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## **Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed: Brecht, Freire, and Boal\***

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### **Abstract**

In this study, Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed have been introduced, and the connection between Freire and Boal's studies has been handled within the context of the relationship between critical pedagogy and theatre. In the study, it has been asserted that the roots of Boal's theatre, which is often dealt with in critical pedagogy studies, must be sought not only in Freire and Bertolt Brecht's epic-dialectical theatre theory, but primarily in Brecht's lehrstücke<sup>1</sup>-learning plays. When it comes to Boal's theatre, this assertion hinges on the assumption that Bertolt Brecht's lehrstücke-learning plays have been neglected by researchers. In the study, the similarities between Brecht's epic-dialectical theatre and Boal's theatre have been limited to the approaches of the two men of theatre to "catharsis".

**Keywords:** *Bertolt Brecht's theatre, Augusto Boal's theatre, Paulo Freire, Critical pedagogy.*

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1 The lexis "lehrstücke" is employed in Germany to refer to the term "learning-plays".

## **Introduction**

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed practices set a strong example that there is/may be a connection between critical pedagogy and theatre. Boal carried the pedagogical suggestions/techniques in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2014) to the field of theatre through his studies that can be collected under the title of the "Theatre of the Oppressed". Following Brecht, Boal thus provided a powerful, living example in relation to the idea of a political theatre with pedagogical missions. Inspired by Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed practices and by the ALFIN programme, a literacy campaign in which Freire's techniques were employed (Burton, 2009), Boal developed the Theatre of the Oppressed and started the movement of Theatre of the Oppressed in various parts of the world (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz, 2002; Boal, 2005a, 2008, and 2012; Thorau, 2017; Gökdağ, 2004; Kuyumcu, 2012; Sezgin, 2014). However, it is still difficult to assert that Boal took inspiration only from Freire. As it can also be seen in his *Theatre of the Oppressed* (2008), the first person Boal was influenced by and then he criticized is Bertolt Brecht (Ünal, 2009). Agit-prop Theatre examples in the Weimar Republic, Guerilla Theatre and Latin America Theatre in North America (Thorau, 2017), and Piscator's Theatre (Taylor, 2005) are also the first that come to mind as the other sources having inspired Boal.

### **Bertolt Brecht's Epic-Dialectical Theatre Theory and Augusto Boal**

Augusto Boal benefitted especially from Brecht's criticisms of Aristotelian Theatre; the spectator-actor relationship and defamiliarization techniques in epic-dialectical theatre, and the new function – social transformation – Brecht ascribed to theatre became a starting point for him (Boal, 2008; Babbage, 2005). Like Brecht, Boal criticized the prevalent understanding of tragedy and termed it as "Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy" (Boal, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, and 2008). For Boal (2008), this system is a powerful system of threat and repression. Although its structure took on different forms, this system proceeded on its way by carrying out its basic task with the aim of purging all *antisocial* elements. To Boal (2008), Aristotle systematized a formula based upon catharsis whose aim is to eliminate all that is widely unaccepted, including revolution,

just before they take place. Aristotle's system continued to appear in a disguised form on television, at cinemas, at circuses and at theatres, but the essence of the system did not change. This system was designed in order to restrain the individual and to adjust him/her to what is prevalent, to what is given. "At first, Antigone states that family rights are above laws and state rights (...) In the classic western, unhappy Indians or Mexicans believe in the possibility of violating the laws of the General Custer. Then, what happens to all these people? They fall down! The spectator gets a fright and submits to catharsis" (Boal, 2012, 84). At this point, Boal stated that if the thing wanted is the continuation of what preexists, the Aristotelian approach answers this purpose perfectly, but if the spectator is expected to engage in revolutionary action, another poetics must be sought. To this end, Boal set off on a quest for a new theatre (Boal, 2005a and 2008; Ünal, 2009).

(...) the poetics of Aristotle is the poetics of oppression: the world is known, perfect or about to be perfected, and all its values are imposed on the spectators, who passively delegate power to the characters to act and think in their place. In so doing the spectators purge themselves of their tragic flaw – that is, of something capable of changing society. A catharsis of the revolutionary impetus is produced! Dramatic action substitutes for real action. (Boal, 2008, 151).

According to Boal (2008), against Aristotle's coercive theatre, there is need for a new theatre that will be established by a new social class and will provide a radical break with the oppressors. "For those who are happy with the values of that society, obviously this form of catharsis is useful. But are we always happy with all of society's values?" (Boal, 2012, 84). For Boal, the Aristotelian catharsis is a tragic catharsis (Boal, 2008 and 2012). In the plays constructed through this structure, the characters' opposition to the values, to the Gods, or to the state/government structures of the day is evaluated as a tragic flaw and the characters raising objections experience a downfall. Spectators see the downfall of these characters, free from their own feelings/ideas about the rejection or the opposition (catharsis) by identifying with the characters, and turn into order-abiding, obedient persons. This is the theatre of the oppressors. First of all, this form of theatre must be rejected in favor of the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2005a and 2008). The Theatre of the Oppressed must be a dialectical-materialist theatre; it must prod the spectator into action, must concentrate on the issues of substructure and superstructure, and the characters in this theatre – as in Brecht's theatre – must reveal

the contradictions of social structure. Therefore, it is necessary to practise continuously since the new theory arises from continuous practise and the process in theatre renders it possible to realize these practises (Boal, 2005a, 2008, and 2012).

On the path of creating his own poetics, Boal (2005a, 2006 and 2008) brought Aristotle and Hegel's ideas into discussion, found Brecht's criticisms of the prevalent theatre true and revolutionary, but objected to the term "epic" Brecht employed. Boal's objection stems from the fact that the term "epic" has a meaning involving the adventure and war stories from Aristotle to Hegel. However, Boal did not mention that Brecht employed the term "epic" in theatre since he preferred the narrative as in epics, and also did not mention about the "defamiliarization" function of the narrative in Brecht's theatre. He objected to Brecht's use of this word since it reminds of the prevalent tragedies.

For idealist poetics, social thought conditions social being; for Marxist poetics, social being conditions social thought. In Hegel's view, the spirit creates the dramatic action; for Brecht, the character's social relations create the dramatic action. Brecht is *squarely, totally, globally* opposed to Hegel. Therefore it is a mistake to use, for designating his poetics, a term which means a genre in the poetics of Hegel. Brechtian poetics is not simply 'epic': it is Marxist (...) Brecht himself became aware of his initial mistake and, in his last writings, began to call his poetics, 'dialectical poetics' (...) Brecht should have called his by its name: Marxist poetics! (Boal, 2008, 78).

Boal and Brecht share the same starting points; both of them called for the rejection of Aristotelian theatre in order to prod the spectators into action. This common goal brought together the two men of theatre firstly on the basis of theatre theory. However, Boal (2008) maintained his criticisms of Brecht, claiming that epic poetics is the poetics of "the enlightened vanguard", and tried to clarify the distinction between his own theatre and Brecht's theatre, stating that the poetics of the oppressed is that of liberation.

Brecht's poetics is that of the enlightened vanguard: the world is revealed as subject to change, and the change starts in the theatre itself, for the spectator does not delegate power to the characters to think in his place, although he continues to delegate power to them to act in his place. The experience is revealing on the level of consciousness, but not globally on the level of the action. Dramatic action throws light upon real action. The spectacle is a preparation for action. The *poetics of the oppressed* is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for

himself! Theatre is action! Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution! (Boal, 2008, 135).

While maintaining his criticisms of Brecht, on the other hand, Boal carried Freirean practices/concepts/techniques to the field of theatre and created the general framework of the theatre practices that can be collected under the title of the “Theatre of the Oppressed” (Boal, 2005b and 2008; Babbage, 2005). Boal’s (2008) definition of Brecht’s theatre as “the poetics of the enlightened vanguard” was negated again and again through theatre stages (halls, streets, and any space that can be used as a stage), readers, spectators, and actors. Brecht’s theatre proceeded on its way as proletarian theatre and continued to delegate the power of action not to the character but to the spectators along with the characters because as Şener (2003) also indicates, epic-dialectical theatre is an antithesis underlining that theatre should be “no mirror but dynamo” against the theatre thesis Aristotle defines as “the imitation of action”. In contrast to Boal’s claim, the persons taking action through this dynamo in Brecht’s theatre never became the members of the enlightened class. Brecht did not mention anywhere about any “movement” pioneered by the enlightened members of society; he believed in collective human who does not exist today, but will one day arise somewhere by getting rid of all his/her malevolence. Brecht’s human will take action as a collective subject (Karacabey, 2009); it will constitute/be constituted, will destroy/be destroyed, and will arise again and again in dialectical process.

### **Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire**

Augusto Boal was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1931. Boal’s adaptation of John Steinback’s “Of Mice and Men”, which he directed in 1957 at São Paulo's Teatro de Arena (Arena Theatre)<sup>2</sup> founded in 1953, was his first performance as a director at the Arena Theatre. Arena was a theatre that refused to privilege the aesthetic, preferred the circular stage instead of elaborate and detailed stages, and sought to integrate theatre with social and political issues. Boal redefined the function of Arena Theatre, leaving aside the star performance system and the “italianismo”<sup>3</sup> attitude of the period’s prominent communities that favoured a proper and beautiful enunciation of words on luxurious

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<sup>2</sup> Boal directed plays at São Paulo's Teatro de Arena between the years 1956 and 1971 (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Italianismo is an attitude that pays extreme attention to diction, to elaborate stages and decorations.

and detailed stages. As of Boal's period, Arena was a political theatre and its main objective was to perform theatre for the national liberation struggle. In 1960, Boal wrote the play *Revolution in South America*, which is considered a "polemical farce", and this play was regarded as the initiation of Brecht's influence on Brazilian theatre (Ünal, 1999). Later, Boal initiated the phase known as "the nationalisation of the classics" at his own theatre, and through these plays, he carried Brazilian gestures, idioms, and corporality to the stage, focusing on the social relations in Brazil. In these plays, which he created by looking at European and North American classics, Boal naturalised the social and political issues of the classics, and drew the spectators' attention not to the characters but to the political. His aim here was to strengthen/support the anticolonialist movement (Boal, 2008). After the 1964 coup in Brazil, Boal carried all the political and aesthetic lessons of the previous years to the stage through his two political plays *Arena Tells the Story of Zumbi* and *Arena Tells the Story of Tiradentes*. He created these works, which feature a blend of Brazilian myths and popular stories of national heroes, by mixing Brechtian theatre and Brazilian performance traditions. In these works, Boal provided that the oppressor and the oppressed would exist in a distinctive manner. The actors did not play fixed characters; they were allowed to change their roles during the plays. In 1968, Boal realized the first phases of what would later be called as the Theatre of the Oppressed. He involved the spectators in the play<sup>4</sup> and then created Newspaper Theatre. He carried out some Newspaper Theatre practices in which he also staged the political criticism of current events. After his arrest and torture at the time of the coup, Boal was exiled from Brazil in 1971 and went to Argentina where he would live until 1976 (Delgado and Heritage, 1999; Ünal, 1999; Gökdağ, 2004; Babbage, 2005; Schuzman and Cohen-Cruz, 2002; Boal, 2008). In Argentina, Boal was exposed to political pressures again and thus he developed Invisible Theatre there (Thorau, 2017). Invisible Theatre is a form of theatrical performance in which the actors disguise themselves, hiding the fact that it is a theatrical performance, and the spectators do not know that they are the participants of a performance. The actors begin to talk about a political issue as if they are common citizens, and wait for the spectators to participate. Thus, all of a sudden, social, political, and economic issues begin to be discussed there.

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<sup>4</sup> In simultaneous dramaturgy technique, Boal involved the spectators in the play. The spectators offered their suggestions on how the play must progress and how the resolution (or denouement) must occur. The actors acted these suggestions out. This intervention then turned into a physical intervention through Forum Theatre; the spectators were invited to the stage in order to act out their opinions/suggestions. The term "spect-actor" in Boalian Theatre precisely corresponds to this.

Boal actually developed Invisible Theatre to be able to perform theatre during the period he was subjected to repression in Argentina. Invisible Theatre was performed in a variety of public places such as streets, supermarkets, and bazaars (Thorau, 2017).

Upon the intensification of political repression in Argentina, Boal went to Peru and continued his Theatre of the Oppressed practices there. For instance, he took part in the programme of the Integral Literacy Operation (Operación Alfabetización Integral [ALFIN]) which was carried out by the socialist government of Peru. There, Boal was impressed by the methods and the techniques Paulo Freire developed in favour of the oppressed (Delgado and Heritage, 1999; Ünal, 1999; Burton, 2009). As Boal himself states, in the programme of the Integral Literacy Operation (ALFIN), his own aim was to practically show that the oppressed can express themselves through theatre and can also transform it in the way it will be at their service (Boal, 2008). As Boal (2005a and 2008) and Burton (2009) indicate, the literacy campaign in Peru was developed in accordance with Freire's education model. Within this literacy campaign, courses for the illiterate were organised in a participatory way through the dialogue, reading programs were arranged by taking into consideration the daily lives of the communities, and teacher-student relationship was rejected (Burton, 2009). The reason for this rejection was because according to Freire (1970/2014), this form of relationship would cause the reproduction of oppressor-oppressed relationships and the reduction of education to an act of investment and depositing. In the Theatre of the Oppressed developed by drawing inspiration from Freire's techniques, theatre is viewed as a tool to transform the world. It is regarded as a rehearsal of the actions to be taken for a democratic world, as "a rehearsal of revolution" (Boal, 2008, 135), or as a "rehearsal of the transformation of reality" (Boal, 2005b, 12). The term "spectator" or the idea of a spectator who just sits back and passively watches is rejected. "'Spectator' is a bad word! The spectator is less than a man and it is necessary to humanise him, to restore to him his capacity of action in all its fullness" (Boal, 2008, 134-135).

Another method of theatre developed by Boal is the Rainbow of Desire Theatre which concentrates on individual and psychological issues as a part of social problems (Delgado and Heritage, 1999; Boal, 2005a and 2008; Sezgin, 2014). In the period of the Rainbow of Desire Theatre, Boal (2012) put forward the concept of "osmosis" and underlined that the personal and the social are intertwined, stating that no individual consciousness can remain away from a social influence due to "osmosis". That is to say,

Boal (2012) maintained his criticism of social structure in his evaluations of the individual, and claimed that the person and the society penetrate each other. According to Boal, “There are no cops in our head, they must have come from somewhere – and if they are in our head, maybe they are in other people’s heads as well. Where did they come from and what are we going to do about them?” (cited in Jackson, 1994, xii). Boal sought answers to this question through the Rainbow of Desire Theatre, and emphasized that while addressing individual issues, he tackled social problems, too (Jackson, 1994). To Jackson (1994), the theatre groups joining Boal’s practices in the West had difficulty in explaining their own experiences through the terms “the oppressor” and “the oppressed”. The workshops of the Rainbow of Desire Theatre concentrated on emptiness, fear, and et cetera emotions, and these emotions were evaluated as “pressures”.

Although it was handled by Boal (2012) under the title of the “Theatre of the Oppressed”, the Rainbow of Desire Theatre process (1980-1989)<sup>5</sup> was regarded as a different stage of the Theatre of the Oppressed, and its concern with individual issues was criticized (Jackson, 1994; Sezgin, 2014). In this process, Boal dealt with the oppressor-oppressed relationships within the context of the individual issues such as existential alienation, suicide, dependencies, pessimism, fear of emptiness, loneliness, hopelessness, unhappiness, sense of helplessness, weakness, and lack of communication. In the Rainbow of Desire Theatre, he associated pedagogy with psychology and therapy, and ascribed a positive, healing meaning to catharsis unlike in the whole process of the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2012; Sezgin, 2014). In the Rainbow of Desire Theatre process, Boal (2012) pointed out that catharsis does not only have a negative effect like controlling the groups, but it is also a weapon that can be pointed in other directions. He also added that catharsis releases the desires imprisoned by the social structures such as school, family, work, and it can be functionalized not to tame but to clarify and dynamise the desires (Boal, 2012). Boal’s approach to catharsis in this process is certainly quite different from his evaluation of catharsis as “a weapon of oppression” in the Theatre of the Oppressed process.

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<sup>5</sup> In his book *The Rainbow of Desire*, Boal states that the final techniques of The Cops in the Head were developed between 1988-1993. This shows that in Boal’s theatre, the periods in which the techniques and the types of plays were developed cannot be separated from each other through clear, or distinct lines because Boal also carried out Legislative Theatre practices in that same period.



### *Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed*

Boal, who lived first in Portugal and then in France between 1976-1986, established the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed - CEDITADE in Paris and continued to develop his theory during that period he was away from Brazil. He returned to Rio, Brazil in 1986. In Rio de Janeiro, he established a second CTO<sup>6</sup> (Rio de Janeiro Center of Theatre of the Oppressed) and carried out Legislative Theatre practices together with the Theatre of the Oppressed team in order to support Brazil's Workers' Party. Boal became a candidate for the position of *vereador* (city councillor) at the suggestion of the Workers' Party and was elected. He served as a city councillor in Rio from 1993 to 1996, and while serving in that position, he maintained his Theatre of the Oppressed practices. During that period, as CTO Rio, they achieved the passing of fifteen municipal and two state laws (Boal, 2005b and 2006; Cohen-Cruz, 2002; Demirdiř, 2021). Boal (2002) handled Legislative Theatre as an advanced stage of the Theatre of the Oppressed. "Up to now we did forum theatre to understand the situation better, to try to see the possibilities of action in a given situation, to train ourselves for action. But in this case we would add something different: could there be a law that would help solve this problem? And if so, what law?" (Boal and Cohen-Cruz, 2002, 234). As it can be understood from Boal's statements, the main purpose in Legislative Theatre, which was his final project, was to encourage the oppressed to create laws in a collective manner by means of theatre for their participation in government. In this form of theatre, the laws created predominantly through the Forum Theatre methods were presented to the government representatives as well.

Boal developed various forms of theatre such as Invisible Theatre, Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, Newspaper Theatre, Direct Actions, the Joker System, Simultaneous Dramaturgy, the Rainbow of Desire or Cop-in-the-Head Theatre, and Legislative Theatre. However, the Theatre of the Oppressed, which was developed by drawing inspiration from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, became the main title of all the above mentioned forms of theatre that were actually used as various exercises or techniques within the Theatre of the Oppressed practices (Boal, 2005a, 2006, 2008, and 2012). These techniques and the basic concepts in Boal's theatre have been shown below through the tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed:

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<sup>6</sup> Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed.

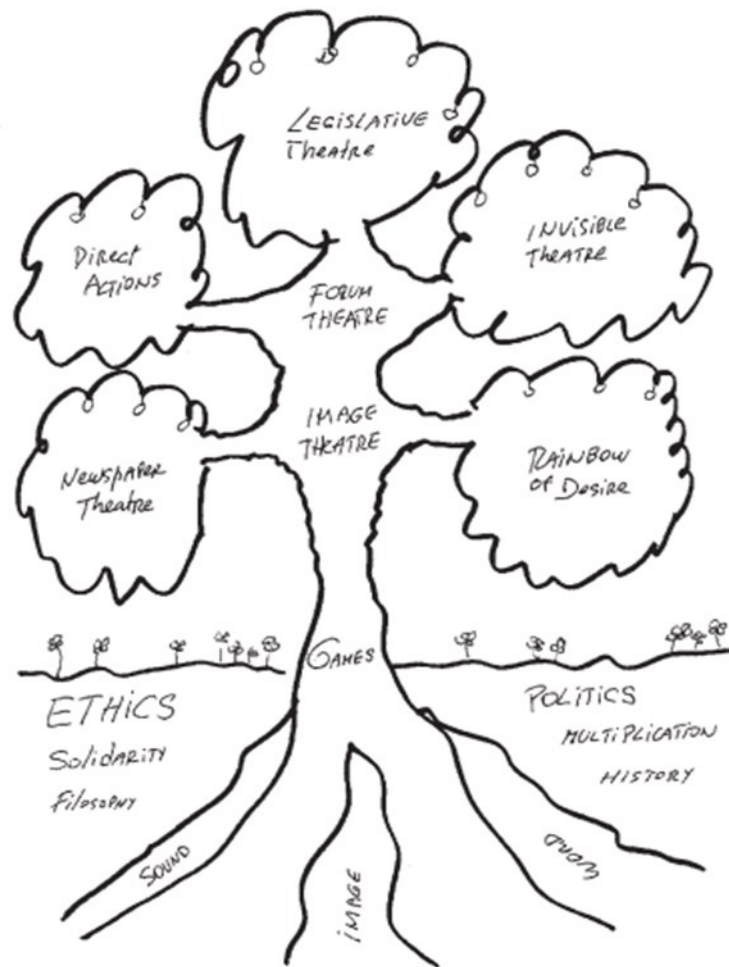


Fig. 1 The Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2006, 3).

As it is also seen in Figure 1, “sound”, “image”, and “word” together comprise the roots of the tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed. They combine with “ethics, solidarity, philosophy, politics, history, multiplication<sup>7</sup>”, and create the types of plays under the title of the “Theatre of the Oppressed”. The different types of plays and the techniques, which seem to be independent from each other, are not actually isolated from each other in the Theatre of the Oppressed; they together create an inseparable relationship in all their diversity. The techniques are fed from the roots that also feed the tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed. In other words, they are fed from the same roots; from the fertile ground of philosophy, history, politics, and ethics (Boal, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Growth, multiplication in terms of quantity and quality, in the social sense.

Since 1970, when I systematised the Techniques of Newspaper Theatre, the Theatre of the Oppressed method has not stopped growing, in Brazil and in the five continents, always adding new Techniques which respond to new necessities, and never abandoning any of the old ones. The enormous diversity of Techniques and of their possible applications – in social and political struggle, in psychotherapy, in pedagogy, in town as in country, in the treatment of immediate problems in one area of the city or in the great economic problems of the whole country – has never deflected them, not by one millimetre even, from their original informing proposition, which is the unwavering support of the theatre in the struggles of the oppressed (Boal, 2006, 4).

As to the reasons for these changes and developments in Boal's theatre, Babbage states the following: "The body of ideas and techniques that constitutes the Theatre of the Oppressed was not born from purely, or predominantly, artistic decisions and experiences, but grew out of a determined battle to make socially engaged, life-affirming theatre in a climate of extreme repression." (Babbage, 2015, 2).

The Theatre of the Oppressed exceeded the boundaries of South America and after Brecht, it became a new source of inspiration in the theatre world in terms of the relationship between theatre and politics (Boal, 2005b and 2008; Delgado and Heritage, 1999).

The pedagogical aims and practices of the Theatre of the Oppressed were considerably affected by Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed practices. In the method Freire calls as the banking model of education, teachers make explanations on a topic completely alien to the existential experiences of students, and the narrator (teacher) wants the students to memorize mechanically the narrated contents. Students are transformed into empty vessels to be filled by teachers, and thus education becomes an act of depositing. To Freire (1970/2014), the oppressors use the banking model of education because they fear that the students will become self-aware. This situation prevents the oppressed, especially the students from becoming subjects and growing into human beings for their own selves, and also disclaims their competence as a human being. Freire states that this contradiction can be overcome through a reconciliation in which each party simultaneously becomes a teacher and a student. This may be possible through the acceptance of the problem-posing education model against the banking model of education because problem-posing education is a liberating education; it consists of the acts of cognition, and rejects communiques and the transferrals of

information. Problem-posing education is the posing of the problems that people experience in their relations with the world. It realizes communication, embodies the resolution of the teacher-student contradiction, and is not possible without dialogue. In problem-posing education, the-teacher-of-the-students and the-students-of-the-teacher disappear through the dialogue and new terms emerge: student-teacher and teacher-students. For Freire, education, as a liberating practice, rejects the idea that human is isolated, abstract, and unattached to the world; it perceives human being as a part of the world. As for the world, it is not static; it is historical, it is a reality in process, in transformation, and it has dialectical relations. Through the pedagogy of the oppressed, student-teacher and teacher-students can reflect on themselves and on the world, and can also create a new pedagogy without dichotomizing this act of reflection from action (Freire, 1970/2014).

As Freire points out, “Any situation in which A objectively exploits B or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression” (Freire, 1970/2014, 55). This situation continues in the field of education as well. However, it can be eliminated thus: The problems can be identified together with the teachers and the students (problem-posing education), the learning process can be planned not through a top-down curriculum but by taking into consideration the participants’ situation and their relations with the world (thematic universe). Knowledge can be presented in the form of a problem whose final solution has not been developed, and the learning process can be realized through a dialectical structure in which reflection and action go hand in hand (praxis). Finally, it can be underlined that the transformation of history is possible. All these practices must be carried out through critical dialogue and limit-acts. This is the pedagogy of the oppressed, and the oppressed liberated through this pedagogy will also liberate the oppressors (Freire, 1970/2014).

There are similarities between Freire’s techniques and Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed techniques (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz, 2002; Karaboğa, 2003; Kuyumcu, 2012, Karabekir, 2015; Babbage, 2015; Sezgin, 2014). As in the pedagogy of the oppressed, Boal created the Theatre of the Oppressed for the liberation of the oppressed. Having also benefitted from his previous experiences, Boal first removed the separation between the spectator and the actor in the Theatre of the Oppressed. Instead of that separation, he created the term “spect-actor” with reference to Freire’s concepts of

“student-teacher” and “teacher-student”. This term derives from the combination of the words “spectator” and “actor”, and implies the unity of spectator-actor (Brahma, Pavarala and Belavadi, 2019; Gökdağ, 2004 and 2015; Boal, 2005b, 2006, and 2008). That is to say, in the Theatre of the Oppressed, the spectators can take on the role of the actors, and the actors can also assume the role of the spectators. Thus, they can build the theatre process together (Brahma et al., 2019; Kuyumcu, 2012). This situation was used by Boal through Freirean dialogue and in order to build the dialogue. To Boal, there is a wall between the spectators and the actors in Aristotelian theatre; the spectators are passive and they have turned into the persons whose consciousness is determined, or whose thoughts are shaped by the actors (Boal, 2008 and 2012). For him, spectators can be humanised and restored to their capacity of action again through their participation in the performance and through the rejection of “Aristotle’s coercive system”. Boal’s statements on Aristotelian Theatre are parallel to Freire’s statements about the oppressed who have been exposed to overdetermination and consciousness manipulation. In a similar vein, Freire stressed the necessity of getting free from the submerged consciousness, and of rejecting the traditional, pre-determined curricula and the banking model of education.

In Boal’s theatre, the problems are identified and the suggestions for possible solutions are developed together with the spect-actors, as in the “student-teacher” and “teacher-student” practices of Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In Boal’s theatre, the possible solutions developed together with the spect-actors are never final solutions; they are solutions that may change based on the conditions. To Boal, the spectators must find the best answers that can be given to the questions posed during a performance in the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2005a). Similarly, in problem-posing education, Freire indicates that the present reality must be treated as a problem and these problems must be handled through the dialogue (Freire, 1970/2014). However, it is important to underline that the knowledge here is not “at the level of the *doxa*”, but “at the level of *logos*” in Freire’s words (Freire, 1970/2014, 81). In addition, the problems are identified but not left unresolved in problem-posing education. At this point, Freire (2019a and 2019b) points out that leaving the problems unresolved may lead to a conclusion that evolves into something postmodern. In problem-posing education, the solutions are in favour of the oppressed, and they are not final solutions since they may change based on the process. The problems and the possible solutions

are handled at the level of logos, away from doxas, namely away from the beliefs/perceptions that are not scientific or rational, on a dialectical basis, and with the reality of the oppressor-the oppressed relationship in people's lives. They are discussed with dialogue and hope. The problems are identified and the suggestions for possible solutions, which are not final solutions, are developed together. Consciousness and the world become simultaneous.

Freire's other two important concepts are "historicity" and "thematic universe". Freire suggests that humans are historical-social beings and there is a dialectical relationship between history and humans. To him, human who is a historical being exists in history, and there is a constant interaction between the world and the human who determines history and is determined by history. For Freire, historicity is also the interpenetration of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts and et cetera that strive towards plenitude in a dialectical interaction with their opposites. In this historicity, the obstacles impeding human's humanization and the ideas, hopes, concepts on the pathway to human's humanization exist as thesis and antithesis. Historical themes are never addressed as isolated, disconnected, or static themes; the interwoven totality of the interacting themes of an epoch – political, social, economic et cetera – constitutes the thematic universe of that age (Freire, 1970/2014). In Boal's theatre, socio-economic issues and contradictions of daily life are handled as well, and it is underlined that the intervention of the human/the subject, who exists in and interacts with history, in history is important. Like Freire, before starting his studies, Boal (2008) carried out some research about the area, in which he will work, and tried to determine the thematic universe of that area. This approach bears similarity to Freire's techniques of thematic universe and historicity.

Freire (1970/2014) employs the concept "limit-situations" to refer to the economic, political, geographical, psychological situations restraining the persons, and the technique "limit-acts" to describe the actions taken in order to overcome these restraints. These two concepts/techniques also appear in Boal's theatre; Freire's "limit-situations" correspond to the identification of political, psychological, economic, familial, traditional, et cetera problems/obstacles in Boal's theatre. As for the "limit-acts", they correspond to the practices that must be carried out to overcome these problems/obstacles in Boal's theatre. *Praxis* which means the unity of reflection and action, and occurs after the awakening of critical consciousness according to Freire

actually appears in Boal's theatre as the extension of plays into public spaces and as the experience of reflection and action at the same time. The actors of the Theatre of the Oppressed hid the fact that they were the actors of a theatrical performance, using the Invisible Theatre techniques. The actors tried to perform the Theatre of the Oppressed in public buses, in bazaars, in factories and workplaces, in luxurious restaurants, in front of supermarkets, in all areas where the relationships of the oppressor/the oppressed are reproduced. Boal aimed to democratise the theatre and the politics through the Theatre of the Oppressed, and added the democratisation of therapy to his other purposes through the Rainbow of Desire Theatre (Jackson, 1994).

Freire and Boal come from the same geography. Both of them lived in South America, were arrested by the 1964 Brazilian coup, and had to leave their countries. Both Boal and Freire's main objective is to liberate the oppressed. At this point, Freire turned to the field of pedagogy and Boal turned to the field of theatre. They re-created the fields they focused on for the liberation of the oppressed. Boal once referred to Freire as "my last father" (Boal, 2005b, 100-103). The particular importance Boal attached to Freire and his techniques can be understood more clearly through his following statements:

With Paulo Freire, we learned to learn. In his method, over and above learning to read and write, one learns more: one learns to know and to respect otherness and the other, difference and the different. My fellow creature resembles me, but he is not me; he is similar to me, I resemble him. By engaging in dialogue we learn, the two of us gain, teacher and pupil, since we are all pupils, and all teachers. I exist because they exist. To write on a white sheet of paper one needs a black pen; to write on a blackboard the chalk must be a different colour. For me to be, they must be. For me to exist Paulo Freire must exist (Boal, 2005b, 102).

The similarities between Boal and Freire's approaches can be multiplied, but in this study the attention is centered upon the connection between critical pedagogy and theatre. It is obvious that there is a path leading from the Pedagogy of the Oppressed to the Theatre of the Oppressed. The pedagogical methods in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed were carried to the field of the Theatre of the Oppressed through some techniques/concepts. Among these are learning together, dialogue, historicity, transition from passivity to action and subjectivation, dialectical thinking, overcoming limit-situations through limit-acts, praxis, thematic universe, problem-posing education and

spect-actors, and transformative learning. Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire evidently provide one of the strongest examples of interdisciplinarity in the field of critical pedagogy.

### **Bertolt Brecht's Learning-Plays and Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed**

In the Theatre of the Oppressed, it is quite significant that theatrical performances get off the stages; the plays are performed in streets, in squares along with the people who are transformed into the spect-actors. It is also of great importance that theatre is used as a means of tackling social, political, or economic problems. Therefore, each performed play of the Theatre of the Oppressed turns into a rehearsal for the transformation of life. However, as emphasized before, evaluating Boal and Brecht's ideas only in the context of epic-dialectical theatre may cause incomplete or inadequate comments because the Theatre of the Oppressed actually shows similarity with Brecht's learning-plays rather than with his epic-dialectical theatre theory.

The similarities between Bertolt Brecht's learning-plays and Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed are as follows:

Long before Boal's "spect-actor" concept and practices, Bertolt Brecht wrote and staged his learning-plays whereby he suggested removing the separation between the spectator and the actor. He accomplished this objective and realized the transformation of all participants into learners.<sup>8</sup>

While explaining the concept of "major pedagogy" related to the learning plays, Brecht states that "The Major Pedagogy completely changes the role of acting. It abrogates the system of actors and spectators." Similarly, he suggests that "learning play teaches not through observing, but through acting.". This statement can also be regarded as one of the first approaches foreshadowing the birth of the spect-actor of the Theatre of the Oppressed. (Kemaloğlu and Güllü, 2009, 162-163).

Learning-plays are not didactic; they have the characteristics of dialectical pedagogical practices and aim at learning together (Mueller, 2008; Jameson, 1998). Learning-plays,

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<sup>8</sup> Here, it must be reminded that Brecht carried out learning-play practices (writing, staging, making changes, et cetera.) between 1926-1933, and Boal started his "Theatre of the Oppressed" practices in the 1960s (Demirdiř, 2019). In the period when Boal was a director at Arena Theatre (1956-1971), the Joker system was at the core of theatre practices. In the years following the 1964 coup, Boal did Agit-prop Theatre and Forum Theatre for workers and villagers in the north regions of Brazil for propaganda (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz, 2002).



which can be regarded as the first systematic example of the connection between critical pedagogy and theatre, were performed together with the spectators/learners (workers' choruses, trade-unions, et cetera.), and were staged along with students at schools in Germany (Brecht, 2013; Kemaloğlu and Güllü, 2009). At this point, it is important to recall Boal's statements on Forum Theatre. He mentions Forum Theatre as "a theatre which is not didactic, in the old sense of the word and style, but pedagogic, in the sense of a collective learning" (Boal, 2012, 9). Boal's definition of Forum Theatre seems obviously parallel to Brecht's description of learning-plays. For Brecht, learning-plays do not aim at teaching any doctrine, they are dialectical pedagogical practices developed for the experience of a dialectical learning process (Mueller, 2008; Karacabey, 2006).

Similar to Boal's (2012) practices which he later calls as "simultaneous dramaturgy", Brecht's learning-plays are open to constant interventions and each of them, as a project that has not finished completely, contains in itself the idea of a "process" (Karacabey, 2009). While tackling a problem in simultaneous dramaturgy, which can be considered as an early form of Forum Theatre, Boal (2012) let the spectators intervene verbally in the performance and change the course of the play, and thus he reconstructed the play together with the spect-actors. This practice shares similarity with the way of staging a learning-play because Brecht's learning-plays are open to constant interventions as well. They can be written or performed again based on the suggestions of the learners who come up after the removal of the separation between the spectator and the actor. Additionally, they can be staged together with the learners.

Boal addressed social, political, or economic issues in the Theatre of the Oppressed as in Brecht's learning-plays. He also transformed the theatre space into a space convenient for dialectical discussion through the dialogue, as in learning-play practices in which the dialogue usually remains at the forefront. In the dialectical discussions of learning-plays, Brecht did not reach a final synthesis to maintain the process, and wrote/staged these plays not to teach any doctrine but to create a dialectical learning experience (Kemaloğlu, 2005; Karacabey, 2006 and 2009, Demirdiş, 2019). This situation bears similarity to the basis of dialectical discussion in Boal's Forum Theatre and to his approach about not teaching any doctrine (Jackson, 1994; Thorau, 2017). "We are tackling a problem, but we are not imposing solutions." (Boal, 1978; cited in Thorau, 2017).

In learning-plays, theses and antitheses are confronted in order to initiate and maintain the process, or antitheses are created in the course of the play (Karacabey, 2006 and 2009). This situation shows similarity with the Forum Theatre practices (Kuyumcu, 2012; Karabekir, 2015) and with the creation of opposite situations in Invisible Theatre, which Thorau (2017) views as the most provocative form of the Theatre of the Oppressed. “While one of the actors defends his enlightening opinion, the other comes up with a manipulative idea against that opinion.” (Thorau, 2017, 11). Thorau (2017) points out to this similarity in terms of Boal’s Forum Theatre and indicates that Forum Theatre which provides a confrontation of the rights and the wrongs serves as a reference to learning-plays.

Boal (2012) mentions about “analogical induction” in the Rainbow of Desire/Cops in the Head Theatre. In “analogical induction”, the individual story of a single person is pluralised by the other participants telling their own stories of oppression. What matters in this practice is discovering the general mechanisms by means of which the oppression is produced thanks to different perspectives and possibilities, and analyzing the various possibilities for breaking the oppression. The aim is “to allow a distanced analysis, to offer several perspectives, to multiply the possible points of view from which one can consider each situation” (Boal, 2012, 54). Boal’s aims in analogical induction are similar to Brecht’s learning-plays’ structural characteristics because in a similar vein, Brecht reconstructs his learning-plays through different perspectives and their results, and aims to multiply the perspectives on the idea of a common good. For instance, in his learning-play *He Who Says Yes And He Who Says No*, Brecht (2013) created two different versions of the same play, and made it possible to discuss the events from different aspects with different conclusions. He constructed the two versions through the subject’s decisions (the subject says “yes” or “no”) and through the changing circumstances (the boy who goes on a journey to fetch medicine for his ill mother in the first text sets out on a journey for the cure of an epidemic illness in the city in the second one). Brecht aimed to multiply points of view, showing different perspectives and their possible results through these two versions of the play (Demirdiř, 2019).

To Boal (2008), theatre must deal with the issues of substructure and superstructure. Boal’s approach of theatre also bears similarity to Brecht’s definition of pedagogy in the theory of learning-plays because according to Brecht, the new

pedagogy, which is the new function of theatre, revolves around the issues of substructure and superstructure, too (Brecht, 2003).

In addition, it can be suggested that the term “the cops in the head” (Boal, 2012; Thorau, 2017) provides a good example of the similarities between Brecht and Boal’s concepts. “In Paris, at the beginning of the 1980s, I led a workshop which ran over a period of two years: The Cops in the Head. I started from the following hypothesis: the cops are in our heads, but their headquarters and barracks must be on the outside. The task was to discover how these cops got into our heads, and to find the ways of dislodging them.” (Boal, 2012, 10). “Every oppressed person is a subjugated subversive. His submission is his Cop in the Head” (Boal, 2012, 50). In his writings on defamiliarization effects, Brecht pointed out to the cops getting into our heads, too, and suggested that this situation manipulates our consciousness: “... Be careful: What if the mind you wish to be in unity and solidarity with – though it is not in unity and solidarity with you – is the mind of the cop?” (Brecht, 2011, 189).

Brecht took a break from his learning-plays since he had to leave Germany, and then concentrated on epic-dialectical theatre. Therefore, learning-play practices were interrupted and this situation caused Brecht to be widely remembered only for epic-dialectical theatre (Demirdiř, 2019). At this point, Boal (2005a, 2008, and 2012) made his evaluations of Brecht, to a very large extent, within the context of epic-dialectical theatre. As for the evaluations of the relationship between Boal and Brecht (Auslander, 2002; řener, 2003; Jackson, 1994; Ünal, 1999; Babbage, 2005; Gökdağ, 2014), they were considerably made in the context of the Theatre of the Oppressed and epic-dialectical theatre. These evaluations focusing more on epic-dialectical theatre caused the neglect of the similarities between Boal’s theatre and Brecht’s learning-plays. These unnoticed similarities can be summarized thus: the “spect-actor” practice, the experience of learning together and the development of dialectical thinking skills, the view of theatre as a pedagogical tool and as a space of praxis for the realization of social-political transformations in favour of the oppressed, the confrontation of theses and antitheses in the course of the plays and the nonexistence of a final solution, the presentation of the knowledge that the results are changeable based on the conditions, and the involvement of different perspectives in the plays.

## **Conclusion**

The examples that illustrate the relationship between critical pedagogy and theatre can be listed as follows: Bertolt Brecht and his pedagogical theatre practices, the relationship between Freire and Boal, Boal's practices in ALFIN and the Legislative Theatre practices he carried out in Rio together with the oppressed for their enlightenment about legal issues (Boal, 1998; Şeran, 2015), the new practices Reiner Steinweg developed by taking Brecht's learning-plays as a model and used in informal education practices (Steinweg, 1972), and the activities of the Jana Sanskriti community performing Forum Theatre in India for political-pedagogical purposes (Kuyumcu, 2012; Gökdağ, 2015; Karabekir, 2015; Brahma et al., 2019; Demirdiş, 2021). In different parts of the world, there may also be some other examples, which we do not yet know, related to the relationship between critical pedagogy and theatre. It is unquestionable that these practices made/have been making significant contributions to the field of critical pedagogy in terms of the construction of a new social structure.

Critical pedagogy is open to evaluation under the title of dialectics due to both its relationship with different disciplines, its specific structure and its functioning, its relationship with social, political, cultural, or economic institutions. Aksoy (2019) points out that "critical pedagogy provides people with the thinking tools and the basis that help them lead their lives as free and conscious individuals. This basis must be considered as a source of inspiration for the persons in quest of learning to improve themselves and create new opportunities and possibilities, rather than as a source that appears by itself and has an end point." Therefore, as Aksoy, again, indicates, "critical pedagogy is not an educational approach that only students or educators – teachers take interest in, and to advance this field, to enhance it through interdisciplinary relationships is one of the responsibilities of the persons carrying out critical pedagogy studies."

Aksoy's (2019) statements are actually valid not only for the field of critical pedagogy, but also for all the fields that claim to be "critical". In this regard, when it comes to the relationship between Boal and Brecht, the persons carrying out "critical" studies on the history of theatre need to review Boal's criticisms of Brecht and take into consideration Brecht's learning-plays while examining Boal's theatre. This situation will render it possible to handle Brecht and his learning-plays within the context of critical pedagogy, and will also help to make different, or possibly more comprehensive

and extensive assessments in the studies on Boal's theatre. Though it is difficult to estimate the possible outcomes now, this is one of the objectives of this article because criticism includes/must include in itself the opportunity to make new inferences through new information, too. "Dialectics" which has been interwoven with critical education already – certainly – necessitates this, and it is quite obvious that the practices in this direction will expand, enhance and push forward the "critical" field.

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