice in use. As a meshwork of individuals and communities pushing back against oppression, theatre of the oppressed manifests a counterhegemonic praxis. When it achieves its emancipatory potential, TO amounts to much more than a toolkit for participatory socio-political analysis; its participants effectively challenge dominant assumptions, inspire hope, and build alternative institutions. In this chapter I examine the distinct experiential and embodied forms of knowledge that TO communities produce. The unifying ontology that participants share is empowering in the way it enables them to redefine their identities, particularly in relation to others. I argue that by embodying and enacting resistance to the norms and institutions which have historically oppressed them, one of TO's most profound legacies is its capacity to decolonize knowledge itself. This intellectual innovation has emancipatory effects, as TO communities work to bridge the gap between human rights theory and materialization.

TO's hope for prefiguring liberatory institutions is invested in its capacity to foster relations of solidarity. Solidarity requires its adherents to make behavioural decisions based on the

reciprocal logic that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” It is an ideology rooted in an understanding of interconnectivity. Yet, as an ideology, solidarity does not define mainstream consciousness. We know that even when people know about injustice, they are not necessarily motivated to act for change. Neither the assumed social contract governing people’s social interactions, nor the legal institutions regulating people’s behaviour, implore the average individual to act against injustice. Apathy and indifference are normalized attitudes in an individualistically-oriented culture; selflessness, generosity and service are valorized, but not normalized qualities. The interconnected and interdependent nature of human systems is at best overlooked and undervalued; at worst, when informed by xenophobia, bigotry or a false sense of entitlement, interconnectivity can be feared enough, and interdependence loathed enough, that they inspire hatred and violence.

I have shown how TO is distinctly counter-hegemonic in the way it pushes back against marginalizing globalizations, and in the way it cultivates an empowering ontology within its communities. Now I turn my attention to participants’ knowledge of the world itself. Through theatre of the oppressed, participants render knowledge collective and changeable. Through processes of conscientization, they can alter not only their perception of society, but also the agency they have to engage with society, and the nature of the relationships they embody within society’s institutions. Using theatricalized interventions, they can effectively turn conscientization into an exercise in redefining their own identities, and the institutional constructs they inhabit. By exposing, understanding and transforming injustice, they can engage in the co-creation of more humanizing institutions.

TO's decolonizing mission challenges participants to abandon the certainty of knowledge, and retain a nourishing doubt. It is by doubt's insatiable appetite for questions, that knowledge maintains its evolutionary currency. Knowledge is not static; it is constantly being negotiated, enhanced, questioned, developed and contested. The generation of knowledge is a collective process. It is not the property of any one party, for distribution to others, even if dominant norms of enterprising capitalism seek to commoditize knowledge and protect it as private property through legal institutions. Dominant epistemologies make claims to truths, universal or not. Scientists, scholars and other professionals are deeply invested in knowledge economies which privilege intellectual certainty. Knowledge innovations are vigorously protected and capitalized on as "intellectual property." To understand knowledge as intersubjectively co-created, collectively owned, and universally accessible is counterhegemonic.

6.1 Theatre of the Oppressed as Knowledge Production

Theatre of the oppressed is a tool that groups use to share and reflect on their experiences. Its ability to transform that experiential knowledge into a new consciousness gives TO empowering qualities. The kinds of knowledge that can have emancipatory effects need to be cultivated intentionally. People who have survived various forms of oppression do not possess an innately emancipatory disposition. Their interest in forging solidary relationships as a strategy of resistance is neither natural nor inevitable. It is a socially conditioned and politically activated stream of consciousness which needs time and energy to develop and strengthen. TO, through its conscientizing praxis, seeks to fulfill two objectives: it provides a set of tools for critical social analysis and it engages in the prefigurative work of altering social institutions by developing solidary relationships.

Engaging in theatre of the oppressed is a collective process. It is based on the experience of its participants, and rooted in a historic context which is shared by the collective. The process is about co-creation of something new: a new form of knowledge; a new way to understand the world we live in; and a new perspective from which to engage in society. Through TO, participants see the world not as comprised of rigid unchangeable structures, but as multiple fluid and changing institutions which participants can define for themselves, based on their own experiences, and in their own interests.

The collective nature of this work means that the interests of the group supersede individual interests. This is necessarily so. Sanjoy Ganguly notes that the claim to individual entitlement or acclamation is corrosive to the establishment of collective consciousness. In order to maintain and reinforce the collective conscience, theatre of the oppressed must be understood as collaborative work, and it must be organized non-hierarchically (Personal communication, Berkeley, May 31, 2012).

To dislodge the individual as sole producer of knowledge is counterintuitive in a culture which rewards and perpetuates individualism. Individual pride is as much an issue for artists as it is in other sectors. Allowing a collective ethos to supplant the individual ego takes considerable willpower.

I have heard it recited numerous times throughout my observation of TO practitioners that “anyone can do theater, even actors. And theater can be done everywhere. Even in a theater.” Julian Boal attributes these words to his father, Augusto (Fieldnotes, May 30, 2012, Berkeley; June 13, 2015, Chicago). Here Boal decolonizes our understanding of theatre, as he dismantles the traditional role of the actor. He calls on the theatre artists to cast their reflective gaze not

only on the problems faced by the oppressed, but also on their own practice. The countercultural challenge posed herein contains TO's emancipatory potential, but also its risk for emancipatory deficiency. Its democratizing effects depend on the ability of the facilitator to dislodge themselves from the central role in order to uphold the collective as primary knowledge producers.

This challenge can be difficult for theatre artists to overcome. Not all artists even want to try. Kate Tempest (2014), in a reflection on her experience as a forum theatre playwright, demonstrates how her creative inclinations were constrained by the structural requirements of the theatre of the oppressed. She was tasked with writing a script for a play which would be used to engage groups in dialogue at prisons and shelters. She struggled with the writing process because she felt the mechanical requirements of forum theatre stifled her creativity. Rather than imagining and artistically representing complicated problems and complex relationships, she was pressured by her director to keep things simple, and to provide multiple entry points for the interventions of spect-actors. She felt that there was "no room for poetry, nuance or the exploring of delicate relationships. The forum has to come first."

I use Tempest's experience only to illustrate how control over the means of production can be an issue for the creative artist. I did not attend this performance, but can identify some emancipatory deficiencies based on Tempest's reflection. I have argued that the liberatory potential of the theatre of the oppressed lies in its capacity to alter the institutions within which the oppressed live. While it creates a space in which oppressed people can analyze particular incidents and rehearse alternative responses to these scenarios, I find more emancipatory potential in its ability to build relationships of solidarity, deconstruct institutions of oppression,

and engage participants in forms of knowledge production which can change the way they identify themselves and the positions they occupy in various social contexts. Emancipatory theatre of the oppressed is a collective process, right from the scripting of plays through to their performance and use for generating dialogue-based analysis. The characters and script of a play would be developed out of the shared experience of collaborating participants. In Tempest's case, she had full ownership over the scripting process, which is contrary to TO orthodoxy. She comments that "what I wanted to do and what the forum needed me to do were different things. Forum needs a bad guy. It needs an oppressor and an oppressed and an onlooker. So I kept working at it, and by the end of the process I felt the play was hardly mine at all. Like I hadn't even written it, I'd just joined the dots."

She struggled to meet the technical requirements of a forum theatre production because of the way in which it compromised her artistic agency. But in the end, she reports that she was able to recognize some of the value of the process. She had a "revelation" that "what is important in [f]orum is not the writing at all, but the discussions the play will encourage, and the feelings and ideas that come up in the audience." For Tempest, community dialogue began after she had completed her script, and delivered it for other people's consumption and digestion.

Her own reflection on the production process reveals a self-centred perspective which contradicts what I understand to be the collective nature of TO. She writes "The feeling of being in a room full of people discussing the lives of the characters that *I'd* created ... was unlike anything I've known" (emphasis mine). To witness audience members taking on the roles of the characters on stage, but informed by their own life experience "was truer than anything a writer could script" (Tempest 2014). She was admittedly excited by the audience's improvised

engagement with the play. She also appreciated the value of the discussion her play generated. However, she only partially turned the means of production over to the audience. Audience members got to play with script after it was presented to them, and alter the outcome of the characters' experience. But they were not engaged in the longer processes of critical analysis, collective authorship and solidary relationship building. The collective qualities of TO praxis are skipped over when the crafting of a script is tasked to an individual. In my understanding of TO, this can render the process emancipatorially deficient.

Recall that in Chapter Three, I assessed the performance of a forum theatre production at the Mennonite conference similarly. Where theatre groups, teachers, development agencies or other practitioners retain control over the means of production, and limit the audience's participatory capacity to "spect-actor" interventions, this compromises the emancipatory potential of theatre of the oppressed. I use the term "Boal lite" to indicate that while this particular production may have been inspired by Boal's method, its neglect of critical rigor compromised its capacity for liberation.

Counter-hegemonic praxis is fundamentally alter-epistemological. That is, it identifies mainstream cultural institutions, practices and assumptions which are problematic, dehumanizing, marginalizing, and oppressive, with the intention of deconstructing their constituent values, and enacting alternatives. This process results in the co-creation of new forms of knowledge, new hope for change, new relationships of solidarity, and a collective commitment to produce new norms. These norms enhance rather than suppress dignity, engage rather than isolate the vulnerable, and enable to the oppressed to enact their full human dignity. Theatre of the oppressed exercises can have a democratizing effect when they enable participants

to break free from the confines of the familiar, and engage in processes which restructure relations of power. The oppressed are able to redefine the meaning of their relationships, the institutions within which they live, and the very identify which hitherto had restricted their ability to live as fully human.

6.2 Knowledge as Collective

Theatre of the oppressed renders knowledge production a collective endeavor. It rejects dominant societal norms which restrict vulnerable people's capacity to enact their full humanity. Through its work to deconstruct contemporary social conventions, TO also dislodges the individual as creator of knowledge. Individualism is an ideology which frays the bonds of our connectedness and sociality, and is a central tenet of exploitative capitalist systems. Jiwon Chung likens capitalism to a prowling animal which separates prey away from its community in order to pounce on it. The system sustains itself and legitimizes its own exploitative power by perpetuating a myth of individualism (personal communication, Berkeley, June 5, 2012). Deconstructing individualist-capitalist logics, then, takes on a central focus in TO analysis.

A collectivist epistemology is counter-normative in an individualist culture. Theatre of the oppressed builds upon the experience of individuals, to be sure, as individuals know intimately and personally the effects of their oppression. Theatre of the oppressed isolates the individual's experience temporarily, in order to place it in a wider context. Then, the individual is supplanted by the group, which takes collective ownership of that experience. Each member of a TO group is an integral part of this collective. Their experiences are depersonalized so that the collective can deconstruct it, analyze it, and, through dramatic interchanges and interpretations of it, give new meaning to the individual's experience. It is through this collective process that TO groups

are able to push back against institutions which marginalize them, and alter the meaning which defines their existence, on their own terms. By engaging in this way, participants reject their status as victims of injustice, and claim a more empowering identity as oppressed people, with the implication being that they have the political agency to change the way they respond to such scenarios. The nature of the institution within which the oppressed live, then, is altered by this change in power dynamics. The oppressed may still occupy a subordinate socio-political position in the institution, but they do not enact their role as passively as they had before. Having changed the way they identify themselves, the oppressed enact their role with a more humanized and politicized sense of agency.

Freire asserted unequivocally that the ally of the oppressed is not the “proprietor of revolutionary wisdom” to be given to or imposed upon the oppressed. This mindset is a form of deception, symptomatic of the old oppressive institutions, and lacking full “communion” with the oppressed (Freire 2005 [1970], 60-1). Freire’s is a radically humble approach to knowledge, considering the ways in which conventional thought privileges certain elite forms of knowledge. As Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell (2008) argue, community-based knowledge is not what political elites or mainstream society traditionally recognize as authoritative knowledge. The notion of “expertise” is usually reserved for knowledge produced with methodological rigor defined as “scientific,” or the knowledge produced in the capitalist economy by those deemed to be qualified professionals. To oppose this set of assumptions, then, and to establish a methodological practice rooted in problem-posing rather than problem-solving is counter-normative.

Theatre of the oppressed, in order to retain its emancipatory currency, needs to guard its co-generative nature against the potentially corrupting influence of individual participants. It needs to be intentional in the way it resists the patronizing tendency to evolve into a “theatre for advice.” The giving of advice is a unidirectional transaction, like a knowledge deposit. This is what Freire so opposed in contemporary understandings of knowledge production, as it neglects the co-constitutive nature of knowledge. I have heard from some practitioners in my research that sometimes theatre of the oppressed amounts to a brainstorming session, in which a problem is posed to the audience, and they are invited to offer suggestions on how to resolve it, based on their own experience or ideas.

This approach was part of the problem encountered by some Muktadhara festival participants that I recounted in the previous chapter. A European spectator at the Kolkata performance by the trafficked women felt that she shared little in common with the women whose experiences were enacted in the performance. She felt that it was “dishonest” and “inauthentic” to offer her interventions in a forum theatre performance by people she felt did not share her social status. Her concern was rooted in her understanding of solidarity, which I found to be problematic. She defined solidarity the same way that Boal did: as “running the same race” as the people you are concerned about. In order for this condition to exist, the potential for solidarity would be limited to people experiencing the same form of oppression, or, would necessitate those with relative privilege making material changes to their condition so as to be more like the oppressed. A person living in a gated suburban community, then, may not be able to act in solidarity with a person living in an urban slum, because their material existence is too dissimilar. To me, this conceptualization of solidarity is problematic because it conflates solidarity and similarity. The

participant even gave an example: she believed that white people should not offer forum theatre interventions based on people of colour's experience of racism in Europe, because white people don't experience the same form of oppression. Solidarity for people of colour would have to come from people whose ethnic identity causes them to be discriminated against in some way.

This participant's idea is interesting not so much because of the way she thinks about solidarity, but because of the implications of her own attitude towards anti-oppressive work in general. Her perspective betrays the emancipatory potential of theatre of the oppressed by preserving the "us" versus "them" dichotomy. It prohibits the type of transcendence that I argue can happen through effective TO. I locate TO's liberatory potential in its capacity to create institutions which are humanizing, inclusive, tolerant, and just. This capacity does not exist where praxis is invested in an adversarial paradigm. As Freire argued, it is not enough for the oppressed to aspire to invert their oppressive relationships. Without a comprehensive understanding of "we", and a collective perspective which acknowledges and respects the interdependence of all in a complexly inter-related system, we cannot truly work towards the co-creation of liberating institutions.

In the example above, the individual's opinion that she was put in the uncomfortable position of offering advice to others reveals more about her own insecurities, than about the deficiencies of that particular forum theatre activity. Her position reflected her own feelings of social superiority, and even coloniality. She lacked an understanding of the ways in which her own experience is connected to that of the people whose stories were performed on stage. Whereas I argue that solidarity works to bridge difference, and engage politically disparate people towards

a common cause, the idea that oppressions must be shared in order to be acted upon in solidarity is a problem which can sustain and reinforce rather than overcome identities of difference.

Despite this individual's conflation of coloniality and solidarity, her concern over the implications of a "theatre of advice" does warrant consideration. If forum theatre is structured in such a way that it amounts to nothing more than a solicitation for advice, then it does suffer from an emancipation deficiency. That is, it falls short of its potential to engage groups in dialogue, to build new relationships, alter the identity of the oppressed, which are TO's liberatory qualities. Solicitation of advice may imply a hierarchical relationship between actors on stage and the spectators in the audience, where the actors are victims of oppression who seek the counsel of audience members assumed to have a superior form of knowledge. Having appealed for suggestions, audience participants would give theirs, rendering the actors recipients of knowledge, whether it was particularly liberating or not. This is not how TO is supposed to work. If the TO context is set up to create a space for critical reflection, and if its praxis is as emancipatory as it has the potential to be, then it amounts to much more than a knowledge exchange; it is a process in which participants collaborate on the co-creation of knowledge. As such, it has innovative, transcendent qualities. It can avoid falling into a condescending practice of "theatre for advice."

Not all TO practitioners share a collectivist worldview. I was struck by the distinctly individualistic nature of the work being done by a Toronto practitioner, Simon Malbogot. I attended a workshop he facilitated, which he called Masks of Manipulation. His purpose was to use a set of masks, each depicting a different emotion, to develop participants' capacity for emotional discipline. His point was that it is important to be able to define and protect personal

boundaries, so as to not permit oppressors to penetrate these. However, whereas Ganguly defined the individual in relation to the collective (that is, the individual is an integral part of the collective(s) to which they belong), Malbogot's premise is that the individual is an independent entity, responsible for their own identity definition and defense (Fieldnotes, Berkeley, June 1, 2012). I do not dispute Malbogot's pragmatic logic: in an individualistic culture, where day-to-day interactions require individuals' capacity to respond independently to adversity, it makes good sense to know and assert your personal boundaries, and defend yourself against violation. Further, his construction of the individual as such doesn't necessarily preclude that individual's membership in social groups, kin networks, communities or other collectives. At this juncture, I simply wish to point out that there are variations in the way practitioners view the world and engage in their praxis. As I have argued, the global TO meshwork is comprised of heterogeneous practitioners and communities.

6.3 Collaborative Resistance

Malbogot's individualist perspective effectively forces the participant to confront the competitive nature of the struggle to give meaning to one's experience. In my theory for how TO groups work to resist oppression, I argue that they work not to invert the oppressive relationship, but to transcend it; I demonstrate that a co-operative logic supplants a competitive logic, that the focus is group-oriented rather than individualistic, and that resistance is collective. I place the emphasis on a scale of social change above the interpersonal; it is institutional. Yet, by framing my theory in this way, I risk obscuring the competitive nature of the struggle over meaning-making.

I am wary of the ways in which competition can transform into vengeance, as this can derail the liberation project. Freire noted that when people harbour vengeance, their desire may be to ascend to the social or political status of the oppressor. This mere inversion of roles in the oppressive relationship makes the oppressed retain the identity of the oppressor within themselves, and hence to fail at the cause of liberation. Neither the oppressed nor the oppressor can be fully humanized in this way.

Theatre of the oppressed, therefore, needs to channel its competitive energy effectively. Freire quotes Fanon to lament the way in which “horizontal violence” can preoccupy the energy of the oppressed. Rather than fighting against their oppressor for justice, they fight against their peers for the slightest of discord. Freire attributes this desire to the identity of the oppressor surviving within the desires of the oppressed. “In their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them” (2005 [1970], 62). If they are persuaded in this way, then the scope of their liberation is restricted. It is personal, vindicating, but not revolutionary. It has a counter-revolutionary effect similar to what Lisa Wade calls a “patriarchal bargain”: a justification for the ways in which women may secure for themselves a more favourable place within institutions that are gendered oppressively. Rather than committing to collective struggle for systemic justice, individuals compete against one another, jockeying to secure a favourable outcome, even within the structure which oppresses them. Wade demonstrates how “a patriarchal bargain is a decision to accept gender rules that disadvantage women in exchange for whatever power one can wrest from the system. It is an individual strategy designed to manipulate the system to one’s best advantage, but one that leaves the system itself intact” (Wade 2011).

For theatre of the oppressed to retain its emancipatory edge, it is imperative that its practitioners not let their praxis devolve into an opportunistic “oppression bargain.” This is counter-intuitive to people who are enculturated in systems of exploitative privilege. It takes disciplined intentionality to transcend the dominant norms of competition and vengeance, and work towards a co-operative alternative. It navigates people through a departure from the binding dichotomy of “us versus them” and enables people to acknowledge our collective interdependence. Epistemologically, it demands that one reject the understanding of knowledge as something that is to be created or retained by an individual for the transfer to another (either by sharing, giving, selling, teaching, or any other means of transfer), and a re-definition of knowledge as something that is co-generated.

This is a tall order, especially to the hardened activist who has committed much time, energy and resources to engaging in the competitive politics of persuasion. In Freire’s concept of liberation, the oppressed are solely responsible for their own liberation, but not so that they can then ascend the heights of socio-political hierarchy; rather, their liberation is bound up with the liberation of the oppressor, who is equally dehumanized by oppression, albeit with more favourable outcomes. The liberation of the oppressed demands not that the oppressed invert the oppressive relationship such that they are now able to oppress their former oppressor; there is no place for revenge in the vocation of emancipation. They are tasked, rather, with the responsibility to humanize their oppressor, such that they live in dialogue. This is counter-normative, even among radical activist groups. The protestor, the neoliberal, the religious zealot, and people entrenched in other ideological positions are fundamentally opposed to an idea, institution, or policy, and will fight until their preferred option defeats the one that they opposed.

Cultures are invariably adversarial, where certain ideas and norms compete against others for legitimacy or popular currency. As such, TO is revolutionary in the way it endeavors to transcend such adversarial politicking.

Theatre of the oppressed, then, must not suppress people's competitive inclinations, but direct them effectively. Normative change is a political game; its players are invested heavily in its outcome. Freire's purpose was to change the nature of the game, transcending vengeful competition, dehumanizing oppression, and creating more affirming institutions, both cultural and political. TO communities resist oppression by trying to alter the nature of institutions, foster creativity, prefigure alternative organizational structures, and challenge tired narratives. They occupy a complicated position between co-operation and competition.

6.4 Aesthetics of Knowledge Production

Art is a form of knowledge, and a medium of communication. It is not only a reflection of reality, but an interpretation of reality from the perspective of the artist. Boal argues that if the artist aspires merely to reflect reality, they relinquish the opportunity to render reality understandable from different perspectives (1985 [1979], 171). More importantly, they fail to render reality transformable. The interactive process of using drama to analyze experience enables participants to activate alternative intellectual perspectives. Using the imagination, and engaging in TO exercises, people can give new meaning to their lived experiences, and change the frames of reference through which they understand their experience. The process has the power to alter the way in which people identify themselves; I argue that this also changes the nature of the relationships comprising social institutions. Aristizabal offers that "if you can

change the script – the one imposed by society or the one that runs in a seemingly endless loop inside your own head – maybe you can change your life” (2010, 250).

The political work of interpreting reality through art is the artist’s vocation. TO practitioners engage in their work not only to interpret the world around them, but to change it. Some, including Boal himself, Diamond and Aristizabal, make the argument that theatre’s persuasive power is invested in its aesthetics. Others debate the importance of aesthetics, thinking of TO more in terms of community dialogue than as the performance of a spectacle. While its aesthetic qualities don’t necessarily preclude its capacity to serve as a vehicle for dialogue, not all TO practitioners have the creative ingenuity or experience to produce art of comparable aesthetic standards. Creative expression doesn’t necessarily require excessive financial means. A talented artist can find ways to create compelling art even with limited resources. Theatre of the oppressed, as a work of art, is a creative interpretation of, rather than a mundane reproduction of the world from the perspective of its participants.

Aesthetics are a matter of creative enterprise. If a group has the capacity to integrate artistic aesthetics into their productions, then this is empowering. I agree with artists who maintain that the persuasive power of theatre is enhanced by its aesthetic impressions. However, given the heterogeneity of practitioners and participants, it cannot be assumed that all are equally artistic. Further, artistic aesthetic is a subjective quality, meaning that different ideas resonate with different individuals, complicating any expectation that there can be an objective measure of aesthetic value.

I was fascinated in the course of my study to learn about the ways in which artistic aesthetics can be invested with politicizing nuance. More interesting than the empirical phenomenon itself

is the way in which aesthetics can have marginalizing or oppressive effects, contradicting the anti-oppressive fundamentals of TO praxis. My interest was sparked during a discussion with participants in a Kolkata workshop. One participant observed that TO practitioners frequently cast the oppressed in a play to appear calm, beautiful, innocent, or otherwise aesthetically attractive, while the oppressors are depicted as ugly, aggressive and repulsive. It raised the question, does the victim have to be aesthetically pleasing in order to evoke an empathetic response? Does a female victim of dowry-based violence, sexual assault, barriers to education and employment have to look pretty in order to generate support from spectators? If the victim is not aesthetically pleasing, does the given person lose some empathetic credibility? Of course, in theory, a victim's physical appearance should not render them any more or less "deserving" of empathy than any other victim. But, in a frank and honest discussion of this issue, only three out of twenty five participants were able affirm that the groups with which they regularly engage make a conscious effort to confront such stereotypes (Fieldnotes, Kolkata, December 7, 2012). Some objected to this practise, arguing that they are conscious of this problem, and do work intentionally to ensure that they don't perpetuate such superficial and materialistic mainstream aesthetic values. But my feeling after this discussion was that it's an issue that many succumb to, and that it needs to be scrutinized more regularly and rigorously by TO practitioners.

I am not a dramaturg, but something I have learned in my engagement with theatre artists is that effective communication through theatre requires a certain amount of performative exaggeration. Facial expressions, body movements and voice projections, for example, deliver their message more concisely when exaggerated. Given this practice, it would not be surprising if artists cast actors with a certain image in order to manipulate how they are perceived. This

may imply a solidarity deficiency. It could undermine the emancipatory nature of the work TO practitioners do. Three out of the twenty-five participants in this discussion said they are keenly aware of this issue, and actively work to ensure that they are not stereotyping the oppressed, or otherwise sensationalizing their work. There is a risk that TO practitioners are re-creating oppressions through their casting if they engage in this uncritical practice.

Sanjoy Ganguly advises that forum theatre, and theatre of the oppressed in general, are about “representation, not reproduction” of reality. This is an important distinction. We need to be analytically incisive, and for this we need certain details to be accurate. But we also need to be critical of our stereotypes, and consciously break them where we can. Theatre is an accessible form of knowledge, but not an apolitical form. The work of interpreting reality through theatre is a political act. It occurs at several points throughout TO. Groups work collaboratively to interpret the experience of their members in a dramatic production. Facilitators also interpret in the way they mediate interactions. The TO facilitator needs to pay keen attention to the way in which their leadership works to contest or reproduce oppressive politics.

6.5 Theatre as a Form of Embodied Knowledge

During a workshop in Kolkata, after going through a series of TO activities, all participants were invited to form a large circle, facing outwards, away from others’ line of sight. The facilitator directed each of us (simultaneously) to create an image of “theatre” with our bodies. We were then instructed to turn around, so that each of us could see all of the images created. We were then to move about the space and form small groups by joining with the image(s) that most resonated with our own. I found myself paired with a woman who had created an image nearly identical to my own. Both of us had our hands pressed together in front of our chest, eyes

closed. She stood on her feet, and I was on my knees. Then, bringing each pairing to the attention of the larger group, the facilitator instructed us to speak one word to describe our image. She spoke two: depth and realization. My word was hypocrite. This contrast evoked laughter from the group. The facilitator was intrigued. Here were two images so similar that he had expected boring similarity when we associated words with the images. Yet, the thoughts going through our minds as we created our images were contradictory. The feelings evoked by two similar images were of two entirely different and opposing concepts: hers took theatre for what it's worth, embracing its transformative power; mine interpreted theatre with a grain of suspicion, not trusting the practitioner, suspicious of the ulterior motives which may underlie the practitioner's practice.

Communicating with body images nonverbally can be empowering, as it engages people with senses they don't normally use. It activates alternative thought processes. As a mechanism of social change, nonverbal communication can do two things effectively: first, it forces people out of their comfort zones, and leverages creative energy which otherwise lays dormant inside people. We are so accustomed to what is "normal," including visual and audible perception, and verbal communication of our ideas. By taking away verbal communication, in a setting wherein we need to communicate immediately (time does not permit communication in written forms) participants are forced to think creatively and quickly, generating innovation. Second, nonverbal communication can deconstruct entrenched power relations. Power is projected through our speech, and some people can dominate a conversation or a debate just by their oral presence. Taking this power away from participants opens the potential for new personalities to bring

forward their thoughts, concerns, and contributions to a discourse. As I argued in Chapter Three, TO's ability to engage people through different senses can thus have democratizing effects.

This creative form of communication can be empowering, but it is also subjective. Its subjectivity enables participants to engage with one another in their own ways. It allows for people to use their creative energy, individual enterprise and collective co-creation. But harnessing collective intellect requires dialogue, interpretation, development, listening, etc. It is neither easy nor simple. As this case demonstrates, contradictory ideas and interpretations are likely to emerge. TO, therefore, includes other mechanisms to tease out dialogue, work through ideas, deal with contradictions, and work towards empowered participation.

By engaging with peers in this way, participants exchange experiences and ideas, but they also share new experiences in the process. Intellectual friction is created by the interaction of ideas, giving rise to new knowledge. An individual's experience of oppression can take on new meaning when it comes into contact with other people's experiences and interpretations. And so, by engaging in a TO exercise, experiences are shared in dialogue, and empathy is generated. Individuals, relinquishing their desire for intellectual dominance, listen to others, and allow ideas to move in multiple directions. As a result, dialogue is manifest. (It may be more accurately described as "multilogue," since ideas are exchanging and growing between several participants, not just pairings of two). TO is distinctly not an exercise for multiple competing monologues.

Dialogue in theatre of the oppressed is embodied. After we had developed our plays in Kolkata, we assembled as a large group to perform them for our peers. Ganguly used our group to experiment with some "rainbow of desire" activities. Taken from TO's extensive repertoire of analytical tools, the rainbow of desire has participants embody the characters in an incident of

oppression in order to interrogate their personalities, their interests, their thoughts, desires and constraints. It is an examination of what goes on inside the minds of the characters created for the theatre of the oppressed. It adds to the complexity of the characters created, enabling participants to know their personal circumstances more comprehensively and intimately.

Ganguly invited the audience members to make still images with their bodies to demonstrate what is happening inside the mind of one of the oppressed character. In this case, the protagonist was an elderly mother, whose family could no longer care for her, and who was being sent to live in a nursing home. The woman playing the mother then went to each of the images (five were volunteered from audience) and engaged in a dialogue with them, to prod them, to interpret the image, based on how the spectator perceived the character. The purpose of this exercise was to bring the story to life, to query the mind of the protagonist, and to develop that character further. This form of interaction provides opportunities for the protagonist to incorporate the thoughts and suggestions of others into their character, thereby enriching the plot of the play. It adds layers of complexity to the story, and the characters involved; from numerous people's perspectives and experiences, not limited to that of the individual actor playing the role of the protagonist.

Theatre of the oppressed has a politicizing orientation which is distinct from other forms of theatre. Its purpose is not to deliver a message, but to change the ways in which its participants engage in society politically. The process of TO, then, becomes a political intervention of its own. It creates an opportunity for all involved to participate in politics. Acting has a "double significance," as it refers to the performance process as well as the political action which it demands (Ganguly 2010, 66-7).

The knowledge produced through TO is accessible because it is based on the experiences of its participants. Because all people have the ability to reflect their experience, and to imagine themselves responding to a given situation in alternative ways, all people have the ability to do theatre. And all of our lives are conscious performances. We intentionally act in certain ways in certain places, wear certain clothing for various occasions, and project different personas in different social settings. The main difference between actors on stage and humans in everyday activity is that stage actors are aware of the theatricality of their performance, and so are better positioned to use this fact to their advantage. Others are not necessarily aware that they are doing theatre (Ganguly 2010, 70).

6.6 Unlearning the Familiar

Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* gives practitioners the critical tools necessary to understand people's place in the complex relationship between the colonizer and colonized (Macedo 2005 [1970], 11). Coloniality is about power, privilege, opportunism and exploitation; it is about institutionalized relationships which subordinate and dehumanize some for the benefit of others. Multiple variables of difference intersect to complicate the human experience. It requires a nuanced understanding of complexly interrelated factors to understand how and why certain individuals are able to ascend the hierarchies of wealth and power, while others struggle to cope with systemic disadvantages. My research provides evidence that as an adaptation of Freire's liberating praxis, theatre of the oppressed equips participants with the tools they need to understand the coloniality of the social structures they live within. Its interactive exercises provide an innovative way to resist injustice. Participants are able to counter oppression by

deconstructing, re-envisioning and enacting anew, the ways in which they live within and respond to their various contexts. As such, it is an empowering and optimistic project.

TO's interactive methods can effectively disrupt the "culture of silence" which sustains oppression. Yet, liberation requires more than normative disruption, or consciousness raising. Its reflective praxis requires ongoing adaptation to changing contexts, and rigorous adherence to humanizing principles. At times it is even necessary to check one's own (unintentional) colonial tendencies. Freire understood the ways in which oppressed peoples' "ignorance and lethargy were the direct product of the whole situation of economic, social, and political domination – and of the paternalism – of which they were victims. Rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they were kept 'submerged' in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were practically impossible. And it became clear to him that the whole educational system was one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence" (Shaul 2005 [1970], 30).

Boal makes a similar inference, but focuses his criticism on the capacity of oppressed people to respond to injustice autonomously. TO practitioners are fond of one particular Boalian refrain, which they often recite in their promotional materials: "theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it" (Boal 1992, xxxi). Focusing on individuals' (in)capacity to respond to oppression has colonizing implications, because it denies the agency of the oppressed prior to their encounter with a particular form of knowledge.

This gratuitous logic relegates the oppressed to a social status more condemning than Boal intended, and is inconsistent with the anti-oppressive principles which define his general body of work. TO practitioners distinguish the "oppressed" from "victims" by defining the oppressed as

people with an active interest in and capacity to alter their social condition, whereas victims lack such agency. To suggest that TO's exercises for raising consciousness equip participants with the tools they need to act on their social condition rather than "just waiting for it" implies a degree of passivity which betrays the humanizing ethic of TO. It undermines the agency of the oppressed, as if they are sitting around, unaware of their relationships, their relative poverty, their oppression.

In my experience, those who have not encountered Boal's work can still be active change makers, if and when they want or need to be. Politics happens. People were not apolitical prior to their exposure to Boal's politicizing ideas. The assumption that victims of oppression lacked the agency to resist prior to their encounter with TO is made in error. What TO does is it changes the ways in which the oppressed engage in their relationships; it changes their politics. Living in any cultural context requires that people continuously negotiate and re-evaluate the ways in which they engage with the world. People are complicated multi-dimensional entities. The cultural contexts in which they live are dynamic, changing. Neither individuals nor the cultural contexts they live in are static or certain. Against a backdrop of uncertainty and change, then, people perform their roles in various ways. The oppressed do not take their oppression so passively.

To deny oppressed people's agency prior to their encounter with a particular set of ideas does a disservice to all anti-oppression movements, large and small. These movements have not only made gains for justice and peace the world over; they have also informed the anti-oppressive norms constituting theatre of the oppressed itself. Abolition, women's rights, and the right to

self-determination, to name only a few, are hard-fought rights achieved by prolonged struggle. Conscientization can take on many forms.

In the way that some practitioners use Boal's words, there is a danger that they can betray TO's emancipatory potential by adopting a problematic saviour complex. This adoption occurs when one believes that the liberation of others depends on the intervention of a particular activist, or their particular model of engagement. What Boal did offer was a new model for praxis. He chose to refer to his work as "humanizing," which, regrettably, can imply that prior to their encounter with this idea, the oppressed were somehow less than human. For me, humanization refers not to people's material existence, but to the social relationship between the parties in dialogue. It is not that the oppressed were less human before; rather, it is that through the process of dialogue and critical analysis, participants can dismantle the barriers which prevented them from enacting their full rights-bearing humanity hitherto. This distinction is important. Part of the work of decolonizing knowledge, I think, requires that we also decolonize Boal's understandings of human-ness and agency.

Freire did not make the same colonial assumption as Boal. His model was committed to deconstructing the patronizing relationship of knowledge transfer from teacher to student. He recognized all people as capable humans, and sought to invest in them the critical conscience to overcome their subordination. Fighting against coloniality is a daunting task. Hegemony is entrenched by definition because as a set of legitimized norms, it is consented to by the people living under them.

At its core, the foundational principle of TO is justice; its medium is dialogue. Dialogue is not merely a utilitarian tool for social, cultural, economic, or political analysis; it is an

“epistemological relationship,” rooted in open curiosity. That is, it is an acknowledgement of the dialectical nature of knowledge, a recognition of the inter-subjectivity of the process of knowledge creation and sharing, and an acceptance of the importance of all stakeholders in the process of creating knowledge. The creation, retention, or sharing of knowledge is not an individualistic endeavor, despite the popular norms like private (intellectual) property and meritocracy which would argue otherwise; rather, it is a social process (Macedo 2005 [1970], 17).

This process implies an openness to alternative ways of knowing, and as such, runs contrary to more traditional frameworks of knowledge in a culture of certainty where forms of knowledge are hierarchically stratified, and the supremacy of a particular knowledge is nurtured. To question social conventions, and to experiment with alternative forms of knowledge production, are radical propositions, particularly in the face of monological dominance. Even in democratic rhetoric, we fight for the right to speak, to have our voices heard, but rarely is there public uproar about our correlative responsibility to listen.

As we decolonize our understanding of community, individualism, power, and democracy, one of the things which TO achieves is the alteration of the ways in which issues are framed. I participated in an exercise in Berkeley where each participant was tasked to think of one word to describe themselves. One participant used a word which he thought was an accurate depiction of his character: generous. The facilitator noted that even if there is an implicit connection to others in the concept of generosity, it is communicated from an individualistic perspective. It says, “I am generous,” “I have enough that I can afford to give others,” but it doesn’t necessarily challenge the institutions within which these people live. It presents oneself in a positive light.

An alternative concept which evokes a similar relationship is “privileged.” This concept is less charitable to the affluent individual, and draws attention to people’s social nature. This word places one more explicitly in front of the other(s) with whom one has a relationship. It challenges the ways in which people occupy disparate social, economic or political positions in a given situation. This kind of challenge is the intention of theatre of the oppressed: to open up new ways of interpreting the world, understanding social relationships, institutions, and processes of disparate power.

To name the world, to give meaning to one’s context, is not the privilege of a few; it is the right of everyone. It is people’s capacity to observe and know the world, to be able to name it, and, through reflective action, to change it, which makes people fully human. Any institution which negates people’s ability to engage in the world, which is antidemocratic, and which privileges some at the expense of others, then, is oppressive. This logic is explicit in how Freire articulated his approach to anti-oppressive institution building (2005 [1970], 88). It is also fundamental to the idea that societal progress can be measured by the degree to which people can realize the objects of their human rights (Sen 1999, Stiglitz 2006, Pogge 2008). Theatre of the oppressed uses embodied dialogue to bring individuals together in an encounter through which they can criticize, reject and dismantle oppressive institutions, in favour of more humanizing alternatives.

Dialogue’s decolonizing effects come from the ways in which TO engages through creative media, including dramatization and play. These innovations are embraced by theatre artists, but also can be met with resistance by others who are uncomfortable acting outside of conventional norms. Hector Aristizabal reflects on the use of creative play as a method for critical analysis

and collective knowledge creation. He describes a game where participants are following the instructions of a facilitator whose purpose is to get the players confused, mixed up, making a mess of their tasks, all in good fun. His point is that it is only by losing one's inhibitions through creative play that one can truly embrace their creative capacity. A society which stigmatizes making mistakes, as if getting something wrong is the worst thing you could possibly do, "educates people out of their creative capacities" (2010, 226-7). So, it is our fear of getting things wrong which cripples our creative instincts. But to admit that there is merit in experimentation is to move away from the dominant paradigm which requires intellectual certainty, and persuasive authority. "So I make sure everyone gets it wrong. I urge the kids to move faster and faster and faster. Now everyone is making glorious mistakes and the only penalty is shared laughter" (Ibid.).

6.7 Towards an Ontological Adjustment

Through their work to resist oppression, deconstruct social institutions, and position those who have traditionally been marginalized as knowers rather than known, TO can amount to a form of epistemic decolonization. Its participants can deconstruct the relationships they have been oppressed within, develop solidary relationships with a commitment to transcend oppression, and enact alternative institutions. They are no longer resigned to an identity imposed upon them by others, and instead can claim a self-determined identity and give new meaning to the contexts in which they live. Using TO exercises, participants are able to enact their full humanity as subjects who know, rather than merely objects that are known. They are able to understand more critically their roles in society, as they can define these roles for themselves, and push back against systems which otherwise marginalize them, and represses their humanity.

The emancipatory potential of theatre of the oppressed is located in its praxis. It is empowering because the oppressed can use it to relocate control over meaning-making. That is, they wrest control over the process of defining their identities and giving meaning to their experiences in such a way that they delegitimize the assumed power of the oppressor. They reclaim the full humanity that was theirs all along, but which the oppressors were able to repress within them. Through TO they embody alternative relationships and new forms of knowledge. Its ideational power is creative, voluntary, generative, not coercive or oppressive. It is tri-scalar, manifesting not only through personal introspection, but also in the way participants engage interpersonally. Working as a group, developing relationships of solidarity, participants can also change the nature of the institutions they live within.

TO offers an ontological perspective which is as liberating as it is decolonizing. Yet, its emancipatory potential requires that its participants undergo a radical intellectual re-orientation. It is counter-cultural to expect that the oppressed will uphold a notion of the common good, even if it means neglecting their own personal interests. Anger and resentment fester in people. Vengeance is real. People who have been oppressed aspire not to end oppression, but to escape their oppressed existence, and ascend socially to the height of their oppressor. The labourer seeks to become the foreman or the owner. Not to alter the structure of the workforce, but to be able to reap the rewards which can come from it, such as monetary gain and authority over others. Freire notes how this phenomenon is distinctly gendered: it is “manly” to oppress others. “[The oppressed person’s] ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors” (2005 [1970], 45). Theatre of the oppressed, therefore, makes a bold demand, asking its participants to voluntarily displace their own self-interest in favour of a larger collective objective.

There is something inherently optimistic about TO as an ontology: that is, one believes in the possibility of transformation, of change. Participants are equipped to act as agents of change within the social institutions they see as fluid, contestable, and open to alteration. While practitioners vary in their optimism for attitudinal or behavioural change of the oppressor, they are unified in their belief in the capacity of the oppressed to transform their own condition, to build relationships with others, to have empathy, to develop solidarity, and to resist oppression. Practitioners would not engage in the work they do if they didn't believe in its capacity to inspire and nurture progressive change. They see themselves not as passive recipients of an unjust socio-political order, and not as alienated servants of a system which disproportionately benefits others, but as co-conspirators and key contributors in the struggle to define new social institutions.

There are very few TO practitioners who can call themselves “fulltime” practitioners, and very few organizations in the world which consider themselves profitable or sustainable. When asked why TO practitioners use TO methods in their work, only two percent could say that it made for a profitable business (Malloy, 2012, Theatre of the Oppressed Survey, Unpublished raw data). Practitioners have a vocational commitment to the work of social change. When asked how much of their work is comprised of TO activities, very few (only 13.9 percent) could say that they derive their entire livelihood from TO. However, though most practitioners do not derive their entire livelihood from their TO practice, several pointed out to me that TO's principles define their perspective on the world, and inform the other forms of work that they do. That is, while not working with Boal's specific exercises, “his work and writings still influence everything I do, the way I see the world, the way I interact with others” (Ibid.). These

respondents represent the kind of revolutionary change at the cultural level which theatre of the oppressed endeavors to inspire.

Sustained by the vocational efforts of its members, the success of TO as a movement, and the co-ordination of the meshwork usually rely on volunteers, and on collaborative solidarity. It is not an enterprising endeavor. Most practitioners are either educators, researchers, theatre actors or directors, social workers or therapists, community organizers, staff of nongovernmental organizations, or combinations of the preceding occupations. While 87.2 percent of respondents to my survey identified as having organized or led workshops or other initiatives involving theatre of the oppressed, only 55 percent acknowledge that they have received some sort of formal training as a TO facilitator. The question of qualifications to do TO facilitation is another point of contention in the TO world. Some organizations offer “master classes”, and some offer courses intended for people with varying degrees of experience (from introductory through to classes which focus on the particular characteristics and roles of the joker, or “difficilitator”). There is talk among some TO network members about creating a recognizable system of merit which could give credentials to practitioners. While such an idea has obvious utility in the context of expert-oriented knowledge, some are ardently opposed to such a system because institutionalizing the practice in this way would push it out of the reach of the oppressed. Indeed, such a system would render the oppressed as needy, and the TO practitioner as in possession of a form of knowledge somehow superior to that of the oppressed, therefore undermining the very value system of TO. The work would risk becoming theatre *for* the oppressed, rather than theatre *of* the oppressed.

The revolution which will liberate the oppressed is as cultural as it is economic or political. It demands that social institutions be deconstructed, re-imagined and co-created. The technical training of revolutionary leaders, or praxis leaders, is not enough; what will complete the revolution is wholesome cultural change. This dimension of change is the challenge that TO takes on. Through dramatic exchanges, participants are able to change not only the way they identify themselves; they change the way they understand knowledge itself.

It is the interconnected nature of people's relationships, and the interdependence of their security and prosperity that justifies individuals' commitment to collective struggle. Speaking to a focus group, Sanjoy Ganguly answered the question, "why is it worth it to invest so much time in the process of community building through theatre?" In answering, he took us back to his origins as a political activist, when he was first experimenting with theatre work as a medium for communication, engagement, and collaboration with illiterate peasants. One of them showed Ganguly a fishing net. He noted that if a single string is broken or unravelling, it will still catch its fish. However, slowly, over time, the net will come apart, further unravel, and lose more of its integral knots and strands. Ganguly uses this metaphor to explain how the illiterate fishing peasant taught him about the nature of collectivity, and the integral relationship between the collective and its comprising individuals. Each person in a collective has important knowledge; each intervention in a forum theatre process has value (Fieldnotes, Berkeley, May 31, 2012). All are important to the overall emancipation process.

A workshop participant visualized oppression as a house raised up on stilts. Each stilt is a pillar, or a characteristic, of oppression. A person's socio-political context can only be understood when deconstructed point by point. Each pillar of oppression must be identified,

isolated, and redressed. The pillars are inter-connected, of course, and good critical analysis needs to work towards an understanding of the myriad ways in which these pillars are inter-connected or otherwise inter-related. But the fundamental belief underlying the work of anti-oppressive analysis, solidarity, and a commitment to societal transformation is rooted in the belief that the house – or, one’s socio-political context – is not mounted permanently on an immovable or indestructible rock. It is on pillars, socially created, contestable, transformable, removable (Fieldnotes. Berkeley group discussion, May 31, 2012).

Despite the liberatory potential of theatre of the oppressed, not all oppressed individuals are willing to assume the risks associated with resistance. Intellectual revelation does not necessarily lead to activism or behavioural change, much less broader social change. The oppressed, upon gaining a critical understanding of the ways in which they are oppressed, may not be comfortable with altering their behaviour, or the way they identify themselves. Freire noted that the struggle for freedom can induce fear. And for good reason, as confronting an oppressor can cost someone their life, particularly under the military junta of Brazil during Freire’s time. It is for this reason that some, even if they know of the ways in which they are oppressed, prefer to seek refuge in security; to accept their place, and make do with what they have, comfortable in the knowledge that it could be worse should they attempt to confront their oppressors or oppression (Freire 2005 [1970], 36). What TO praxis can do is bring people out of their isolation and into a collective. It can change a collective mindset from one of resent and self-pity to one of collective conscientization, and empowering redefinition of identity. The oppressed do not live in isolation, even though their experience may make it seem that way. A servant is isolated in the context of their work, but is also a member of a large class of people: a

class of servants, of women, or working poor people, etc. And it is by identifying as a member of a larger group – a collective – that one can derive strength from the collective, develop supportive relationships, cultivate a belief in themselves, backed by the knowledge that one’s experience is shared, and that there are others who sympathize and empathize with her. It is with the affirmations which accompany such conscientization that the oppressed can break free from the alienating consequences of oppression.

Richard Schechner, addressing an assembly of activists, artists and academics at the 2012 Performing the World conference, issued a challenge to those who use performance as a perspective through which they engage with the world. Commenting on the wave of protests happening all over the world at that time, he noted that “the 99 percent is angry, dissatisfied and restless” because “those in power are not making changes deeply, broadly or swiftly enough.” But, he questioned, are the discontent “revolutionary”? Lamenting the current cultural-political condition of the world, Schechner called for a revolution in the way people think. He challenged performance activists to reject the dominant ideologies which stunt intellectual and creative freedom. He noted that it is “almost unimaginable” to break free from the confines of convention, because “it is so hard for people to take seriously those who are not doing business, making war, or enforcing the will of God” (Schechner 2012).

When theatre of the oppressed is meeting its emancipatory potential, as I have argued, its practitioners and participants are already taking up Schechner’s challenge. TO was developed in response to the tendency of dominant cultural institutions to legitimize and reproduce dehumanizing forms of oppression rather than enhance vulnerable people’s capacity to enact their full human-ness. Schechner provides an intellectual framework that TO communities can

use to understand the ways in which their work changes the nature of knowledge itself. He proposes that to understand our existence in the world as a performance, is to play with knowledge itself, and to embody new institutions. Breaking his proposal down into four principles, he argues that:

1. To perform is to explore, to play, to experiment with new relationships.
2. To perform is to cross borders. These borders are not only geographical, but emotional, ideological, political and personal.
3. To perform is to engage in life-long active study, to grasp every book as a script; as something to be played with, interpreted, reformed and remade.
4. To perform is to become someone else and yourself at the same time. To empathize, react, grow and change (Schechner 2012).

Through theatre of the oppressed, participants can renew their creative energies, embody new forms of knowledge, and relate to one another on a performative rather than an ideological basis. To play is to engage with the script provided by socio-political norms. Participants may want to enact that script when they can derive some benefit from it. However, theatre of the oppressed calls on participants to uphold a collective perspective, and to interpret this script with full autonomy, altering it when necessary, thereby breaking down the conventions of society which are unsatisfactory or oppressive. The performative lens is empowering enough to enable its participants to understand and reject the institutions which perpetuate injustice, and to embrace a practice which is reflective, critical, dialogical and creative.

TO performativity is distinctly prefigurative, even if the organizations through which practitioners do their work are constrained by the conventions of corporate culture. The work is

billed as a “rehearsal” for revolution, but it is occurring in the active present. TO is not about protest, even if protest becomes a part of what the TO activist and community engage in. TO is about altering the nature of human relationships by engaging in embodied dialogue. It is less about targeting a particular ill, and more about creating something anew.

In a hierarchically organized world, where the trained “expert” is valued above the commoner, and where contracts for work are rewarded on the assumption that an agent can produce quantified “deliverables,” the community-based organization needs to conform to certain organizational norms in order to procure and retain its legitimacy, or at least its financial viability. Jiwon Chung, a past president of the PTO organization, is sure that the work of the organization’s members is by definition counter-hegemonic, but he concedes that the “organization” PTO is constrained by the US laws governing charitable organizations. The organization needs to identify a president and a board of directors, giving the appearance of hierarchical organization, in order to comply with 501 c3 regulations. But this is not the only factor restraining or defining the culture of the organization. The TO community represented in the PTO organization does not share a consensus about definitions of oppression, the purpose of the organization, the scope for social change, etc. There is a mix of radical leftists and centrists, activists and professionals. While all are using Boal’s techniques, and all have their own ideas of what forms of social change are needed or possible, there is a range of understanding regarding the very meaning of change, and its scope given the world in which we live (Fieldnotes, Berkeley, June 5, 2012).

Theatre of the oppressed, when it adheres to the emancipatory principles I have identified, deconstructs the very concept of knowledge as it is traditionally understood. It is for this reason

that I argue that TO amounts to a form of epistemic decolonization. Participants enter into the work of TO already in possession of particular class-based and context-specific experiences. They embody a particular form of experiential knowledge. They also generate knowledge collectively through dialogue, sharing, relationship building, and dramatized enactments, which equip participants to change the way they respond to injustice outside of the TO setting.

Mobilizing their own experience-based knowledge, and leveraging their collective power by working in solidarity with their peers, the oppressed are able to change the way they give meaning to their experience. This is empowering. As an “activist ethnographer” (Routledge 2013), or a “militant ethnographer” (Escobar 2008), I have engaged through this research in an enlightening project to co-create knowledge based on shared experience and collaborative work. The production of knowledge is not an individual’s exclusive endeavor. It is the very process of deconstructing, contesting, and co-creating knowledge which has the potential to transform social and political relationships. Its purpose is “to move beyond the acquisition, cataloguing, ordering, and publishing of information and toward jointly producing knowledge with resisting others to yield critical interpretations and readings of the world that are accessible, understandable to all those involved, and actionable” (Routledge 2013, 253). It is my hope that this research, which could not have been completed without the collaboration of those whose experiences I have shared in, will aid in their struggle to decolonize knowledge, and will breathe life into the belief that another world is possible.

Chapter Seven

Governance from the Margins

My research demonstrates the ways in which theatre of the oppressed activists embody the emancipatory potential of human rights theory. TO practitioners engage with communities in processes of intentional praxis, equipping participants with the skills for critical social analysis. They are developing a provocative meshwork of solidarity to collectively resist the subordinating effects of traditional social, cultural and political institutions. Theatre of the oppressed communities manifest a counterhegemonic version of globalization which nourishes translocal solidarity, and which connects socially diverse and politically disparate groups around the world. Its emancipatory potential is invested in the intentionality of two interdependent processes: conscientization and praxis. Each informs and is informed by the other, and neither can be neglected. Used effectively, TO can enable its participants to reorient their ontologies, and decolonize their epistemologies.

I caution that not all theatre of the oppressed work is equally emancipatory. There are groups using TO games and exercises in ways which can neglect or even undermine the critical tasks of deconstructing oppressive institutions and enacting alternatives. Employed in isolation, the games and exercises of the theatre of the oppressed are politically benign. However, as I have demonstrated, when integrated into a strategy of resistance, its effects can be politicizing. Globalizing a manifestation of resistance to dominant norms, TO is more revolutionary than Boal gave it credit for. He provided a sort of disclaimer when he said that “Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!” (1985 [1979], 155). I argue that even though it may not cause the upheaval of oppressive institutions, theatre of the

oppressed does alter the political identities of its participants, and it does change the nature of the relationships they live within. In these ways, it is revolutionary. It embodies the promises of human rights, including the notion of political equality, the right of people to live free from violence and discrimination, the right to economic and cultural survival, and the right to be active determinants of the political culture within which people live.

Theatre of the oppressed participants identify no longer as alienated victims of oppression, but integral members of a collective, a social group with solidary relationships. Participants identify themselves not as powerless accessories to other people's wealth and status, but as political agents with the power to affect the socio-political nature of an institution. The TO participant is no longer identified by their subordinate role in a political relationship; on the contrary, they can determine their own identity, and choose the way they enact it. TO doesn't change the objective reality of experience. A victim of rape, police brutality, religious bigotry, or other forms of identity-based discrimination cannot undo an incident which happened. However, they can choose how they give meaning to that experience, how they leverage that to determine their future course of action. Victims of violence and oppression will always have that experience; but they do not need to let that experience define them. Where social conventions limit an individual's capacity to enact certain behaviours, or make certain choices, TO can free them from those confines. By engaging in theatre of the oppressed activities, participants are able to claim their status as rights-bearing individuals.

In Chapter Three, I introduced some of the exercises that comprise the TO practitioner's "toolkit". I examined how the roster of games is used to challenge conventional understandings of social relationships, and even of knowledge itself. From group-oriented ice-breakers and

teambuilding games, to activities which cause participants to “unlearn” thought processes, these exercises can alter the way in which participants understand and give meaning to the world they live in. Reorienting their ontological perspective, participants are able to change the way they identify themselves, and perform their roles in the various social institutions they inhabit.

Theatre of the oppressed requires participants to communicate in innovative ways, using senses they may not be accustomed to using, thereby altering participants’ political landscape. Those accustomed to performing certain roles find that without the use of verbal communication, they must change the way they create and project their personas to others. This has democratizing effects, as it deconstructs conventional power relations, removing participants from the comfort of familiarity, and requiring that they communicate in new ways, interpret their context using different senses, and open new possibilities for socio-political analysis and performance.

In the collective sphere, the theatre of the oppressed engages participants in processes of relationship building. Victims of oppression emerge from their isolation and identify as part of a class of people who share experiences and interests in common. This identification occurs within and across cultural and territorial boundaries. Participants share identities, experiences, and forge relationships of solidarity based on their common interest in overcoming dehumanizing existences. Using image and forum theatre, they manifest a form of embodied knowledge creation as they deconstruct experiences of oppression from their lives, and work to transform their individual perceptions of their experience, and the collective response to oppression.

Both critical “conscientization” and prefigurative praxis comprise the liberatory foundation of theatre of the oppressed. I have demonstrated that not all TO work is equally emancipatory. Its

potential depends on practitioners' ability first to engage participants in a dialectical and decolonizing form of knowledge production, and second to build empowering relationships of solidarity which support oppressed individuals' capacity to resist oppression, and alter the institutions they live within. TO's theatrical mechanisms provide creative methods which can enhance the imagination, and expand the horizon of behavioural possibility. Participants are able to use TO to alter their understanding of, and responses to, the various incarnations of oppression they encounter. The collective power they share, to "rescript" the performance which is their lives, brings them out of isolation, into solidarity, and equips participants to experience life in empowering ways.

In Chapters Four and Five, I examined the ways in which TO communities sustain their praxis, building and globalizing a "meshwork" of solidarity. While TO work invariably occurs in a "local" context, the experiences of oppression it deals with transcend local spaces. I argue that it is the interconnectedness of people's experiences which provides opportunities for relationship building, empathy, and unity of cause. Practitioners frequently frame their work as resisting the repressive effects of dominant globalizations, including neoliberal economic logics which push vulnerable populations further into the margins of society. But even while condemning globalization's negative consequences, TO practitioners are engaging in a form of globalization themselves. Theirs is distinctly counter-hegemonic, as they equip individuals and communities with interactive analytical skills for the purpose of developing critical understandings of social institutions, and working to dismantle them.

The TO meshwork is distinct from organizational forms networked in more traditional ways. Its participants are committed to fostering relationships based on equality, empowered

participation in the process of meaning making, horizontal movement of ideas, and decentred control over creative ingenuity.

With this intentional commitment to counterhegemonic practices, and liberating use of imaginative play and embodied knowledge, TO serves as an incubator for counter-normative change. Their work is humanizing and democratizing, making it an important example of how we can understand anti-oppressive governance. By bridging the gap between human rights theory and practise, TO manifests emancipatory governance; not because of its legislative applications, but for the way in which it changes the politics of the oppressed.

My argument is that through these activities, participants manifest a revolutionary prefiguration of a rights-respecting and democratizing political institution. As such, they offer a glimpse into the possibility of an anti-oppressive governance. Engaging in the active present, they alter the way they think, the way they identify themselves, the way they participate in the creation of knowledge, and the way they behave in a given social setting. Participants are empowered with analytical skills; but they are also engaging in a process of relationship building, altering the very nature of their socio-political existence. They are developing relationships of solidarity which bring individuals out of isolation, and into community with others. Even if this doesn't change their immediate material condition, it does change their identity, and it also changes the nature of the oppressive relationships they live within. That is, they are no longer passive recipients of a social order imposed on them by society at large. They are agents of change with the capacity to engage autonomously in the political cultures they live within.

This emancipatory effect is not an inevitable outcome of engagement in TO exercises. It requires principled praxis, and intentional commitment to methodological rigor. I demonstrated that there are practitioners who use TO mechanisms without an integrated approach to solidarity-building praxis, and that this deficiency compromises their work's emancipation potential.

The work of developing solidary relationships must also not be taken for granted. I argue that this is fundamental to the emancipatory potential of theatre of the oppressed, but my experience at some field sites demonstrates that there are barriers to solidarity that some practitioners find difficult to overcome. I argue that TO offers a distinct ontological perspective through which TO can generate liberatory effects, but not all TO practitioners or communities subscribe to this ontology. For some, they are attracted to particular meshwork locations, and repelled from others; they are able to nurture relationships with some individuals and communities, but not others. The TO meshwork is heterogeneous and decentred. These two qualities are sources of both promise and problem.

Because TO's intention is to engage participants in a new way of doing politics, it is uniquely positioned to provide innovative insights to democratic cultures. At its core, TO is a way of doing dialogue. It is distinctly not a venue for competitive monologues. It seeks to enable participants to enact their full humanity by giving them control over the way meaning is created. TO renders knowledge production a collective process, based on the intersubjective exchange of ideas and experiences, analysis and reflection. Oppression, globalization, knowledge generation and dissemination, then, are not impositions on the vulnerable, but contested social constructs over which the oppressed can have some agency. It works in intimate spaces, rendering the

global local, and the oppressed as empowered agents of change who can push back against the marginalizing effects of globality.

I argued in Chapter Six that because of the ways in which TO offers opportunities to engage in knowledge production, it has decolonizing effects. It changes the way the oppressed identify themselves, the way they give meaning to social and political norms, and the way they perform their roles in various social institutions. This kind of engagement can have the effect of changing the very nature of the institutions within which people live. TO is alter-epistemological in the way it changes the constitution of these different forms of knowledge. Changing the nature of knowledge, from an individual pursuit to a collective co-creation, and the nature of institutions, from oppressive impositions, to social constructs over which the oppressed can exert some agency, TO participants demonstrate an effective way to counter oppressive norms.

Normative change is a long-term struggle. The games, exercises and other engagements of theatre of the oppressed do not offer instant emancipatory gratification. Conscientization is an integrated and dialectical process; praxis is a long-term and reciprocating process of action and reflection. The revolution which TO communities engage in, when their work is sufficiently emancipatory, is to incrementally alter the social condition and political agency of the oppressed. TO offers no promises to the oppressed vis-a-vis their oppressor. Should they attempt to transfer the scenes enacted on stage into their lived social context, and confront an oppressor off stage, they may be vulnerable to the oppressor's violent reaction. I find more emancipatory potential in participants' collective resolve to build relationships of solidarity, deconstruct institutions of oppression, and engage in empowering forms of knowledge production.

From the first point of contact, where TO groups play games, enact creative characters, and establish an initial group dynamic, through to the sharing of experiences of oppression, and the use of theatrical mechanisms to analyze them, then onwards to the engagement with a wider community to present scenarios onstage and use drama as a medium for community dialogue, TO is a collective process. It challenges normative conventions in an individualistically-oriented capitalist culture. That is, it identifies mainstream cultural institutions, practices and assumptions which are problematic, dehumanizing, marginalizing, and oppressive, with the intention of deconstructing their constituent values, and enacting alternatives. This action results in the co-creation of new forms of knowledge, new hope for change, new relationships of solidarity, and a collective commitment to produce norms which enhance rather than suppress dignity, and engage rather than isolate the vulnerable. Theatre of the oppressed exercises can have a democratizing effect when they enable participants to break free from the confines of the familiar, and engage in processes which restructure relations of power. The oppressed are able to redefine the meaning of their relationships, the institutions within which they live, and the very identity which hitherto had restricted their ability to live as fully human.

Female peasant participants in the villages around Kolkata who participate in Jana Sanskriti's groups exemplify TO's transformative potential. They note that prior to their engagement with Jana Sanskriti activists, the thought of leaving the confines of their domestic surroundings and participating in community development projects was inconceivable. Today they engage in political discussions, co-operate in the management of a civil society organization, and even dance and celebrate at community events with men they are not related to (Fieldnotes, Kolkata, December 17, 2012). These developments represent a qualitative change in the (domestic)

institutional norms which had hitherto oppressed these women. As rights-bearing and dignified humans, they could reject the social norms which relegated them to a subservient existence, and participate as political equals in the organization and management of their societies.

7.1 All Emancipatory Theatre of the Oppressed is Governance; Even Legislative Theatre

I have limited my study to the theatre of the oppressed activities most common among TO practitioners, including its roster of interactive games and exercises, image theatre and forum theatre. I have made the case that through these activities, participants contest society's defining norms, and that for this reason, their work has important governance implications. There is another incarnation of TO which some may assume is more explicitly oriented towards governance, but which is less frequently used: "legislative theatre." Integrating TO tactics into the legislative process could offer a promising set of tools with which the traditionally disempowered and disenfranchised can engage in the political process, thereby giving new meaning to their right to self-determination.

In the 1990s, Boal was able to achieve this dream when he was "accidentally" elected to the municipal government in Rio de Janeiro. He hired a group of trained TO facilitators to act as consultants, and they used forum theatre as a method of consulting with constituents, gearing their workshops towards legislative changes. Boal dubbed this explicitly governance-oriented theatre work "legislative theatre". But, his tenure as *vereador* was short-lived, lasting only one term.

The first time legislative theatre was attempted outside of Brazil was in Vancouver, British Columbia, 2004, when the municipal government commissioned Headlines Theatre to facilitate an experimental democratization project, in response to the province's widespread cuts to public-sector funding. Under the leadership of David Diamond, Headlines (now Theatre for Living) had a history of using Boal's forum theatre methods to dramatize local social and political issues, dating back to 1981.⁷ Working in collaboration with residents, and observed by a lawyer whose summary of the process would be documented in a legislative report, the organization identified the people's most urgent issues as food security, affordable housing and services for seniors. They staged a production entitled *Practicing Democracy* in a variety of venues throughout the city, with the intention of drawing a diverse audience of spect-actors into dialogue on these subjects.

The Vancouver project failed to penetrate the policy debates in the chamber of Council during the mandate of its commissioning government. Pratt and Johnston (2007) argue that it could not meet its intended outcome of enhancing people's participation in the legislative process because as an inclusive and participatory construct, it threatened to undermine the established authority of incumbent government officials. Council members reportedly felt that it was their job to interact with the citizens they represent, and to network with colleagues from other jurisdictions, keeping abreast of the latest policy innovations and "best practices." Therefore, to validate the report of the theatre experiment would equate to an admission that the councilors were inadequately performing their roles in government (98).

⁷ <http://headlinestheatre.com/pastwork.htm>

As a mechanism intended to change the way in which people engage in democratic management of their politics, it is not surprising that political incumbents might view TO as an affront to their privilege. I argued in Chapter Three that because of the ways in which TO changes the politics of the oppressed, and empowers participants by getting them to interact in norm contestation and iteration in new ways, it has important implications for governance. The overarching theory I put forward in this research is that all emancipatory theatre of the oppressed is governance, even legislative theatre. By making this argument, I intentionally mirror the decolonizing nuance of Boal's statement that "anyone can do theatre, even actors. And theatre can be done everywhere. Even in a theatre." That is, because TO challenges dominant norms, it is already a politically-charged governance mechanism; it is already questioning governance logics and forms of social organization, cultural assumptions and political ideologies. I argue that TO is a form of resistance, which is used by those in the margins of society. Should it be relocated into the mainstream of legislative politics, it risks dulling its emancipatory edge. I do not focus on legislative applications of TO in this research, but I do advise the globalizing TO meshwork that by engaging in the contested politics of norm definition and change, their work has important governance implications even if they are not performing in the chambers of a legislative assembly.

TO's emancipatory potential is invested in its conscientizing praxis. Without this intentionality, and the commitment to transcending oppression by changing people's ontological perspective, and therefore also changing the nature of their social relationships, so-called theatre of the oppressed is susceptible to an emancipation deficiency. That is, its critical edge is dulled. When TO achieves its liberatory potential, it manifests a decolonizing form of knowledge

production. The world as it was previously known is altered such that the oppressed embody empowered agents of self-determination. They are no longer isolated individuals, rather, integral members of a collective. Their identity is no longer the one imposed upon them by their oppressors, but the one which they define, on their own terms, and with the support of those engaging solidarily with them. With the ability to understand their experience differently, they are freed from the confines of conventionality. The oppressed can effectively reclaim a humanizing identity and build empowering social relationships. This enables the oppressed to change the ways in which they engage with people in these newly formed social groups.

In these ways, TO work can be politicizing, liberating. Its games, image theatre and forum theatre provide the analytical tools the oppressed need to change the way they identify themselves, and the roles they play in the institutions within which they live. These changes have important governance implications, even without occurring in legislative processes. Participants engage in embodied dialogue, asserting a claim to political equality, and exercising their right to engage in democratic forms of dialogue. TO practitioners even articulate rights not (yet) institutionalized in popular human rights discourses. By enacting alternative rights-based identities and roles, TO participants manifest inclusive, participatory, and empowering communities which not only perform the rights already legitimized as universal principles, but also push the boundaries of universal human rights norms.

In order to be emancipatory, theatre of the oppressed needs to retain certain qualities: when its conscientization and praxis are intentionally used to alter the identities of the oppressed; change the way the oppressed view the world; when TO participants build relationships of solidarity; and when TO engagement changes the nature of the social institutions people live

within, then it is emancipatory. It is revolutionary in the way it can take human rights norms out of the “preambular rhetoric” of traditional governing institutions, and embody them in participants’ day to day social interactions. It is revolutionary for the oppressed to find new ways of enacting their political agency.

Through theatre of the oppressed, those who are traditionally pushed to the margins of society are able to enact their full human dignity, their capacity to engage in political dialogue as empowered and autonomous individuals, and participate in governance by redefining the norms constituting social institutions. TO gives people a set of politicizing tools that they can use to change the way they identify, and the way they engage with others.

7.2 Contribution to Knowledge

I have come to understand that not all practitioners appreciate or even recognize the politicizing effects that I ascribe to their work. While many TO practitioners aspire to be able to use legislative theatre as a way of doing democracy in their communities, only 47 percent recognize their TO applications to be working on “political dialogue,” and even fewer (28.3 percent) have framed their work as “legislative theatre.” Practitioners recognize the concept of dialogue as integral to their work, but, when asked more broadly what they use theatre of the oppressed for, they identified engagement in social and community-based issues as the primary concern of their work, more so than altering the political landscape of participants. To give some definition to the work that TO practitioners understand themselves as doing, 89.5 percent see their work as “raising awareness for various social issues,” 82.9 percent as engaging in “community dialogue,” 71.4 percent do “conflict resolution or transformation,” 71.4 percent

engage community members in “participatory community development,” and only 41 percent engage participants in “inclusive political processes.”

At a PTO conference I attended, I heard government defined as “the administration of oppression” (Fieldnotes, Berkeley, June 1, 2012). I don’t disagree that that this can often be the case. The international human rights regime exists because of the ways in which legitimized authorities (governments) use their power to protect the interests of particular social, economic and political groups, even when this means vilifying, dehumanizing, marginalizing or “cleansing” society of “undesirable” others. At the conference of Performing the World in New York, Richard Schechner took this thought a little further, commenting that while “the nature of government is oppressive, the nature of anarchy is unproductive” (Fieldnotes, New York, October 6, 2012). His point was that we need a new paradigm because our current binary fails to offer humanizing forms of political organization.

Whether a person understands government as institutionalized violence, corruption, a benevolent social service agency, or a cumbersome bureaucracy, I think we can agree that all human societies need governance. Because governance is, simply, how we make decisions that affect the lives of the community. Governance includes the workings of a government, but encompasses much more: not only state actors, but also inter-state organizations, and nongovernmental actors, social movements, community-based organizations, religious institutions, and any other group which comprises or contests the norms of our political culture. Everyone has a stake in governance, which is why it is such an interesting field of study for me.

Because governance refers to the norms and institutions which define a political culture, it encompasses the state institutions, such as the legislature, the courts, the penal system and the

schools, etc., but also the media, electoral systems, civil society and religious organizations, street protests, and artistic and cultural institutions. Most importantly for my research, spaces in which theatre of the oppressed is used are sites of governance. It is in these spaces where political norms and assumptions are challenged, deconstructed, re-envisioned, enacted and re-enacted.

When I made this distinction between government and governance at a conference session of TO practitioners in Chicago, it offered an innovative way for participants to think about the political implications of their work. Some commented that while they think of their work as political in the sense that resistance to oppression is political, they didn't connect their work to the wider societal institutions that either legitimize or contest governing institutions. That the oppressed can engage in governance exchanges was a novel way of framing the politicizing nature of their work.

Santos justifies the need to open our epistemological constraints by admitting that “the knowledge we have of globalization, whether hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, is less global than globalization itself” (2004, 13). In the search for ways of better organizing our politics, and “humanizing” our relations with others, we need to break free from the confines of the familiar, and take seriously alternative forms of knowledge. We need to look at not only the knowledge contained within the experience of the oppressed, marginalized, overlooked and excluded, but also the knowledge that is generated through the interchanges which are occurring around the world through such assemblies such as the World Social Forum, the Occupy demonstrations, and, as I do in this research, the theatre of the oppressed. By considering theatre of the oppressed as a site of counterhegemonic globalization, epistemic decolonization, and liberatory praxis, I add a

new perspective to the debate, bringing its study out of its disciplinary home (performing arts and non-formal education), and considering it as a politicized and politicizing phenomenon.

Dia Da Costa (2010) has done some work on the political economy of Jana Sanskriti and their spect-activism in West Bengal; Kelly Howe (2010) and Pratt and Johnston (2007) have studied some applications of legislative theatre. My study of the governance implications of TO is complimentary to, but also distinct from, these studies. I examine the globalizing meshwork of TO practitioners itself, and offer innovative insights on the governance implications of TO as a whole. I locate the politicizing effect in the struggle over norms and institutions, not in the more explicitly governmental applications of theatre in legislative assemblies and partisan politics.

Despite Boal's Marxist political orientation, and the tendency of political theatre to be branded as "leftist," my research is not committed to a political ideology as such. Rather, it is an examination of justice. It begins with the belief that another world is possible, assumes that dominant institutions and norms fail to deliver on the promises of modernity, and looks for alternatives in the experiences, knowledge and capacities of those who have lived subordinate existences, and who are working to envision and construct a more rights-affirming society.

Mature social movements not only protest against existing institutions, but also serve as "social laboratories" wherein alternative democratic discourses and practices are experimented with and developed. The meshwork is, therefore, an embodiment of "prefigurative politics", or a way of doing politics and constructing social relationships which embodies the changes its participants' desire for the world (Escobar 2008, 258, Juris 2008, Wallerstein 2007). Gandhi's prophetic message, to "be the change you want to see in the world," resonates herein.

My research enters into dialogue with those seeking to decolonize and democratize governance institutions; it also speaks to the global community of performance activists who seek to use their art to “change the world.” As I have demonstrated, theatre of the oppressed manifests a distinctly performative power from which activists, artists, scholars and others can derive inspiration. Hector Aristizabal offers two examples where the humanizing effects of TO have manifested in the oppressor. One instance was at a prison in India, where the inmates were among society’s most despised people. The superintendent was “the archetype of a despot,” who never permitted even the slightest bit of human dignity to the inmates under his watch. Somehow Aristizabal was permitted to run a workshop with some of the inmates, and for a few hours they engaged in some image theatre, expressing the oppressions they had experienced in their lives. Then, they imagined what liberation might look like. Much to Aristizabal’s astonishment, the superintendent had seen and appreciated the work they were doing, and, rather than shutting it down, invited Aristizabal back to work with the whole prison population. In Aristizabal’s words, “I believe what had happened was, for the first time, he’d truly *seen* the prisoners. When he’d recognized their humanity, he himself had become humanized” (2010, 229, emphasis Aristizabal’s).

In another remarkable performance, a former Colombian military officer was in attendance, and attested that everything in Aristizabal’s portrayal of torture in Colombia was accurate. He declared before the audience that “what’s happening in Colombia is wrong,” then he embraced Hector. “This wouldn’t have happened at a protest march or rally. It happened in a theatre” (Ibid., 236).

Aristizabal reminds his audience that “imagination isn’t about creating something from nothing. It’s the capacity that moves us forward as we take what we’ve already known and see it fresh, re-envisioned in new ways. If you can change the script – the one imposed by society or the one that runs in a seemingly endless loop inside your own head – maybe you can change your life” (Ibid., 250).

Theatre of the oppressed contains within it a distinct form of persuasive power. It is an enabling form of knowledge production which can penetrate the empathetic faculties of its participants in ways that traditional policy papers and political debates cannot (Pratt and Johnston 2007, 98). Yet, its most promising emancipatory possibility paradoxically renders it unlikely to be institutionalized in mainstream political cultures. There are two reasons for this; one is superficial, and the other is substantive.

Superficially, TO pushes people out of their comfort zone. A quick Internet search for theatre of the oppressed reveals images of people in various stages of theatricalized expression, with bodies contorting, conforming, expressing subjective thoughts, and embodying intersubjective dialogue. Some participants infantilize this embodied and performative form of knowledge production, calling it a “throwback to kindergarten” (Fieldnotes, 2014). I revealed in Chapter Three that I found some of TO’s activities to be embarrassing. Aristizabal reflected at the Performing the World 2012 conference that his father was incredulous upon attending one of his TO workshops. After all his son had been through, surviving torture in Colombia, and training as a psychoanalyst, he’d arrived at a profession which merely required him to play games with people (Fieldnotes, New York, October 2012). For those engaged in the “serious” work of

politics, the idea that knowledge can be embodied, co-created, shared in such creative ways can be confounding.

The inauguration ceremony for Jana Sanskriti's Muktheadhara festival in 2012 was held in a plush auditorium. The invited dignitaries included a British Deputy High Commissioner for eastern India. After hearing Sanjoy Ganguly introduce Jana Sanskriti's work as "revolutionary," and learning about how participants' transition from actors and spectators to "spect-actors" and "spect-activists," the diplomat felt emboldened to play with the concepts despite his evident lack of comprehension of what really goes on in the theatre of the oppressed. He commended Jana Sanskriti for their work, noting that using drama to fight for people's rights is "such a simple, but such a wonderful, idea." He recalled the frequent occasions when his job amounted to little more than monological exchanges with his counterparts, but then he carried on his pleasantries too long. With his tongue in his cheek, and his foot in his mouth, he suggested that the next time he is having difficulty explaining policy to a Chief Minister, perhaps he should use "spect-actors" to help him demonstrate his points. While he was trying to be witty, what he revealed to his audience of experienced TO practitioners is that he had completely and utterly failed to comprehend the most defining feature of TO. Whereas TO works to deconstruct the culture of competing monologues, and to co-create a dialogical culture in which we listen to and engage with others, he mused that what he needed in order to more effectively perform his role as diplomat is not better listening or dialogue skills, but a more persuasive method for delivering his monologues. As such, the concept of TO is not as "simple" as he believed it was. One's ego is a complicating obstacle to engagement in TO, which, for the diplomat, may be insurmountable.

This offers insight into a substantive reason why TO is unlikely to retain its emancipatory edge if it is co-opted into mainstream governance institutions. Whereas oppressive colonial attitudes relegate alternative governance ideas to the realm of the unimaginable or the impossible, TO offers a pro-poor, rights-protective, bottom-up model of democratic engagement. Because it achieves this objective, it is unlikely to penetrate mainstream governance institutions. Those currently in positions of power are more interested in sustaining and reproducing existing systems, and thus protecting their own interests, than opening up these systems to critical, participatory scrutiny which could delegitimize their role or their authority. Theatre of the oppressed may be too democratic, too empowering, and too effective at its objective of altering the politics of the oppressed. As such, it is enthusiastically embraced in the political margins of society, because it provides a set of analytical tools which are demonstrably empowering to those who use them. The globalizing meshwork of theatre of the oppressed practitioners and participants is living proof that a better, more inclusive, participatory and rights-respecting world is not only possible; it is happening.

7.3 Moving Forward

Social change is a creative, not a rational, project. Dan Friedman (2012) argues that we have pushed the limits of rational appeals, and exhausted our collective conscience when it comes to social analysis. The oppressed know that they are losers in an unjust world. They know the ways in which they are disempowered, marginalized, or otherwise oppressed. Yet, knowing this doesn't seem enough to change this reality. His post-Boalian position implies that the work of conscientization is insufficient to the task of generating progressive change. To a limited extent, I agree with this assertion, but point out that he neglects to consider the creative capacity of

praxis, which is integral to the liberatory potential of theatre of the oppressed. Also, my research has demonstrated the oppressed, in fact, do not always understand or appreciate the complex ways in which their experience is interconnected with and interdependent on their relationships to others, privileged or oppressed.

I do support Freidman's appeal for more creative enterprise when it comes to prefiguring institutional change. I have examined the ways in which TO breaks away from conventional network logics, and manifests what others call "meshwork" dynamics. I have also noted that some practitioners work to fit into existing institutional structures, either in the education industry, or in the nongovernmental and charitable organization sectors. Regulatory governance norms constrict their capacity to enact the kinds of organizational changes they seek to provoke, as teachers must "deliver" certain curricula, and NGO professionals must meet the administrative and legal obligations which constrain their political agency. I look forward to examining further the relationship between organizations using TO and governance institutions. It cannot be assumed that power flows in one direction only, from governments to the practitioners' organizations. Through my research I have located some groups which engage in revolutionary organizational politics, which I intend to examine in greater depth. My research has sparked discussions in the TO community about the ways in which organizational cultures and institutional norms alter and even compromise the agenda of TO "spect-activists." In-depth ethnographic research into some of these issues will provide insights as to how individuals and organizations navigate the complicated relationship between revolutionary politics and regulatory restrictions.

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Appendix:
Theatre of the Oppressed Survey

Introduction

Hello,

I am doing research on Theatre of the Oppressed, and am interested in your perspective on a few issues. This research critically examines concepts of global governance, and looks to Theatre of the Oppressed for new and innovative approaches to governance.

I would like to learn about your work with Theatre of the Oppressed. In addition to your own thoughts and experiences with TO, I also want to obtain information about the nature of your relationships with other TO practitioners and participants. To learn some of these things, I have developed a questionnaire which includes some multiple choice questions, and some short answer questions.

After each question, I have provided the option of answering “Other,” and included a text box for your comments. In addition to providing the answer which most accurately represents your experience, I invite you to share with me any thoughts, concerns or comments that arise for you as you think about your TO experience, particularly if you feel your thoughts can be better expressed in this fashion rather than by simply selecting from a menu of predetermined options. Also, if you have published your thoughts and experiences elsewhere, such as in a project report, on a website, in an article or a book (etc.), please use this space to let me know. I would be happy to look up these sources in order to save you the time and effort of reproducing such information. By directing the researcher to such sources, your anonymity in this questionnaire may be compromised. If you would like to bring such sources to the researcher’s attention while still protecting your anonymity in this questionnaire, please contact Adam Malloy at:

Adam Malloy
Balsillie School of International Affairs
University of Waterloo
67 Erb Street West
Waterloo, ON N2L 6C2
226-772-3108 amalloy@balsillieschool.ca

Thank you for your kind and generous co-operation.

Consent Form

The purpose of this research is to study Theatre of the Oppressed in order to explore innovative approaches governance. My objectives include not only considerations of how we do governance, but also how we define what governance is, should be, or could be. I hope that your knowledge of and experience with Theatre of the Oppressed will help me to develop a compelling argument for anti-oppressive governance.

This research is being conducted by Adam Malloy, a doctoral candidate at the Balsillie School of International Affairs at the University of Waterloo, under the supervision of Dr. William D. Coleman. You are invited to participate in this research project because you have been identified as a practitioner of Theatre of the Oppressed.

Your participation involves filling out this online questionnaire, and should take approximately 30 minutes (maybe a little longer if you care to provide greater detail in some of your responses).

Depending on the responses you share in this questionnaire, I may wish to follow up with a short interview. For this reason, you will have the option of providing your contact information, which will be kept confidential. Should you prefer to participate anonymously, this is also an option for you. Please note that choosing to participate anonymously means that I will not be able to follow up with you for additional information, nor will I be able to attribute any ideas or quotes to you in the publications which result from this research.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer and you can withdraw your participation at any time by not submitting your responses. There are no known or anticipated risks from participating in this study.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact:

Adam Malloy
Balsillie School of International Affairs
University of Waterloo
67 Erb Street West
Waterloo, ON N2L 6C2
226-772-3108 amalloy@balsillieschool.ca

You may also contact the faculty supervisor of this research at:

William D. Coleman, FRSC
CIGI Chair in Globalization and Public Policy
Balsillie School of International Affairs (BSIA) and
Department of Political Science
University of Waterloo
Hagey Hall 317, 200 University Avenue West
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519-888-4567 X38893; FAX:(519)746-5622;
wdcolema@uwaterloo.ca

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any concerns or comments resulting from your participation in this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin in the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

Consent to participate

Please select 'I agree' to indicate that you agree with the following statements. If you do not agree with the following statements, or do not give your consent to participate in the survey, please exit this questionnaire. (You may withdraw your consent to participate in this questionnaire at any time):

I am over 18 and I voluntarily agree to take part in this questionnaire.

I give Adam Malloy permission to use the results of my participation in this questionnaire once any data which may identify me has been removed.

I understand that any information about me recorded during this questionnaire will be stored in a secure database accessible only to the researcher. No data which may identify me will be transferred outside this questionnaire. Data will be kept for two years after the results of this questionnaire have been published. Once any identifiers are removed data may be shared with other researchers.

I am aware that since this research method uses SurveyMonkey, and this instrument is hosted in the United States, it is subject to the USA Privacy Act.

I understand that I can ask for further instructions or information at any time by contacting Adam Malloy (see contact information above).

I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time by not submitting my response, without having to give a reason for withdrawal. Any data collected from my participation will be destroyed in the event I withdraw from this study.

I understand that I do not have to answer every question.

I agree

If you would prefer to participate in this survey in a format other than Survey Monkey, alternative arrangements can be made. Please use the contact information above to contact Adam Malloy, and we can arrange for you to participate in an email or paper questionnaire.

To submit the survey, you must click 'Done' on the final page of the survey for your results to be included in the project.

You can choose at any time not to have your results tabulated in the project by clicking 'Exit this survey' at the top right of the page.

Okay, let's start

The spectrum of social, political and economic attitudes

This section will create a generalized portrayal of your political, economic and social attitudes. I use traditional categories, such as "liberal" and "conservative," even though they may fail to adequately describe some people's beliefs. If there are other adjectives which better define your attitudes, such as "anarchist" or "libertarian", please enter the most appropriate term in the space provided for "Other" responses.

1. On a spectrum, where the left side is liberal and the right side is conservative, how would you define your socio-political beliefs?

Extreme left Moderate left Centre Moderate right Extreme right

Other (please specify): _____

2. On an spectrum, where the left side represents communism, the right side represents laissez-faire capitalism, and in between are varying degrees of welfare systems, how would you define your political-economic beliefs?

Extreme left Moderate left Centre Moderate right Extreme right

Other (please specify): _____

3. Combining your economic and political beliefs, which of the following adjectives best describes your idea of a just society?

Dictatorial socialist Democratic socialist Democratic capitalist Dictatorial capitalist

Other (please specify): _____

Profile of a TO practitioner

In this introductory section, I am interested in who you are and how you use Theatre of the Oppressed

4. Where did you first encounter Theatre of the Oppressed?

- took a course which involved TO activities or literature
 read the work of Boal, or another TO author
 participated in a group activity involving TO
 heard about TO from an acquaintance
 other (please specify): _____

5. What is your profession?

- teacher
- scholar
- social worker
- community organizer
- actor
- development worker
- other (please specify): _____

6. What is the extent of your participation in TO?

- You have heard about TO, but never participated in it
- You have participated in one or some TO-related activities
- you have trained as a TO facilitator (joker)
- you have organized or led workshops or other activities involving TO
- other (please specify): _____

7. Are you affiliated with any TO-related organizations or associations right now?

- yes
- no
- other (please specify): _____

8. If yes, how do you participate in these groups?

- member of governing body
- attend workshops, conferences, or other meetings
- share ideas or experiences with other interested people
- write reports, articles, other material for publication on internet, newsletters, journals, books, other media
- Other (please specify): _____

9. How do you use theatre of the oppressed?

- as an actor with a theatre group, doing interactive theatre
- as a teaching tool with your students (please identify at what level of education)
- as a social worker
- as a community organizer
- as an activist
- for political dialogue
- other (please explain): _____

10. How much of your work is comprised of TO-related activities?
- all of your professional work is committed to TO (including administrative, financial, educational, professional development, etc)
 - more than 75% of it
 - about half of it
 - about 25% of it
 - you don't use TO in your work
 - other (please specify): _____
11. Do you use TO because you find it to be:
- an effective set of tools for critical social change
 - generally enjoyable for participants
 - profitable as a business
 - rewarding as a career
 - other (please explain): _____
12. In your experience, how effective is TO as a set of tools for critical social interaction?
- it is always effective
 - it can be effective in the right contexts
 - it rarely achieves the type of social change I think is necessary, but I use it anyways because it is fun
 - other (please specify): _____
13. Do you participate in forms of theatre work other than TO?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please specify): _____
14. Do you participate in forms of community dialogue other than TO?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please specify): _____
15. For what purpose(s) do you use TO?
- raising awareness for various social issues
 - community dialogue
 - conflict resolution or transformation
 - participatory community development
 - inclusive political processes
 - other (please explain): _____

16. How would you describe the oppressive relationships addressed through your TO work?
- Interpersonal (conflicts between individuals)
 - Intrafamilial (conflicts within a family, such as domestic violence, patriarchal assumptions, sexism)
 - Intergroup (conflicts between communities or social groups, within a “local” context)
 - Intragroup (conflicts within a community or social group, at the local level)
 - National (conflicts between communities or groups, within a “national” context)
 - International (conflicts between groups across or beyond national borders)
 - other (please explain): _____

17. Which forms of TO do you use?
- games
 - image theatre
 - forum theatre
 - legislative theatre
 - rainbow of desire
 - other (explain): _____

18. How are your working relationships with various groups first established?
- groups solicit you for your leadership having seen your work advertised.
 - groups request your services having received positive references from others
 - groups seek out your services having heard about TO
 - you advertise your services directly to potential clients groups.
 - other (please explain): _____

Theatre of the Oppressed Principles

In the following section I am interesting in understanding the relationship between the principles of TO and the inherent need of people and organizations to survive (socially, politically, economically).

19. Do you receive enough financial compensation through your services that your work is sustainable?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____
20. Do you seek alternative funding sources (such as charitable donations, fundraising events/drives, supplementary work) to support your TO work?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____

21. Does your need for **financial sustainability** influence the way you approach your TO work?
- yes
 no
 other (please explain): _____
22. If so, how do financial concerns affect your work? How do they influence the type of work you engage in through TO? How do financial concerns influence the goals and outcomes of your work?
Please explain: _____
23. Do you find that you need to compromise your conceptualization of oppression, privilege and emancipation in order to maintain productive or profitable relationships with funders?
- yes
 no
 other (please explain): _____
24. Does your need to maintain a **professional reputation** influence the way you approach your TO work?
- yes
 no
 other (please explain): _____
25. If so, how do concerns about your professional reputation affect your work? How do they influence the type of work you engage in through TO? How do concerns about your professional reputation influence the goals and outcomes of your work?
Please explain: _____
26. Do you find that you need to compromise your conceptualization of oppression, privilege and emancipation in order to maintain the professional reputation you desire?
- yes
 no
 other (please explain): _____
27. Do you feel obliged to protect your **organization's legitimacy, reputation, or professional standards**?
- yes
 no
 other (please explain): _____
28. If so, does this obligation influence the way you approach your TO work?
- yes
 no
 other (please explain): _____

29. If so, how do organizational concerns affect your work? How do they influence the type of work you engage in through TO? How do organizational concerns influence the goals and outcomes of your work?
Please explain: _____
30. Do you find that you need to compromise your conceptualization of oppression, privilege and emancipation in order to sustain legitimacy as an organization?
 yes
 no
 other (please explain): _____
31. Is the organization through which you do your TO work registered as a charitable organization?
 yes
 no
32. If so, how do regulations of the charity's permissible activities influence the type of work you use TO for? (For example, if a charitable organization is limited in the amount of "political" work it can do, does this affect the type of work you do? How do you negotiate government regulations in your work?
Please explain: _____
33. How do you negotiate the beliefs and concerns of others who may have more or less radical understandings of a just society and social change than yourself?
Please explain: _____

Theatre of the Oppressed Relationships

In this section I am interested in learning about your relationship with other Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners.

34. How frequently do you interact with other TO practitioners **in your local community**?
 Weekly
 Twice a month
 Monthly
 1-10 times per year
 Never
 other (please explain): _____
35. In what ways do you interact with these other practitioners?
 communicate for the purpose of sharing information, opportunities, ideas, resources, contacts, etc.?
 attend common meetings, conferences, workshops, etc.

- collaborate together on TO-related initiatives
- Other (please explain): _____

36. How frequently do you interact with other TO practitioners **in your municipality (city or town)?**

- Weekly
- Twice a month
- Monthly
- 1-10 times per year
- Never
- other (please explain): _____

37. In what ways do you interact with these other practitioners?

- communicate for the purpose of sharing information, opportunities, ideas, resources, contacts, etc.?
- attend common meetings, conferences, workshops, etc.
- collaborate together on TO-related initiatives
- Other (please explain): _____

38. How frequently do you interact with other TO practitioners **in your region (or district)?**

- Weekly
- Twice a month
- Monthly
- 1-10 times per year
- Never
- other (please explain): _____

39. In what ways do you interact with these other practitioners?

- communicate for the purpose of sharing information, opportunities, ideas, resources, contacts, etc.?
- attend common meetings, conferences, workshops, etc.
- collaborate together on TO-related initiatives
- Other (please explain): _____

40. How frequently do you interact with other TO practitioners **in your country?**

- Weekly
- Twice a month
- Monthly
- 1-10 times per year
- Never
- other (please explain): _____

41. In what ways do you interact with these other practitioners?
- communicate for the purpose of sharing information, opportunities, ideas, resources, contacts, etc.?
 - attend common meetings, conferences, workshops, etc.
 - collaborate together on TO-related initiatives
 - Other (please explain): _____
42. How frequently do you interact with other TO practitioners **within your continent**?
- Weekly
 - Twice a month
 - Monthly
 - 1-10 times per year
 - Never
 - other (please explain): _____
43. In what ways do you interact with these other practitioners?
- communicate for the purpose of sharing information, opportunities, ideas, resources, contacts, etc.?
 - attend common meetings, conferences, workshops, etc.
 - collaborate together on TO-related initiatives
 - Other (please explain): _____
44. How frequently do you interact with other TO practitioners **in other parts of the world**?
- Weekly
 - Twice a month
 - Monthly
 - 1-10 times per year
 - Never
 - other (please explain): _____
45. In what ways do you interact with these other practitioners?
- communicate for the purpose of sharing information, opportunities, ideas, resources, contacts, etc.?
 - attend common meetings, conferences, workshops, etc.
 - collaborate together on TO-related initiatives
 - Other (please explain): _____
46. Do you compete with other TO practitioners or organizations for limited financial resources (such as foundation or government grants or contracts)?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____

47. Do you compete with other practitioners or organizations for access to communities of “oppressed” people?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____
48. Do you compete with other practitioners or organizations for media attention or coverage?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____
49. Do you compete with other practitioners or organizations for prestige (reputational enhancement) as a TO practitioner?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____
50. Do you compete with other practitioners or organizations for marketing opportunities?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____
51. Do you find that you share a common vision of the world with other TO practitioners?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____
52. Do you find that you share a common understanding of social justice, emancipation, or anti-oppression with other TO practitioners?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____
53. Do you share a sense of obligation to work for social justice with other TO practitioners?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____
54. Do you readily volunteer your time and resources to assist other TO practitioners?
- yes
 - no
 - other (please explain): _____

55. Do you readily volunteer your time and resources to assist others working towards similar goals (not necessarily TO practitioners)?
- yes
- no
- other (please explain): _____
56. Do you attend events for the purpose of interacting with other TO practitioners?
- yes
- no
- other (please explain): _____
57. Do you attend events for the purpose of interacting with other community organizers, educators or activists?
- yes
- no
- other (please explain): _____
58. Do you seek out and read the published material of other TO practitioners?
- yes
- no
- other (please explain): _____
59. Do you keep up to date with the activities of other practitioners and organizations in your area?
- yes
- no
- other (please explain): _____
60. Do you keep up to date with the activities of other practitioners and organizations elsewhere?
- yes
- no
- other (please explain): _____
61. Do you publicize others' work or activities through your own channels of communication (website, mailing lists, etc.)?
- yes
- no
- other (please explain): _____
62. To what extent, and in what ways, do you engage with formal TO organizations, such as the organization for Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed? Other professional associations? Please explain: _____

63. In what ways is your work similar to or distinct from that of other TO practitioners?
Please explain: _____

64. In what ways is your work distinct from the work of Augusto Boal (ie, have you modified his ideas or theory in certain ways according to your own contextual requirements)?
Please explain: _____

In relationship to other global justice initiatives

In the following section I am interested in your relationship with other change-oriented initiatives, such as the Occupy movement, the World Social Forum, human rights movements, etc.

65. Do you see your work as connected to other global justice movements (such as the movements for racial equality, women's rights, "antiglobalization", the Occupy movement, or others)?
 yes
 no
Please explain: _____

66. In your opinion, do you share any goals in common with other justice movements?
 yes
 no
Please explain: _____

67. Do you frame your work in the language of human rights, or in other language?
 human rights
 other language

68. If you frame your work in language other than human rights, please explain how and why you frame your work as such.
Please explain: _____

69. In your opinion, are there any fundamental contradictions between the goals of popular justice movements, and your own goals as a TO practitioner?
 yes
 no
Please explain: _____

70. Do you make any explicit attempts to collaborate together, or distance yourself from these movements (ie, have you participated in the Occupy movement, or other protest demonstrations? Have you used TO work as a part of other campaigns? Have you tried to develop any strategic relationships with other movements? Why or why not? What have

been the results (positive or negative)?

Please explain: _____

71. Do you see the work of Theatre of the Oppressed as a social movement?

yes

no

Please explain how or why: _____

72. Boal believed in the “revolutionary” potential of his work, referring to TO as a “rehearsal for revolution.” What does “revolution” mean to you in the context of your TO work?

Please explain: _____

73. Do you see your work as contributing to social change at levels beyond the personal? For example, when you are dealing with issues like violence against women, or domestic abuse, do you see your work as somehow combatting patriarchy in general? Or is your focus strictly at the level of the inter-personal?

Please explain: _____

Your identity

In this section, I invite you to consider whether or not you would like to be contacted in the future for a follow-up interview. Please note that providing your contact information may compromise your anonymity. Please also note that any information you provide will be kept in confidence.

Depending on how you have responded to these questions, I may wish to contact you for more information. In order to do so, I will need your contact information. Please note that providing your contact information in this survey is optional.

You may wish to protect your anonymity by simply leaving this section blank. I will protect the confidentiality of your contact information.

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, should I require further information from you?

- Yes, please contact me for an interview if I may be of further assistance to you.
- No, please do not contact me for an interview.

If you are willing to be contacted for further information, please enter your name, email and phone number in this space:

Most of the information gathered in this survey will be generalized. However, because there are opportunities to share your unique experiences, ideas and opinions on some issues, you may or may not wish to have your contribution recognized in future publications. Alternatively, even if you have provided me with your contact information for future follow-up, you may still wish to have your identity hidden when I publish the findings of this research. Please indicate whether you would like any quotes, ideas, or other information attributed to yourself, your organization, or whether you wish to protect your identity as anonymous:

- Please attribute any relevant material to me as an individual
- Please attribute any relevant material to my organization
- Please DO NOT attribute my contributions to me or my organization
- Other (please explain): _____

Are you answering this questionnaire as:

- An independent individual
- A representative of a particular organization
- Other (please explain): _____

Thank You

Thank you very much for participating in this research.

The data collected during surveys and interviews will contribute to a better understanding of the anti-oppressive governance.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential, unless you have authorized me to credit you by name for your contribution. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or would like a summary of the results, please provide your email address, and when the study is completed, anticipated by autumn 2014, I will send you the information. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or telephone as noted below.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin, the Director, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca. The faculty supervisor of this project, Dr. William D. Coleman, can be reached at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 38893 or wcolema@uwaterloo.ca.

Sincerely,
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