




A Guide To
Forum
Theatre



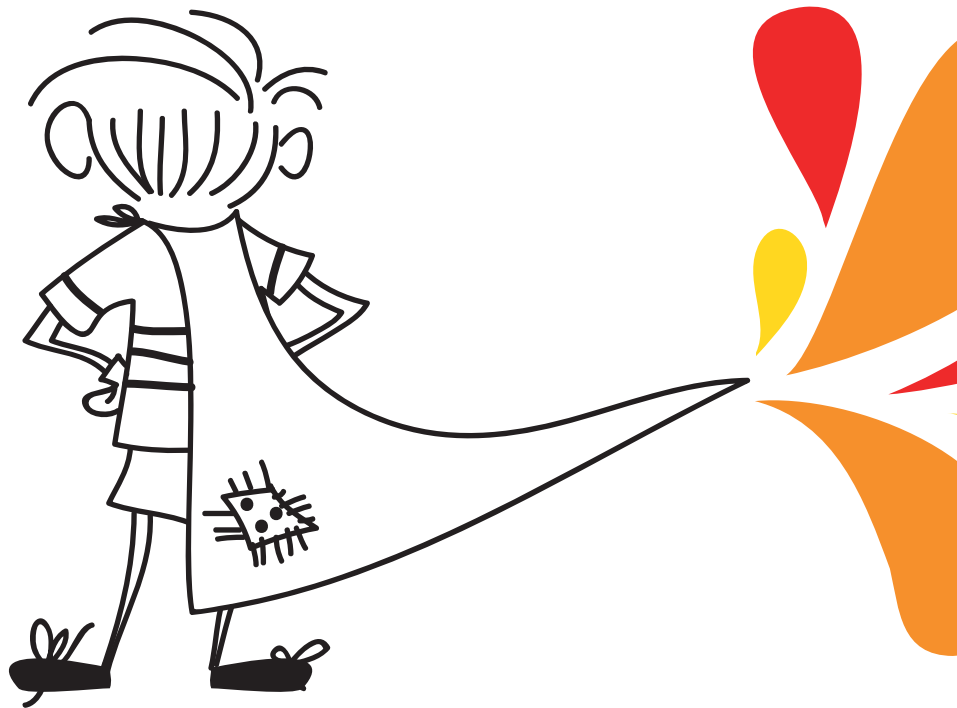
**“WE MUST ALL DO THEATRE,
TO FIND OUT WHO WE ARE AND
DISCOVER WHO WE COULD BECOME.”**

- AUGUSTO BOAL



HELLO READER,
and resident of a world
where many things
seem wrong,

Where **Class, Colour, Gender, Nation, Age, Religion**
and notions of **what is normal and what is not,**
create unfair privilege and wealth for some at
the expense of the suffering of many others.





HELLO,

Future Agent
of Change!

Think it is possible to
**look beyond the
criminal** and **understand
the nature** of a crime?


Wish that you could
stop a crisis that you
have witnessed?

DO YOU...

Feel bothered by the
incompetent laws
in society and wish you
could write your own?

Feel that **helplessness**
is only an excuse on the
part of a witness
to injustice?

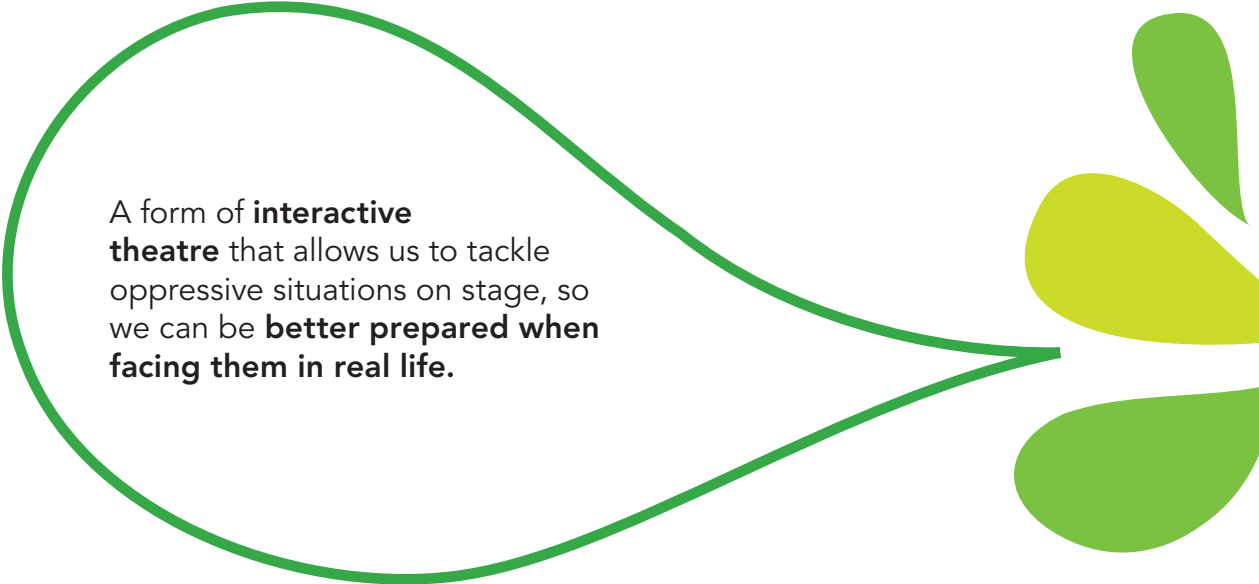
Feel plagued by **guilt**
for overlooking
injustice?



If you've answered yes to
one or more of these questions
then read on...

because now it's time to make
social change
fun, creative and irresistible!

IT'S ALL ABOUT
FORUM THEATRE



A form of **interactive theatre** that allows us to tackle oppressive situations on stage, so we can be **better prepared when facing them in real life.**

A stylized graphic of a branch with several leaves. The leaves are in various shades of green and yellow. A large green circle is positioned on the left side of the branch, containing the text 'ABOUT FORUM THEATRE'.

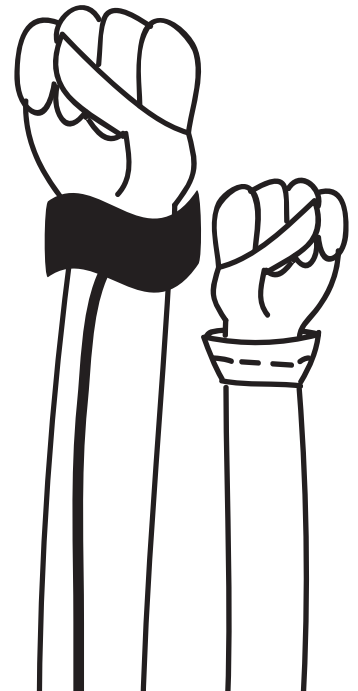
**ABOUT
FORUM THEATRE**

A large green leaf shape with two smaller water drop shapes, one dark green and one light green, positioned to the left of the text.

WHO IS AUGUSTO BOAL?

Augusto Boal, the father of Forum Theatre, was a revolutionary theatre artist and cultural activist from **Brazil**.

Having seen the struggle of the working class against the classist society of Brazil, he brought **theatre to the masses** as a means of voicing their opinion, when they needed it most.





In the **early 1960's** a new military regime came into power which condemned Boal's unconventional teaching methods and saw him as a threat.

Boal was kidnapped in 1971, arrested, tortured and then **sent to exile in Argentina** for five years.

During his exile, Boal further developed the **Theatre of The Oppressed**, which makes the audience an active part of the theatre act and lets them raise their concerns, express opinions and propose changes in the play.



HISTORY OF FORUM THEATRE

Simultaneous Dramaturgy

Simultaneous Dramaturgy is a simple audience-actor interaction where the **audience members propose solutions** to unresolved conflicts in the play. The solutions are played out by the actors one by one until all the solutions have been exhausted.

This technique opened up interactive dialogue on stage but what it lacked was a certain sense of empathy which is **'personal, unique and non-transferable'** that no actor can imitate. *(Boal, 1992)*

For this reason, Boal created **Forum Theatre**. It is a play format which is witnessed by **spectactors** who are members of the audience invited on stage to **replace** the protagonist or a bystander to **intervene** at the event of an injustice and offer solutions to resolve the conflict.

The actors present **a vision of the world** as it is and the spectator intervenes to change it. But, if no spectator intervenes and prevents injustice, it can be considered as an acceptance of the situation in real life.

actor + *spectator* = SPECTACTOR





FORUM THEATRE

A step-by-step
guide



THE ANTI MODEL

To understand what an anti-model means, think about what the term 'model' means. A model situation is one where there is deal distribution of power and no construct of oppression. *(Boal, 1992)*

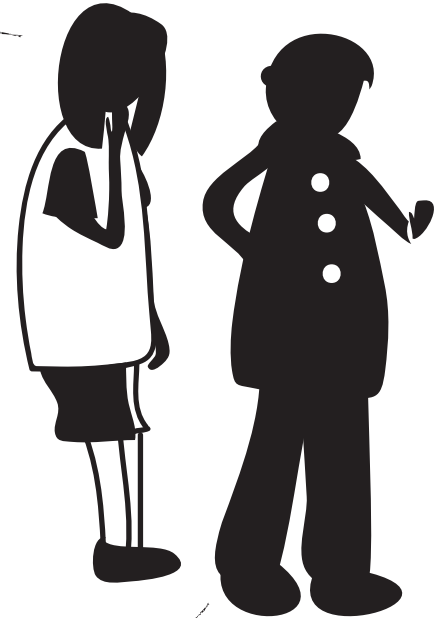
So surely, the anti-model means the opposite- **an act in Forum Theatre that portrays oppression.** A Forum play can include one or more anti-models that narrate **an undesirable but prevalent view of the world.**

Forum theatre is a form of theatre and just like any other, it requires a **clever script and supporting design** that makes it both pleasurable to watch in form and thought-provoking in content.

The anti-model revolves
around the story of:

BYSTANDERS

Who **witness oppression** and are at a position to prevent it from happening.

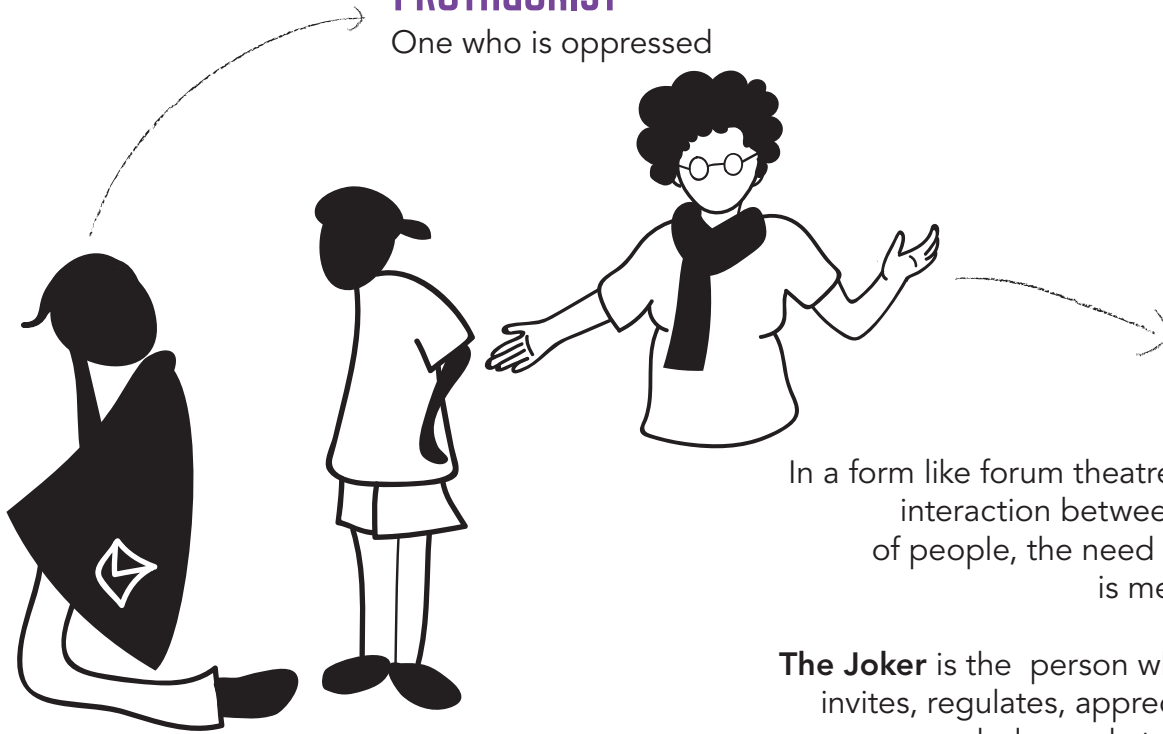


ANTAGONIST

The source of the oppression

PROTAGONIST

One who is oppressed



JOKER

In a form like forum theatre, with constant interaction between different sets of people, the need for a **facilitator** is met by the **Joker**.


The Joker is the person who encourages, invites, regulates, appreciates, explains, concludes and at times translates the ongoing activities.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS:

1



The Joker welcomes and warms up the audience. They **introduce** the context and the members of the play to the audience.



As the play begins, it **takes us through the life of the protagonist**. The cast build the scenes to **portray the act of oppression and its consequences**.

The spectators are given **a few minutes to absorb the gravity** of the act and **reflect** upon it.



The Joker asks them if this kind of a social set up that is acceptable. Questions like,

**“Did you see something real ?
Did you see something wrong ?”**

provoke response. Finally the joker urges spectators to **act out any possible interventions.**

3







The anti-model is repeated a second time and the spectators stop the play at a point where they see a potential for change.

The Joker welcomes the spectators to the stage.



The spectator can:

- Replace the **protagonist** and respond from the character's perspective
- Replace a **bystander**
- Come in as a **new character**

5



The antagonist reacts to the spectator depending on how powerful the offered intervention is and the audience will see the story unfold differently.

Once we witness the intervention, the Joker reflects on it and appreciates the spectator for their contribution.



6

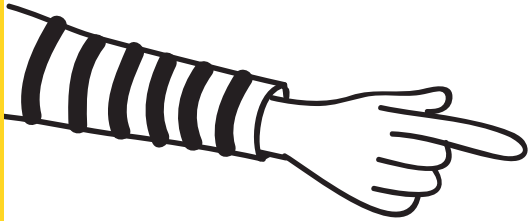


The Joker also **regulates the Forum and any dialogue or debate** that stems from these interventions so that a healthy, meaningful discussion takes place. This is **repeated till most possible solutions are exhausted.**

Finally, the Joker invites the spectators to **reflect on the interventions** in the Forum and how it unfolded.



The play ends with emphasis on how **a real life crisis always has room for change with action.**



What do you
think the word magic
means in this context?

In Forum Theatre, '**Magic**' refers to a solution offered by a spectator that **frees, deletes or makes the oppression of the anti-model vanish by unrealistic means.**

For example, if a spectator tries to replace the perpetrator in an abuse scene, it is unrealistic or magical to think of this approach as a possible solution!

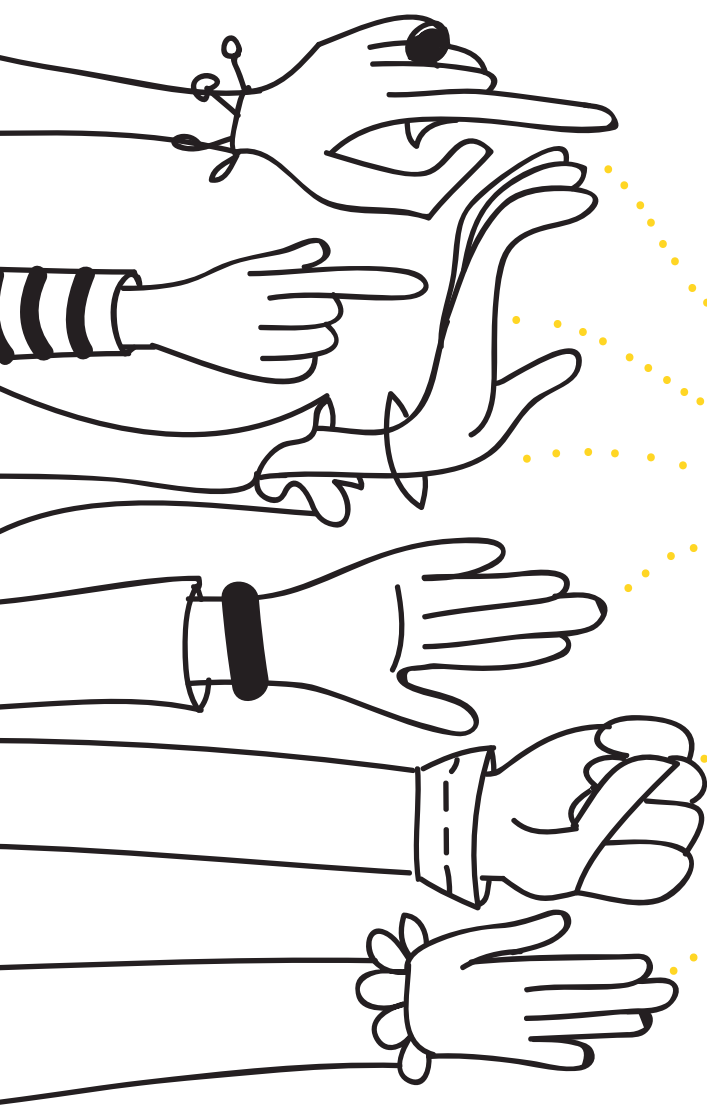
In real life, **is it possible to dissolve matters by wishing a problem away?**



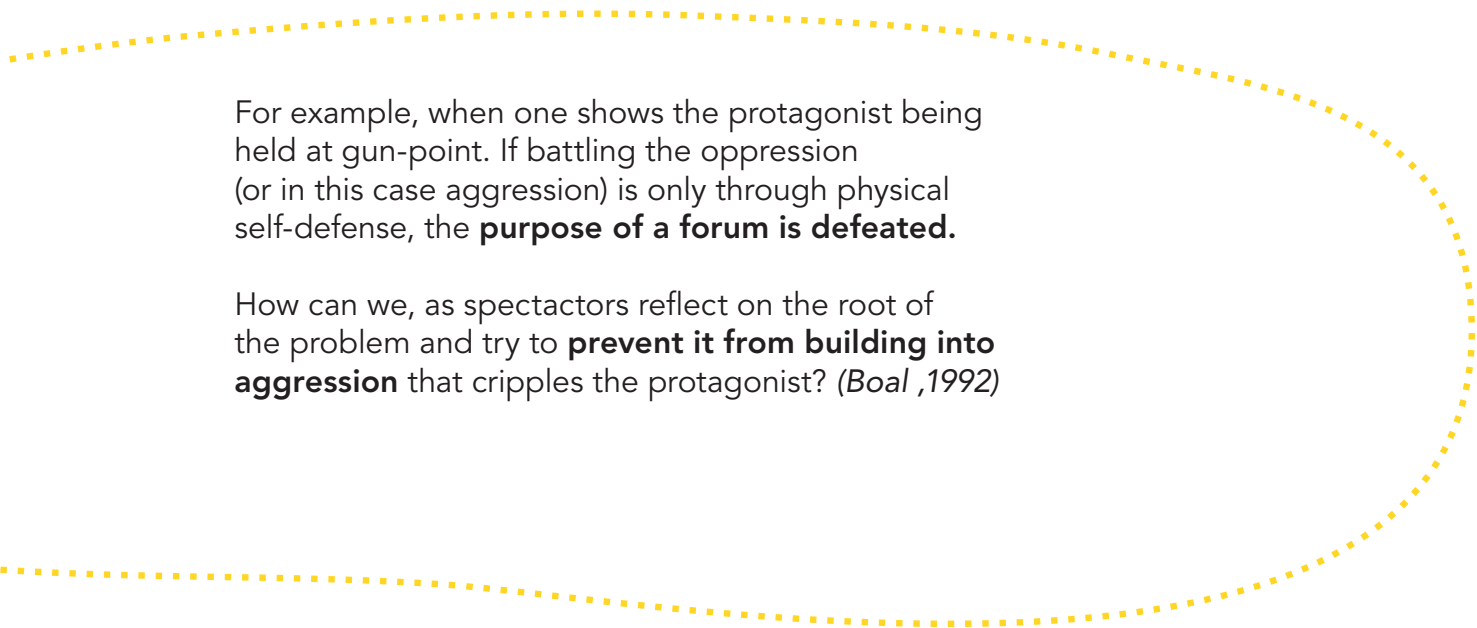
MAGIC

Interventions that use Magic seem too good to be true and look at **super-human or ideal circumstances.**

When Magic as a solution is offered, it is important for the Joker to **identify it and ask for the audience's opinion on it.**



On the other hand if the oppression in the anti-model is portrayed to the spectators at a **point so extreme that it cannot be prevented**, it leaves no room for intervention and ends the play with a sense of **helplessness and loss**.



For example, when one shows the protagonist being held at gun-point. If battling the oppression (or in this case aggression) is only through physical self-defense, the **purpose of a forum is defeated.**

How can we, as spectators reflect on the root of the problem and try to **prevent it from building into aggression** that cripples the protagonist? (*Boal, 1992*)



**FUNCTIONING
AS A
FORUM THEATRE
GROUP**



CREATING YOUR OWN FORUM ACT

All oppressions are
of equal importance-
to the people who are being
subjected to them.

- Augusto Boal



Is the oppression on a child being bullied in the lunch hall less significant than that of a refugee being tortured by militants?

Can you see how **the suffering of two individuals cannot be compared on the same parameters?**

Any subject that genuinely **wants liberation**, that requires the drawing of attention and discussion towards it, can be constructed into forum theatre.

It should ideally be a form of oppression that society can recognize, but is aware of neglecting, that is **relevant to the spectators and that they can relate to.**

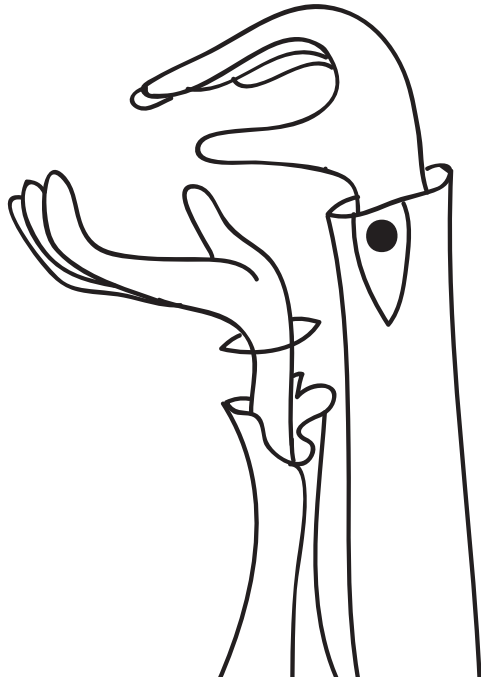
What is important is **how precisely the problem is put forth**,— as Boal puts it, if the presentation of the problem is done in a hazy manner, the solutions will be as hazy.

A clear, well-constructed, strongly portrayed problem will bring about clear, specific and strong reactions.

Using a Visual Language:

Since Forum invite spectators to act and not just hold verbal discussion, a **strong and clear visual and metaphorical language** adds layers to the anti-model.

The visual language **can range from something universal** such as waving ones arms in alarm **to something culturally specific** such as the colours of a flag as a metaphor for liberty.



**OTHER
TECHNIQUES**

A yellow circle containing the text "OTHER TECHNIQUES" in bold, black, uppercase letters. To the right of the circle is a horizontal line with several thick, black, curved stripes, resembling a flag or a decorative element.

RAINBOW OF DESIRE is a set of introspective techniques that use words and images to give us a view of what goes on inside a character's mind. It helps us see how **conflicts play out between internalized oppression and authentic desires.**

This nuanced view of situations helps in **deepening the nature of the interventions.** You will be able to see beyond the black and white, good and evil, right and wrong to be able to better understand the **spectrum of human behavior.**

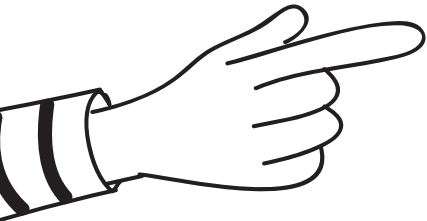
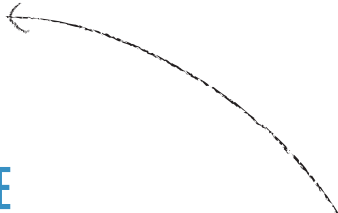


IMAGE THEATRE, as the name suggests, avoids using words altogether. It uses the **spontaneity offered by movement,** body language, objects, gestures, colours and visual signals that **connect to our day-to-day perception.** Through this we make the language on stage more universal.







BELONGING TO THE BIG CIRCLE


- SIT IN CIRCLES
 - RECORD
 - SWITCH ROLES
 - CONFIDE, TRUST, PROTECT
 - ENCOURAGE AND APPRECIATE
- 

Actors in forum create their own script through long sessions of **spontaneous theatre, improvisation and reflection.**

Encouraging habits of teamwork during rehearsal goes a long way in maintaining a healthy group dynamic.







Sitting in circles works miracles-
it **dissolves hierarchy**, everyone
can **focus**, the group **energy is contained**,
it makes taking turns easier, no issues stay unaddressed,
and with a little nudging and shifting, it's always possible to
accommodate one more person in the big circle.



It's an **identical space to start off from**.
When the group reflects and shares observations,
it creates a sense of gathering identical knowledge
and learning. It brings **oneness**.



And it makes louder noises.



AS A GROUP

Try one or
more of these
methods
to create a
healthy group
spirit

Keep **markers and paper** handy when in discussion

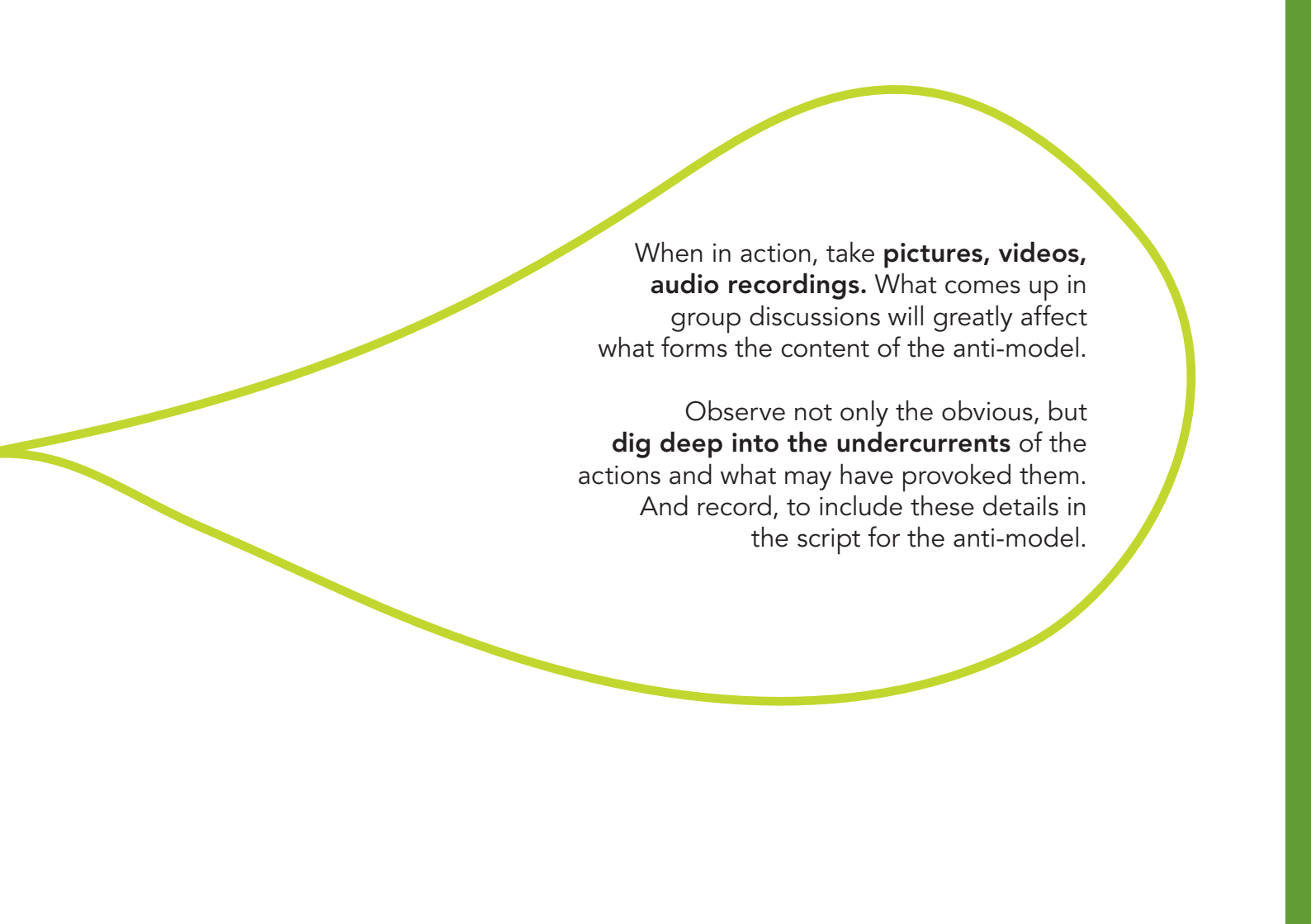
RECORD

Lay down big sheets of paper in the centre and allow **free expression** of needs, wants, fears, hopes and any concerns that people voice for later reference.

Record and remember what makes up the **interests of the group** and respond to them accordingly.

Write big. Note all ideas when brainstorming.





When in action, take **pictures, videos, audio recordings**. What comes up in group discussions will greatly affect what forms the content of the anti-model.

Observe not only the obvious, but **dig deep into the undercurrents** of the actions and what may have provoked them. And record, to include these details in the script for the anti-model.

To keep your content true to a world view, make it well-rounded with **more than one perspective.**

As a group, **switch roles and power play.** Put yourselves in the shoes of someone on **the other end of the spectrum.**

Play both, an antagonist and a protagonist.

A stylized illustration of a hand with a black outline, pointing its index finger upwards towards a blue circle. The word "SWITCH" is written in bold, black, uppercase letters inside the circle. The hand is positioned at the bottom right of the page, with a blue circular shape behind it. The overall design is clean and modern, with a blue and white color scheme.

SWITCH



ROLES

As an individual, try switching your gaze from **outward to inward**.

Observe yourself as a member of society and how **your relationships with society change** with change in context.

A greater sense of **empathy** will develop in us not only from listening to what we are told but from **listening to ourselves**.

Many emotions that are **raw, uncomfortable and private** emerge in activities while developing an anti-model.

There are matters of secrecy that may be clouded by negative emotions.

But as a group, learn to **keep matters confidential with responsibility and sensitivity.**

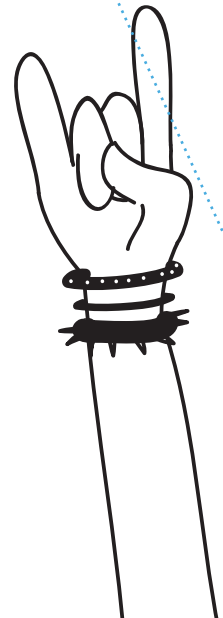
Respect anonymity or refusal to participate in certain discussions.



**CONFIDE
TRUST
PROTECT**

Chances are that as we **build trust**, refusal will morph into hesitation which will slowly bloom into **willingness to share**.

With trust alone we can **keep shame, guilt, hurt and anger from getting in the way of an effective anti-model**.



ENCOURAGE

Talking about oppression in their own life is a struggle which a participant will undergo for the sake of the group.

Encourage participation even if members are hesitant.

At the same time, learn to **detach yourself enough to critically analyze** what fits the script and makes for powerful content.



AND APPRECIATE

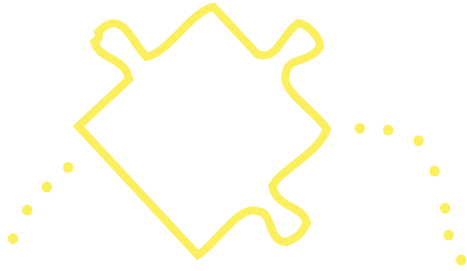


Nevertheless, **appreciate** each other's courage to **let go of the fear of being judged.**

The more people we thank at the end of a session, the richer the day has been in gaining **a variety of perspectives.**

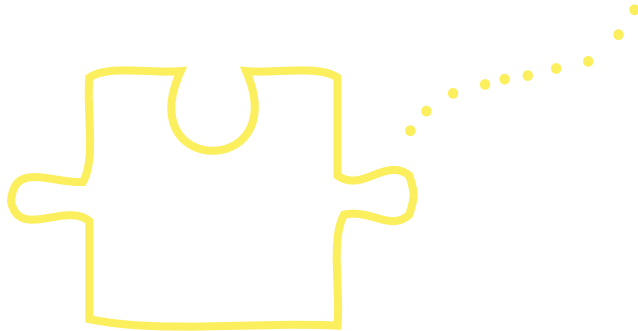
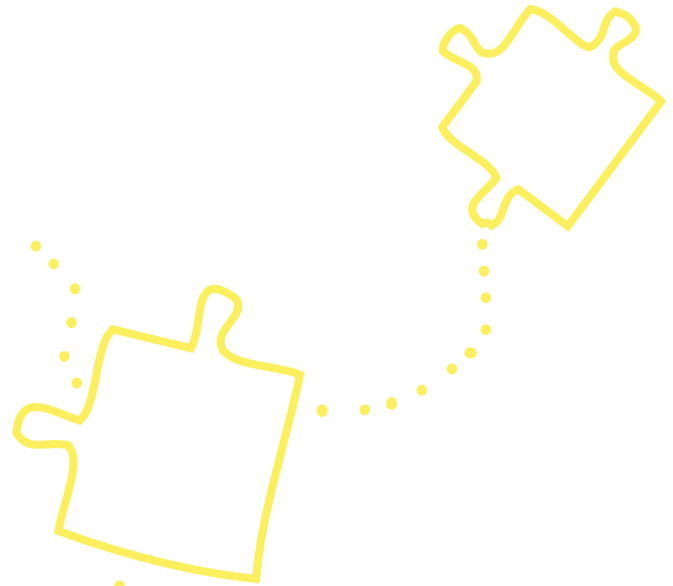


**MECHANISMS
IN SCENE WORK**



Mechanisms used to enhance
the outcome of improvisational
theatre sessions.

These methods bring depth and understanding
behind what eventually goes on stage.



Reflects the **gradient of feelings** that are present in any given group about a certain subject and **breaks the duality of a given situation.**

Ask the group to arrange themselves over **the continuum between any two extremes** depending on how strongly they feel about it, such as "Is racial discrimination prevalent in society?"

One end of the gradient comprises of complete ignorance and the other being extremely affected by the issue.

Participants can stand over the range of these views, **towards one extreme, partially towards one opinion or somewhere in the middle.**



SPECTRUM

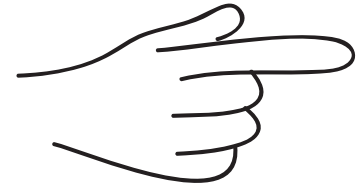
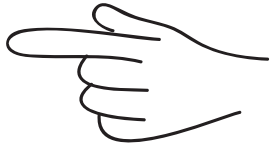
A **poetic monologue**. can be used during a pause to **make inner thoughts public** and deepen understanding of where each other are coming from.

SOLILOQUY/ ASIDE

MULTIPLE ENDINGS

Replay the scene with different endings. **Identify a pivotal moment** in the scene while it's enacted the first time through.

Once it ends, invite a rewind back to that pivotal point and invite the characters to **replay it in a different way**. If the participants can't think of any other endings then **pose "what if" questions**.



FAST FORWARD/ REWIND

Go back in time or ahead to the future.
Every conflict has a history and every resolution has its consequences.

Fast-forward for **pre-viewing outcomes or possible consequences**. Rewind for showing context and history.

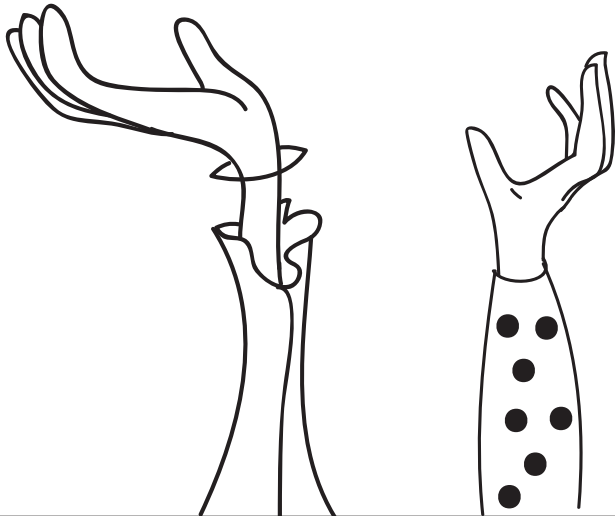
Rewind is especially useful when the conflict appears to start with a violent altercation, through a rewind you may **find the roots of the conflict**.

CHORUS

Like repetition only the group repeats the powerful line or action **in unison**.

REPETITION

To **emphasize** a powerful line or action ask the protagonist to repeat it. This can be done **to bring about catharsis and to raise awareness** about what's taking place in that moment.



DOUBLE

Someone who **mirrors the protagonist's body language** and makes statements in the first person (as if the protagonist) **based on the feelings that arise in their body**. Think of it as someone offering inner thoughts

ROLE REVERSAL

When two people **trade roles** within an enactment. Often useful when parties in conflict are **having trouble listening to or empathizing with the other**.

Also useful **to have the protagonist answer their own questions**.

Useful when the protagonist needs to **take a timeout** from the scene and reflect on what course of action to take. Often done as a conversation with a guide role.

CONSULTATION

PAUSE

To stop a scene and have everyone **hold the body posture** of the paused moment.

Helpful when you **identify a destructive behavioral pattern**. In a pause you may employ any other intervention.

To Assume makes an Ass of U and Me

As a joker **avoid being judgmental and making assumptions.**


Being open minded is important to build trust with the spectator.




Being **aware of one's physical stance** at all times is a must. For instance if the stage is on a higher dais, the **Joker should remain at the same level as the audience.**



**TIPS FOR
THE JOKER**



Polling the audience and asking them to vote through a **show of hands** makes for easier and clearer **communication**.



Create a **sound-o-meter** with the audience. They can **respond with the rise and fall of the intensity and volume of their voices** to **check their interest or opinion** on a matter.

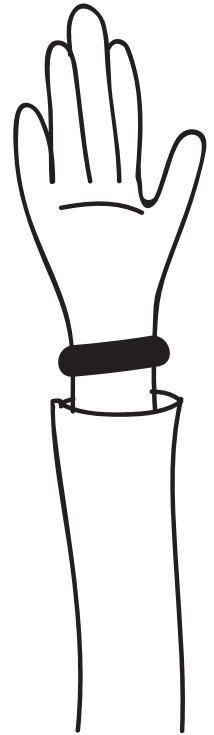


POTENTIAL OF FORUM THEATRE:

Social behaviour compels us to think from within **the roles that we play in our daily lives** such as a student, worker, bread-winner, mother, teacher etc.

Despite ourselves, we invoke and **reinforce these hierarchies, orders and connotations** and **distance ourselves** from communicating as equals.

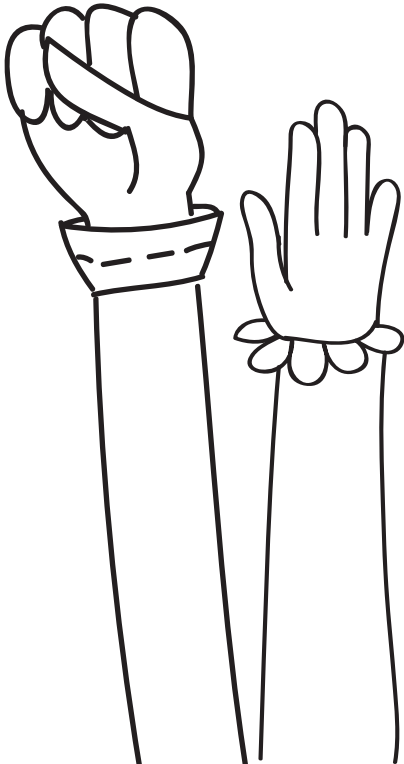
Forum theatre is a medium of **breaking these patterns** and behaviours, sometimes donning new ones altogether and **communicating, the way our bodies guide us**, from one human to another.



The potential of Forum Theatre has been recognized in

- POLICY MAKING
- MEDICAL HUMANITIES
- BREAKING CASTE AND CLASS BARRIERS
- SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
- PUBLIC HEALTH

These fragile relationships require not only an **understanding of the other** but also **thorough self awareness**, that is provided by the improvised voicing of opinions and feelings **under crucial circumstances** portrayed in forum anti-models.





THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED IN EDUCATION:

In his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Friere studies the hegemony in classrooms. Freire calls traditional pedagogy the “**banking model**” because it treats the student as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge, like a piggybank.

However, he argues for pedagogy to treat the learner as a **co-creator of knowledge**. In his ordeal to **democratize space**, Friere says that:

‘Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom will be the result of **praxis-informed action**’

And **informed action is what Forum Theatre prepares us for.**

You have the power to voice your struggle, whether in personal life, in the classroom, at a workplace or on the warring borders of countries.

The subject of the Forum can be ever-changing, but what remains constant is the **empathetic human dialogue** it generates - something the world can use more of.





Now that you are informed in techniques that help you fight oppression..all that remains is putting it into **action!**



Anti-Model:

An act of forum theatre that portrays the opposite of an ideal situation.

Antagonist:

Character who acts as a force of oppression.

Connotation:

An idea or feeling that a word invokes for a person in addition to its literal or primary meaning.

GLOSSARY

Inner-conflict:

The range of emotions that occur within a character of the anti-model, both positive and negative. The thoughts that lead to a dilemma between choosing to live under oppression or seeking liberation.

Joker:

The facilitator of the forum model of theatre who conducts the session with a neutral stand.

Intervention:

The act of a spectator interrupting the forum play when it runs a second time and replacing a character to address the oppression through theatre.

A diagram consisting of four overlapping circles with dotted blue borders. Each circle contains a term and its definition. The circles are arranged in a roughly diamond shape, with 'Change' at the top, 'Soliloquy' on the right, 'Spectator' at the bottom, and 'Magic' on the left. Small blue dots are scattered around the circles, some forming short lines.

Magic:

Any forum intervention that liberates the protagonist but in an unrealistic manner such as replacing the antagonist.

Change:

To make the nature, content or the future course of something different from what it would be if left alone.

Soliloquy:

A poetic monologue of any member that expresses their inner thoughts.

Spectator :

The audience of forum theatre, not simply spectators but participating members who can intervene in the performance and alter its direction.



Liberation:

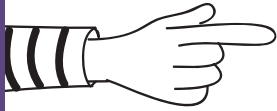
The seeking of equal status or just treatment for or on behalf of any group believed to be discriminated against

Social Change:

Refers to an alternation in the social order of society.

Oppression:

The exercise of authority or power in an unjust manner.



RESOURCES:

Boal, A. (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto Press.

Boal, A.(1992) *Games for Actors and Non-actors*. London: Routledge.

Boal, A. (1995) *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*. London: Routledge.

Diamond, D. (2007) *Theatre for Living: The Art and Science of Community-based Dialogue*. Victoria, BC : Trafford.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.

Landy, R.L. & Montgomery D. T. (2012) *Theatre for Change: Education, Social Action and Therapy*. London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Leveton, E. (2010). *Healing Collective Trauma Using Sociodrama and Drama Therapy*. New York: Springer

Mindell, A. (1995) *Sitting in the Fire, Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity*. Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press.

Nieto, L., Boyer, M. F., Goodwin, L., Johnson, G.R, Smith, L. C. (2010) *Beyond Inclusion, Beyond Empowerment: A Developmental Strategy to Liberate Everyone*. Olympia, WA: Cuetzpalin Publishing

Prendergast, M., & Saxton, J. [ed.](2009) *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice*. Bristol, UK: Intellect

Prentki, T., & Preston, S. [ed.](2009) *The Applied Theatre Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Rohd, M. (1998). *Theatre for community, conflict, and dialogue: The hope is vital training manual*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Schutzman, M. & Cohen-Cruz, J. [ed.] (1994) *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism*. London & New York: Routledge.

Taylor, P. (2003) *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

ABOUT SHADOW LIBERATION

Shadow Liberation uses creatively crafted visual stories to captivate the imagination and invite audiences to interrupt the injustice of gender violence. In the tradition of Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, audience members are invited on stage to offer improvisational interventions into scenes depicting oppression. This artistic dialogue offers no quick fix solutions but rather places faith in the emerging ethics of the community to creatively address the problem. We invite you to face the shadows through remarkable works of participatory shadow theatre. Are you ready to step into the shadows?

Guidance: Evan Hastings

Content: Malvika Tewari
Neha Bhat

Design: Malvika Tewari
Kanika Kaul
Samhita Somayaji



Forum Theatre Guide by Shadow Liberation is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.