

Peace Beyond Borders Programme Programme

Interactive Theatre Methodology*

I. Introduction

The methodology that will be used for the interactive theatre of the “Peace Beyond Borders” Programme is adapted from the interactive ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ developed by Augusto Boal. It is called Forum-Theatre and aims for **social change by the means of awareness-raising amongst communities of their resources or by the awakening of those things that have become normalised out of habit**. It does not require a significant number of actors (7 maximum, plus a Joker). In addition, it must be possible to adapt the conditions of the stage to all communities.

The Theatre Company (Troupe) that is in charge must be aware in advance of the cultural and contextual practices of the locality where it will perform. The objective is to avoid committing mistakes which would damage the success of the Forum-Theatre and the desired outcomes.

The themes to explore for this project have been provided by Impunity Watch: **the manipulation of identities: ethnic, political or national**.

II. The Forum-Theatre

THE SCENARIO

- The scenario must portray **a situation of oppression or a social or political “error”** which exists in a given society at the time of the representation. For the Peace Beyond Borders Programme, this will be the manipulation of political, ethnic or national identities. This error, which will often appear in different, adapted ways throughout the scenario, will be subject to a debate in the forum.
- Contrary to the usual scenarios, which offer an outcome to the tensions, the oppressor necessarily prevails in Forum-Theatre scenarios. **“An unhappy end”**. The scenario can be in whichever style (symbolist, realist, etc.), except surrealist or irrational as the objective is to find concrete solutions at the end.
- The solutions and behaviours of victims in response to solutions or social errors must contain **mistakes and be inadequate, for them to be analysed during the second part of the performance**. These inadequate responses must be well expressed and be repeated in concrete situations at different times throughout the scenario.
- The scenario is usually provided to the actors as a description of a situation per scene. Each actor creates a dialogue based on these descriptions. An accompaniment during rehearsals nevertheless permits harmonising the messages that are to be portrayed or the aspects of the social error to be picked up on and which are linked to the theme. **These messages are specific to each scene** and are specified, by role, in the description of the scenes.

STAGE-SETTING

- **Introduction**

The Joker¹ presents the context, for instance: “The Umushwarara Company would like to present to you the scenario of a social situation. This scenario has two parts. During the first part, you will watch the performance by the actors and during the second part, you will become actors yourselves and find solutions which have not been found by the actors during the first part. You should therefore pay attention to each detail. Thank you”. The actors are subsequently asked to come to the stage.

Note: Spectators must be able to clearly identify each character with precision.

- **Images**

The performance always starts with an image, a fixed picture in which the actors in fact adopt exactly the same postures they will adopt at the end of the scenario and **which represent a situation of oppression or a social error**. It is not compulsory for all actors to be in the image, only those who perform in the last scene should. As much as this image is the one which introduces the play, as much it is the one which ends its first part. It provides some kind of overview or a summary of the initial scenario where the public gets an idea of who the oppressors and the victims are, or what the social error is which is raised in the scenario.

- **First Part of the Performance**

The first part takes place as usual. The actors draw upon the initial scenario.² The performance of this scenario **lasts 20 to 30 minutes**. It is the Joker who ends this first performance by the means of a “STOP!”, which is followed by the “image” for a few seconds.

- **Second Part of the Performance, also known as the Forum or Performance-Game**

In the second part, also called the Forum part, the spectators will become real actors. **The intervention of the public as actors is part and parcel of the performance** and constitutes the real end of the performance.

THE FORUM

1. After the first part of the performance, **the Joker asks the public** whether there are situations in the scenario they find to be suitable as such and whether they agree with the solutions the victims suggested.
2. The Joker informs the public that s/he is going to create **a specialised jurisdiction and give a ruling with respect to the actors**. The authors of errors or the oppressors move to the left-hand side and the victims move towards to the right-hand side.
3. The Joker asks once more whether the public agrees with the solutions and behaviours of the victims who are faced **with social errors or oppression**. The answer will probably be no.
4. The Joker informs the public that if nobody changes these situations, they will remain as such. In a participatory manner, s/he reaches an agreement with the public that **the situations in the scenario have to change**.

¹ Voir page 3 pour l'explication du rôle du Joker.

² Voir les différents points du titre scénario.

5. At first, **the spectators will be individually invited** to quote the solutions and behaviours of the victims which they do not agree with and when specifically they occurred during the scenario.
6. **The spectator picks a role** (not the oppressor), which s/he announces out loud. This can be the victim's or a new role, which offers other solutions/ behaviours than those proposed by the victim in the same situation. Ex.: a neighbour of the victim, a community leader, the child of a victim etc. If the spectator chooses the role of the victim, the victim remains and helps the spectator to find viable solutions by the means of her/his acting.
7. When the Joker feels that a viable solution has been expressed by the new actor, s/he shouts "STOP!", we applaud, and **s/he announces the proposed solution out loud**.
8. Successively, **new actors come on stage to propose new solutions** or reinforce the ones already provided.

Note: The public is not used to acting, so it is up to the actors to stimulate the spectator-actors or to address the barriers or fears in the local context that otherwise prevent their participation.

THE JOKER

The Joker is the centrepiece of the Forum-Theatre. S/he must be someone who has very good judgment, self-control and a capacity to anticipate. S/he leads the game but does not direct it and does not hold the truth. **S/he is the facilitator who allows the public to develop all the possible actions and solutions** to respond to the social error and who transposes the game to their social reality. S/he is the facilitator who will ensure that the game remains constructive and respects the ethics and deontology of the mandating organisation.

• **The Joker's Role**

- i. The gestures and words of the Joker must **under no circumstances manipulate or influence** the spectators.
- ii. Her/his conclusions must be obvious and s/he always questions them. **S/he must always raise doubts with the public**. Do you agree? Does this work or not? Is this what you have said? This will avoid personal interpretations by the Joker and may assist a better exploration of solutions.
- iii. **Decisions are taken with the public**. The public itself can modify the rules of the game if they do not harm the exploration of the topic.
- iv. **The physical attitude of the Joker is extremely important**; s/he must avoid mingling with the public but the public must be able to distinguish her/him from the other actors through her/his position and be able to identify her/him as the leader of the game.
- v. Thanks to his capacity of self-control (**body and spirit**), s/he should not let transpire her/his fatigue, doubts and discomfort caused by an unforeseen situation which arises during the performance.

III. Vox-Pop

This consists of a **series of video interviews** of people in the community, individually or collectively. It takes place about 20 minutes before the performance, close to where it will occur. On the basis of questions on the theme of the performance, the interviewer brings to light the way in which the community perceives the topic. After the performance, a **second Vox-Pop** will take place with the same interview questions than the first time, and ideally, with the same individuals

This short video, which should not last more than 5 seconds, permits getting an idea of the **evolution of the communities' perceptions** after the performance. Below a few examples of questions for the interview on the issue of political, ethnic and nationality-based manipulation:

- What do you understand by the manipulation of youth?
- In what regard can youth be manipulated?
- Who in the community can counter this manipulation and how?

IV. Inviting Communities & Gathering Spectators

There are two complementary ways to invite and gather the spectators:

1. Work with the Administration

In collaboration with the mandating organisations which are in the field, the Theatre Company must necessarily have the authorisation of the local administration. It is also the administration which gives the Company the schedule of the performances, in function of the availability of people in the community, or the Troupe can propose a timeline to the administration. It is once again the administration which will take care of inviting the population according to its usual means.

2. Gathering people on-site (think about using a megaphone!)

When the Company is on-site and there are not enough spectators, it conducts a little investigation to find out the names of the people and places (bar, market, school etc.) which are most popular. It must subsequently improvise a short scenario, which must seem real in the eyes of the community and quite attractive. Ex.: improvise a situation of madness or a fight, a dance, etc. When a sufficient crowd has been drawn, the Joker provides a short introduction and the show can begin. A megaphone can be of great use!

This methodology was developed by the **Association IZUBA (Troupe UMUSHWARARA) in collaboration with Impunity Watch. The methodology is based on research conducted by Impunity Watch as part of the "Peace Beyond Borders" Programme. For more information, visit: www.impunitywatch.org.*

