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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

SHOW ME WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE:

Brechtian Dramaturgy and the Modern Protest

Theater

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
For the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Victoria Gardiner

June 2018

This Thesis of Victoria Gardiner is
approved:

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2018

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Abstract

Show Me What Democracy Looks Like: Brechtian Dramaturgy and the Modern Protest Theater

by Victoria Gardiner

This thesis explores the disjunction between the impact of UC Santa Cruz's 2017 production of Bertolt Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* on the production's cast and on its audience. Specifically, this thesis examines the impact of the decision to conclude the production not with the final lines of Brecht's text, but to add a theatrically staged protest. This protest stepped outside the play's use of parable and directly engaged with the discourses of the 2016 presidential election.

While the cast of *Arturo Ui* reported an experience which was both artistically fulfilling and theatrically empowering, our audiences responded with resistance to elements of the production's message. While we did produce a work which celebrated the ability of the students to engage in political resistance, by adding the staged protest we positioned ourselves as ideologues from the perspective of our audience. As we positioned ourselves as a source of ideological authority right after completing a text about resisting sources of ideological authority we were, of course, resisted.

In this thesis, I analyze the differing perspectives of the actors and the audience through the lens of Augusto Boal's "Theater of the Oppressed." Specifically, I use Boal's theories of a dialectic aesthetic space to talk about the practice of instructive theater as protest theater. Additionally, I discuss the viability of ultimately didactic theater models in what must necessarily be a dialectic space.

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Introduction

In his landmark book *The Empty Space* (1968), Peter Brook writes on Brecht and the Epic Theater: “Historically it is clear how a theater loathing the self-indulgent individualism of bourgeois art should have turned to action instead” (83). This snippet summarizes Brook’s evaluation of the Berliner Ensemble’s take on Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, in which the Ensemble notoriously--and in hindsight predictably--resisted the sentimental notions of the Shakespearean text in favor of a socially active production (81-83). Brook’s remark suggests that Brechtian theater is the antithesis of being socially idle. But in a social climate where the left is accused of receding into ivory towers while the income gap between the liberal executive and the conservative worker grows wider, does the Epic Theater not become self-indulgent?

In the fall of 2017, UCSC produced Brecht’s *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, a production on which I served as a dramaturg. With the liberal leanings of the student population and the relevance of the text’s anti-fascist call-to-arms to the wider scope of the openly hateful political discourse during the 2016 election, it seemed like it would be a fairly straightforward production from process to execution. However, the talkbacks for this production showed the audience’s response was not what we expected. One of the goals was to inspire feelings of hope or solidarity, yet when asked how the production made them feel, people reported feeling dejected, isolated, even attacked; certainly very far from anything resembling being “motivated to action.” However, the students involved in the production enjoyed an immensely

motivating political and artistic space. This thesis examines the contemporary practice of Brechtian dramaturgy and the impact on both actors and spectators through the lens of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* and its 2017 production at the left-leaning University of California, Santa Cruz. The hope for this production was that the relevance between Brecht's writing and the 2016 presidential election would stand for itself. In some fundamental aspect, it seems the Brechtian dramaturgy as we applied it was not sufficient for the practice of the Brechtian Theater we aimed to produce. My argument is that an explanation for the miscalculation in our application of Brecht's dramaturgy can be found in the dialectical tools of Augusto Boal and the "Theater of the Oppressed."

To begin this discussion of our production of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, I will provide background to the original text. This examination will include a brief look at the history of Bertolt Brecht. In order to talk about *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* in concept as well as content, I first lay out a definition of Brecht's "Epic Theater." For our purposes, this definition includes a brief history of Brecht and the events of his life which lead up to the creation of the Epic Theater. I attempt to capture the essence of Brecht's method so that the crucible from which this play was formed can be best understood. From there, I go on to contextualize the original text as a satirical depiction of Hitler's rise to power roughly from the Reichstag Fire of 1933 to the annexation of Austria in 1938. The scope of discussing the play itself is then brought down to the specific production, highlighting the vision of the director as well as relevant design elements.

From that point, I analyze the adverse reactions from the *Arturo Ui* talkbacks by examining the production through the lens of Augusto Boal's "Theater of the Oppressed." Like Brecht's, Boal's method envisions the theater as both a teaching space and a vehicle for social change. However, Boal takes his work a step further and in a different direction than Brecht by calling for the abolition of the hierarchy between the actor and the spectator. Boal's model is not a guide to commercial theater, but rather a tool of activism that utilizes theatrical practices. Ultimately, I theorize that the adverse reactions of our audience members can be attributed to the sensation of being "preached at." There is a tendency for an audience to become defensive and closed off when engaging with didactic models; I explore how it can be broken down using Boal's methods. As Boal seeks to produce spaces in which people can learn to combat systems of oppression, his methods specifically break down the hierarchy between the actor and the audience.

From this analysis, I isolate the elements of our production which led to the audience focusing the locus of their resistance onto the production itself, as opposed to feeling a sense of solidarity with the cast. In addition, I explore how modern protest theater can be shifted back into the realm of galvanizing audiences as opposed to being drowned out in accusations of preaching, blindly proselytizing, or merely contributing to a self-indulgent echo chamber.

Brecht and the Epic Theater

Eugen Bertolt Friedrich Brecht was born in 1898 in Augsburg, Bavaria. Despite Brecht's various claims of working class origins, Brecht's father worked in a management position in a local paper mill and was able to provide a comfortable middle class lifestyle for his family. This ensured Brecht's access to education. He was sixteen at the time of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the event which ultimately catalyzed the First World War. Before the war began, Brecht had been a medical student; thus, he was positioned in a military hospital. In his biography of Brecht, Martin Esslin writes that this

was a traumatic experience [that] left lasting traces in Brecht's character and work.... The disgusted rejection of anything remotely smacking of high-minded sentiment, whether religious or patriotic, can be seen as the reaction of a basically tender mind shaken to its core by the horror of existing in a world where such suffering was allowed to happen (7).

Through forced participation in and open contention with these institutions, Brecht developed a fundamental understanding he would later use in his work to expose and de-glamorize them. Brecht and his wife, Helene Weigel, left Germany in 1933 out of fear of persecution by the newly established Nazi regime. The pair traveled through Europe for just over a decade before arriving in the United States in 1941. While living in the States, Brecht produced some of his most influential works, including *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and *The Resistible*

Rise of Arturo Ui. Each of these plays was politically motivated, either touting the virtues of Communism or proclaiming the evils of Fascism.

Brecht's relationship with drama was framed by his understanding of theater as a tool for political and social discourse, and he rejected traditional forms of theater for the sake of advancing that discourse. In his essay *Interview with an Exile*, Brecht writes:

I don't think the traditional form theater means anything any longer. Its significance is purely historic; it can illuminate the way in which earlier ages regarded human relationships, and particularly relationships between men and women. Works by such people as Ibsen and Strindberg remain important historical documents, but they no longer move anybody. A modern spectator can't learn anything from them (Willet 66).

Further, Brecht found that naturalist drama was not an adequate form to carry the message of his work, which is ultimately concerned with the effects of systemic oppression, writing:

In modern society the motions of the individual psyche are utterly uninteresting; it was only in feudal times that a king's or a leader's passions meant anything. Today they do not. Not even Hitler's personal passions; that's not what has brought Germany to her current condition... (66).

He argued that naturalist drama as a picture of real life was a kind of cognitive opiate stymying critical engagement. Brecht most concisely articulates this belief through

his observation of theater audiences: “Looking out one discovers more or less motionless bodies in a curious state ... they have their eyes open but they don’t look, they stare... they stare at the stage as if *spellbound*.”¹ In Brecht’s understanding of theater, the dialectic of a Naturalist drama is this: the audience sees before them a picture of their own lives, thus they are drawn into the story and seek to identify with the hero. The principles “Epic Theater” are defined against this standard with Brecht himself articulating that “the essential point of the Epic Theater is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator’s reason. Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things” (Willett 23). Brecht’s displeasure with the effect of Naturalism is further evident once again in his observation of audience impact: “How long are our souls going to have to leave our ‘gross’ bodies under cover of darkness to penetrate into those dream figures... in order to share their transports which would otherwise be denied to us?”² Esslin elaborates: “Such an audience, Brecht argues, may indeed leave the theater purged by its vicarious emotions, but will have remained uninstructed and unimproved” (124). The conventions of Brecht’s plays are the results of his lifelong attempt to produce socially productive theater. Brecht surmised the goal of his Epic Theater:

Today when the human character must be understood as the totality of all social conditions: the epic form is the only one that can comprehend all the processes

¹ Originally from “Kleines Organon fuer das Theater” (1948), *Versuche 12, para. 26 p. 119* QTD in Esslin 124

² *Ibid.*, para. 34, p. 122. QTD in Esslin 124

which could serve the drama as materials for a fully representative picture of the world.³

In other words, a total picture of the world is not only comprised of the psychological experience of a character, but also a rendition of the systems of oppression with which the character must contend in every moment of their lives. The alienating techniques of the Epic Theater are designed to abjure the spellbinding effect that obfuscates these systems and instead render them visible by using exposed stagecraft as an illustrative device.

³ Originally from "Anmerkungen zur Dreigroschenoper" (1931), *Schriften zum Theater*, pp. 35 QTD in Esslin 123

The Text

The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui was written in 1941 and first performed in 1958. It was written in the middle of Brecht's most productive period as an artist and not performed until after his death. The work serves as what we call a "parable play;" one that uses allegory and satire to not only reflect a real world situation, but also to hopefully teach audiences something about it as well⁴. The use of parable rather than direct commentary is also a form which contributes directly to the function of the work. Jennifer Wise writes:

[Brecht] chose to depict the famous fascists of his day as commons street-corner thugs specifically to de-idealise them. Rather than theatricalizing Nazis...[The play] gives us a cautionary tale about the conditions under which fascist brute force can triumph anywhere, even in democracies with proper legal institutions. The resistible progress of fear-mongering gangsterism is the true story of *Arturo Ui* and this story can only be told... if the stage is kept clear of swastikas and Hitler moustaches (ix).

Esslin does not describe this play favorably but captures its essence: "[*Arturo Ui*] attempts to transfer the story of Hitler, from his beginnings to the occupation of Austria, into the world of gangsters of Chicago" (306). The allegorical devices of this

⁴ It is important to point out that the function of a parable play sets *Arturo Ui* apart from some of Brecht's other works. This play's goal is explicitly to educate, but more in the vein of a PSA. The scenes in the play present a series of historical facts interpreted through a new aesthetic, more like the laying out of an argument than an invitation to debate concepts of society and morality as seen in plays like *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

play present the ruthless mobster Arturo Ui as a direct satire of Adolf Hitler, and Brecht uses his satirical portrayal of Ui's ruthless quest to dominate the vegetable trade as a metaphor for Hitler's rise to power in Germany. For all that Ui's various speeches in the play are funny, they also carry an undercurrent which is deeply terrifying. This undercurrent is the seed of radical nationalism and is a tone folded into Ui's rhetoric.

As part of the play's satirical function, each of the characters (or group of characters) in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* serves as a stand-in for the historical individuals involved in the series of events that culminated in the Nazi Party's control of Germany. The titular character of the play, Arturo Ui (played at UC Santa Cruz by Ryan Shwalm) takes on the central role of Adolf Hitler. Ui's rise to power through violence and strong-arming is meant to mirror the same set of circumstances which brought Hitler to Chancellorship, and then legally allowed him to transition into the role of Dictator. While we do not see Ui finish this transformation, the intention of the analogy is clear from the parable-like warning spoken by the Announcer at the end of the play. Further, the character of Giri (Ash Brown) is cast in the mold of real life Nazi Hermann Goering, the ruthless commander of the Luftwaffe and the SS. The character Givola (Zade Dardari) is modeled after Joseph Goebbels, chief of propaganda for the Nazi party. In addition, the cavalcade of nameless gangsters throughout the play represent the rank and file of the militaristic arm of the Nazi Party.

This play is highly stylized. The verse is bombastic, even described as “mock heroic,” and the characters are larger than life (206). The moment-to-moment events of the play concern mobsters and cutthroats going to war with one another over vegetables. It is patently ridiculous. However, the use of comedy is designed to catch audience members off guard and prompt them to think about their own political realities.

The Announcer says within the first few lines of the play, “Now settle down folks- please be polite” (Prologue). His rhythmic speech and showmanship is designed to misdirect the audience away from the insidious danger of his words. The call to “be polite” is prevalent in our modern discourses; the need to hear both sides, the need to adhere to decorum. But Brecht was a Bavarian who lived through the rise and fall of the Nazi Regime in his own country; he had a front row seat to Fascism in a way most of us can only imagine. The perils of civility when dealing with ideological extremism are reflected in the actions of Ignatius Dullfeet, a newspaper man who tries to combat Ui with honesty, is intimidated into remaining silent, and then killed for choosing silence over using his voice to speak in support of Ui (Sc. 12-13). This is, of course, not what Dullfeet ever agreed to, but it is impossible to reach a harmonious discourse with Ui; as the discourse progresses his goals change. Once we are desensitized to one unreasonable, unjust demand, another follows close on its heels until we look around and realize that this is our new normal. As Brecht says near the play’s conclusion, “and no ‘Ugh, Phooey!’ and no ‘But that’s not nice!’ will stop Arturo Ui” (Sc. 15)!

At UC Santa Cruz

Arturo Ui is already a play that deals with the transposition of images. Originally, Brecht repainted the Nazi takeover of Germany in the image of the American gangster in the hopes of enlightening Americans of the 1940's to the fact that fascism does not walk up and announce itself as such. By recasting the Nazis within what Brecht thought would be a more familiar or palatable aesthetic for Americans, he hoped to deliver this message despite the pervading idea that fascism was a problem for Europe, and only Europe.

According to our Director Erik Pearson, our goal for the UCSC production was in a similar spirit, but dealing with different circumstances. Pearson conceived the production during the numerous protests surrounding the 2016 Presidential election. He saw the production not only as a declaration of resistance by UCSC's community, but also a celebration of our ability to participate in politically motivated, anti-establishment art. He expressed that he and many artists have spent their lives taking the ability to do so for granted, but should take action in response to a government and political base so willing to deride artists for politically motivated works. The protests at The Public Theater's 2016 production of *Julius Caesar*⁵ were

⁵ (Paulson, Michael) In the summer of 2017 The Public Theater staged a controversial production of *Julius Caesar* where the role of Caesar was modeled after President Donald Trump. On June 16, 2017 a protester jumped on stage and decried the production as condoning violence against the right. Reported on by the New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/17/theater/julius-caesar-central-park-trump-protesters.html>

mentioned in early development meetings and at our first rehearsal. That particular production elected to make their Julius Caesar a direct effigy of Trump, leading to one of the performances being interrupted by Right Wing protesters who sought to speak out against the production, claiming it incited violence against the President and conservatives alike.

Though we weren't out to do "Ui/Trump" (as it came to be called), the President and his administration were in our minds during the rehearsal process. While we did cast a blonde white man as Ui and hair obsession became one of his main character quirks, the textual similarities between Ui and the President became apparent as early as the first read through (see Fig. 1). One of the most frequent questions we got during the post show discussions was if we had changed any of the dialogue to make the play more Trump-esque. We had not. Nor was dialogue written in the 1940's somehow predictive of the 2010's American landscape. As the natural Trump-ness of the characters began to come out through rehearsal, elements of the production shifted to embrace those similarities. The production began with the intention to be an act of resistance and maintained that as its overall goal. Specifically, this act of resistance was meant to be carried out by the students participating in the production, with the intended impact on the audience being an eliciting of solidarity and perhaps even inspiring them to similar acts of resistance. The show opened with a blatant acknowledgment of its relationship with modern politics when The Announcer character appears on stage in a "Nasty Woman" t-shirt, and closed when the same character reappears in the moments after Ui's ascension to

caution the audience about how “the world was almost ruled by such a crook” (Epilogue, see Fig. 2). In the text, the final scene of the play begins with Ui taking the stage and delivering a rousing speech concerning his ambitions for the Cicero vegetable trade (See Fig. 3). Meanwhile, the vegetable dealers themselves are rendered a captive audience at gunpoint. Ui declares that he will not be stopped to the sound of thunderous applause in an image sickeningly similar to the recordings of Hitler’s speeches. At that moment, The Announcer returns to stage and cuts off the action, ripping the audience out of the moment in the play by speaking to them directly. They both admonish and caution the audience:

Now you have learned to see and not just look. And act instead of just talking all day long. The world was almost ruled by such a crook! Though people overcame him you’d be wrong to pat your backs and think yourselves so clever—the ooze that spawned him is as rich as ever! (Epilogue)

Thus with the bookending of the play’s framing device does Brecht’s work end. The message does not need to be overstated; Brecht essentially calls out the audience while simultaneously articulating that “the ooze” of fascism is still present in the world and will not be set aside without direct and decisive action. This declaration, thrown directly at the audience, is simultaneously as challenging as it is uplifting: the rise of fascism can be resisted but what are you *in particular* going to do about it?

However, our production chose to leave the audience with a different final image. As The Announcer finished her speech, the cast members broke their formation from the final tableau and assembled on stage in a grid holding contemporary protest signs they had either made before or had been making during the performance (see Fig. 4). As they arranged themselves, audio clips from the recent political cycle played over their heads, all of them examples of people standing up for beliefs not supported by the Trump administration. These clips included sound bites from the first Women's March, reports on immigration lawyers working pro bono hours in the wake of the travel ban, and a recording of the cast chanting the word "Resist". Once the cast was assembled, The Announcer began to lead a call and response chant of "Show me what Democracy looks like"/"This is what democracy looks like" as the actors began to march out up the aisles and out of the theater. The cast did not return for bows leaving a cue from stage management for the house lights to signal the end of the production.

The sense of disorientation left among an audience confronted with such a sharp turn on stage is very Brechtian. The goal of this moment was to challenge people, as Brecht intended, to ask them what they were going to do. With *Arturo Ui* having been written as a distinct call to action this image seemed like a natural evolution of Brecht's initial parable. The production not only showcased the insidious nature of fascism through Brecht's writing, but also highlighted and celebrated the necessity of conducting acts of protest in the face of the fascist leaning movements of the modern era. The hope was that witnessing a production recounting a thinly veiled

parable of the rise of Adolf Hitler correlated directly with the Trump Administration would inspire people to action. Perhaps even galvanize the hesitant with a showcase spirit and passion from the cast. This did not go over as intended, as became evident during the talkbacks.

During the talkbacks on both Saturday night performances, the audience did respond with some level of solidarity, but they also expressed serious discontent with the production's conclusion. One audience member went so far as to describe the moment as "disingenuous" because the act of contemporary protest, while very much motivated by the actors' own desires, was ultimately staged and thus, in their view, lacking as much credibility as any form of propaganda. Many expressed feeling "preached at" and experienced a natural response of disinclination. One audience member even referred to the display as "self indulgent liberalism." One audience member despondently asked "Is this what democracy looks like? One side shouting at the other." Further, audience members have articulated that the show's conclusion was confusing. Months after the production's close I still receive questions from attendees who wondered if they were supposed to get out of their seats and join the cast.

While it is possible that our differences between intention and execution could be attributed to time, with this image of the production having been conceived almost four months, and that much less desensitization to the election of Trump, earlier, I feel that to lay sole responsibility for the disconnect there is a cop out. I believe this

method did produce *something*; even that it produced what we intended, but not in the format we expected.

Analysis

So what happened? Our production was politically informed, we attempted to distance our audience from the emotional upwelling of the play at just the right moments in order to prompt critical engagement. According to the recipe for Brechtian Theater, we did everything right, but if anything we pushed audiences *away* from the idea of taking action.

What fascinates me about this production in particular are the idiosyncrasies between the experience of the cast and the experience of the audience. For the cast, we produced an uplifting, empowering work which allowed them to use an artistic space to make their voices heard. For the audience, we produced an entertaining and educational but ultimately didactic instruction manual for resisting fascism. The key moment I wish to explore in this analysis is the staged protest and how, through both process and execution, that moment became the catalyst for such varied reactions between our actors and our spectators. To dissect the impact of this moment on the audience's reception of the overall production, I turn my attention first to the theories of Augusto Boal.

Via Boal and the Theater of the Oppressed

There is no way of divining how audience reactions would have been different if we had simply cut the lights on “The ooze that spawned him is as rich as ever” and allowed the cast to come out and take a bow (Epilogue). However, what I can say is that this moment was both a bold choice and a significant departure from Brecht’s original text. It is not through the application of Brecht’s dramaturgy, but through the work of Augusto Boal and the *Theater of the Oppressed* (1974), which has led me to a plausible answer.

The dramaturgical method known as “Theater of the Oppressed” was first developed by Augusto Boal in the 1970’s. The method was conceived as a means of promoting social change in Boal’s own communities, primarily in Brazil. The Theater of the Oppressed explores the idea of making audiences aware of the systems of oppression around them then helping them develop tools to dismantle those systems. However, unlike Brecht’s Epic Theater, which seeks to make the audience aware of oppressive systems by alienating it from the drama, Theater of the Oppressed makes the spectator part of the on stage action. By making the spectator the protagonist of the drama, the Theater of the Oppressed becomes a therapeutic space in which the spectator can be granted agency over a simulation of their oppressive environment. In order to develop these methods, Boal has articulated and given specific definition to a number of elements of his theater. These methods are itemized on Boal’s book *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995). While these techniques were not explicitly discussed during our production of *Arturo Ui*, the final image of the show, a contemporary

protest, is a departure from Brecht's traditional methods. Thus, it needs to be analyzed through the lens of a method related to but outside of the Epic Theater. I want to look at the final images of our stage production as having been born out of a necessity to express a level of visceral connection to the material not facilitated by Brecht's techniques. Rather, in creating this moment Pearson was drawing on the spirit of Brecht's work, but not the methods, resulting in a moment of synthesis that rests at the heart of this examination. I will first define some of the key elements of Boal's work, then provide a summary of this specific moment in our production. I will then examine the audience reactions to this moment versus the director's intentions and explore how Boal's techniques relate to the series of choices which lead to the creation of this image.

The first thing Boal defines is the scope of the spectator within this model of theater. Or rather, Boal introduces the term "spect-actor" to make his point. The spect-actor is a role which appears in Forum Theater, a fundamental tool within the Theater of the Oppressed. Unlike the spectator, who simply watches a performance through a distancing concept, the spect-actor is both witness and participant of a dramatic event. This can come in several forms, including the spectator physically appearing on stage and entering the causes and effects of the drama, or the spectators instructing the actions of the actors. Second, Boal defines when discussing Theater of the Oppressed something called the aesthetic space. According to Boal, an aesthetic space can be designated in any time, space, or circumstance. He writes: "We simply decide that 'here' is the stage... and the rest of the space being used is 'the

auditorium'... the interpretation of these two spaces is the aesthetic space" (Boal 18). Thus the space in which an audience is able, or implied to be able, to observe a theatrical act is an aesthetic space, thus rehearsal in addition to performance is an aesthetic space. It may seem tedious for Boal to describe a concept almost always taken as a given, but this need for specificity is born from two things. One, Boal is developing his theater as a tool of the oppressed, thus the liberation of the stage from the historically classist notion of 'the theater' is essential. Two, Boal further articulates that the aesthetic space is endowed with three particular qualities, which he calls plasticity, doubling, and telemicroscopicity. Boal describes the aesthetic space as "being endowed with the same plasticity as dreams" (20). In other words, a performance space need not adhere to the conventions of any natural circumstance. History may repeat itself ad infinitum, history may be altered, physics defied, or probability balked at. By being placed in this realm which lacks constraints the spect-actor is able to take the elements of a dream and render them physical. The doubling to which Boal describes refers to the binary created between actor and character. The distance between the actor's self and the character can be small or vast, but either way it is still contained within a single mind and body multiple personages occupying the same space and capable of intimate observation of one another. Through this, a space for self reflection is created. Finally the aesthetic space is described as telemicroscopic. The aesthetic space is able to focus on, heighten, and slow down the cascading effects of a single event or individual, allowing the concept to be processed in a way the constraints of space, time, and perception do not normally allow. As

Boal puts it: “that telemicroscopic property, which magnifies everything and makes everything present allowing us to see things which, without it, in a smaller or more distant form, would escape our gaze” (28). It is through these qualities that the work of the Theater of the Oppressed can be done.

Next Boal breaks down the process by which the aesthetic space is utilized as a therapeutic environment through three concepts: osmosis, metaxis, and analogical induction. Osmosis is not a technique of Theater of the Oppressed per se, but rather a circumstance present in the life of the spectator which Boal’s method must both acknowledge and deconstruct in order to function. Osmosis is the term Boal uses to describe the natural inclination to conform to the dominant paradigm present in a society. That is, the Oppressed will replicate the value systems of the dominant class as a survival tactic. It is for this reason that Boal highlights that the theater must be specifically and intentionally reciprocal in order to teach subversion. In the traditional paradigm between the passive spectator and active stage, the stage takes on the role of the dominant class in terms of dictating what is and is not an acceptable practice. The audience members may resist the messages of the play within their own minds, but they are unable to change the circumstances on stage, because those circumstances have been pre-determined and rehearsed. Thus, the spectator remains outside of the agency granted by the plasticity of the stage while the stage itself becomes a kind of secondary oppressor; this is exactly the circumstance Boal seeks to avoid. Metaxis is the kinesthetic relationship between the spect-actors actions on stage and their practices in their real life. Boal sums up the concept:

if the oppressed-artist [spect-actor] is able to create an autonomous world of images of his own reality and to enact his liberation in the world of his images, he will extrapolate into his own life all that he has accomplished in the fiction. The stage becomes the rehearsal space for real life (44).

In essence, where Brecht seeks to confront his audiences ethically and cognitively with his work, Boal seeks to place the tools of subversion into the bodies of his actors. This is, of course, not a tactic well suited to commercial practice, which is a key difference between Brecht and Boal. Brecht produced socially engaged work but was still in the business of running a theater company, playwriting, and directing. Boal is less hampered by the constraints of capitalism. Finally, Boal describes the Theater of the Oppressed as “the theater of the first person plural,” a theater where the “I” is all of us (45). He facilitates this environment through a system which he calls analogical induction. In a traditional Theater of the Oppressed event, the session begins by the spect-actors sharing stories of their own experiences with oppression, theater is then built around those stories. Analogical induction refers to the process of pluralising an individual's experience into a model which can speak to individuals outside of that experience. Through simultaneously broadening the experience and inviting the other spect-actors to step further within it through practicing empathy, Boal is able to create a fluid model which is able to speak to all of the spect-actors instead of the specifics of the individual's experience. While this does generalize the circumstances of oppression, which can hinder the nuance often required of complex

or intersectional circumstances, it does allow for the aesthetic space to benefit more than one individual at a time.

Essentially, we did the work of trying to produce teaching theater, of literally showing people how to resist, without laying any of the groundwork to make our theater a teaching space. Our aesthetic space maintained the same hierarchy between stage and audience found in traditional theater. This made our staged protest seem like an artificial callout rather than an inspired moment. Of course, what the audience was not aware of was that the signs held by the actors were made during the given night's performance. Each was made in response to the reaction of the actor to the show or their own lives on that given day. Further, let us not dismiss the aspect of Brecht's theater which is designed to encourage people to ask *why* they had a negative reaction to something, but I have no way of tracking if the sense of defensiveness present in the talkbacks abated later. We engaged in a hostile osmosis, establishing ourselves as the moral authority, which irrevocably changes a teaching moment into something which feels more like chastisement. The audience were solely spectators and never given the opportunity to become spect-actors. They were never invited into the world to share in the agency being enjoyed by the cast as dismantlers of their own oppression.

Unintended but not Unimportant Consequences

What I find particularly interesting is that the model for the Theater of the Oppressed yields much more smooth results when applied to the cast of our production instead of our audiences.

Interestingly, our production of *Arturo Ui* contained a sort of reversed spect-actor. At different moments throughout the production the cast would come out on stage between their cues and watch the show from the very back of the set, in full view of the audience. In this moment the cast, who had just existed within the cause and effect of the drama, become spectators before eventually becoming actors again. This was intended to contribute to the alienation of the audience; however, the actors remained in costume and were often placed in deep shadows, making them difficult to distinguish. This also created an interesting space from which the actors could reflect; our physical set consisted of a large, open space and a back wall with a raised level all the way upstage. This allowed for actors not in the scene to collect at the back of the set and watch the action taking place before leaving the stage as themselves and entering again as their character at the appropriate time. According to Boal's theories, this complicates the aesthetic space. There is an audience outside the scope of participation looking in, but there are also literal spect-actors simultaneously watching and participating in the work. If an aesthetic space is simply denoted by a decision that here is the stage and here is not, then why not examine the concept of an audience within an audience? Through their placement in a commercial theater process, they are endowed with the agency and access to practice the further stages of

Boal's work. There is no hierarchy of subject and object between the "on duty" actors and the rest of the cast. Due to the event being scripted, both are endowed with the same level of control over the action taking place on stage. One could argue that the script means that no one has any control over any of the action on stage save for Brecht himself, but I would contest that solely because of the addition of the protest after the conclusion of the text. If osmosis is the system which is subverted in order to facilitate metataxis, then that protest is the act of putting the tools of subversion into the bodies of the actors. That is the moment in which they are most purely allowed to practice the Theater of the Oppressed. As noted above, the signs representing the causes in our staged protest were deeply personal to the actors, in addition to the fact that many of the actors brought their own experiences of oppression into their work on the production. Many actors mapped their own feelings about politics, injustice, nationalism, or simply the fear of a changing, violent world onto the moments of the play and their own characters. In each bringing their own experiences to the production, but all being confined to the same universal language, they created a space that is a word of the first person plural. Brecht's script, in and of itself, serves as the generalized model to practice tools of overthrowing oppression. However, rather than beginning with the personal and developing out to commonality, the cast began with an impersonal model and brought their hearts and souls to it together.

The resulting phenomenon is that, while our audiences were made uncomfortable and many of them left the theater disgruntled, our actors engaged in an experience they found to be uplifting and empowering. While ultimately becoming a

didactic, oppressive force towards our audience could be termed a failing on the part of the production, creating an environment which facilitates a stage as a therapeutic space for the actors is not without merit. This production was intended, in part, to be a celebration of resistance. On the macro it was a showcase of a national refusal to accept a disagreeable leader. On the micro it was a celebration of the resilience of the UCSC student body, with our cast serving as a sample of that larger community. The production was in some ways conceived for the actors, and that original conception was not let go of, even to the potential detriment of our intention with audiences. I myself lacked the appropriate distance to anticipate a guarded reaction because I had been aware of how personally represented the actors were going to be from the earliest meetings with the director.

Building the Modern Protest Theater

I do not know what the ideal act of resistance looks like. I do not know how to take a stand in a way that is liberated from all intersections of privilege and power or that surpasses the limitations of imperfect perspectives. I do not know of a way to speak out from a position of perfect empathy. I know that reaching such a model of expression is impossible, but that does not disqualify hope.

I know that this production ultimately took on the role of ideologue as much as the authority it was meant to resist. However, I also know that it was a rejuvenating, inspiring process for the artists involved. In a national topography where a group of students from Parkland, Florida⁶ do more to drive an agenda than elected officials, a method of composing theater driven by the need of the cast to express is, perhaps, not entirely out of the question.

The arts are as effective a method of speaking out as they have ever been. Were they not, The Public Theater would not have had to weather protests from conservatives during their 2017 production of *Julius Caesar*. However, I also know that using art to lay injustices bare is no longer sufficient. Even in an environment as saturated with liberalism as UCSC, simply pointing a finger at the Trump

⁶ (Chuck, Elizabeth et al) In reference to the Stoneman Douglas High School mass shooting, which took place February 14, 2018. Originally reported on by NBC: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/police-respond-shooting-parkland-florida-high-school-n848101>. (Chaffe, Tim.) This event led to survivors of the event organizing March for Our Lives to protest gun laws across the country on March 28, 2018. Reported on by the New York Times <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/24/us/march-for-our-lives.html>

Administration elicited jaded responses. In a political landscape where the trope of “the intolerant left” has proven both pervasive and effective, to speak *out* toward people is to be regarded as speaking *at* them. In order to galvanize hearts and minds it is necessary to not only invite audiences to think, but to invite them to act in specific ways, and ways organic to themselves. There is a necessary compassion in the transformation of the stage from pulpit to platform. That necessary compassion also comes with a necessary patience and vulnerability. The difficulties of Boal are immense because the space created is plural, as opposed to holding a strict binary between the stage and the seats. However, the potency of the vulnerable, the visceral, the immediate and the plural is what is demanded by the howling, fear mongering state of political discourse.

I do not come back from this project to advocate sweeping changes to the professional theater model. Rather to say that the demands of fully engaged, effective political art require investigations into new models of artistic practice. In the same way that Brecht was disgusted by the spellbinding effect of spectator based theater, I am disgusted by theater rooted in commercialism which claims to be political. It succeeds in nothing but self indulgence for those who agree, and alienation for those who do not. This is not to say that loud, celebratory, representational works of art are not absolutely essential for the health of a community, but so long as power is displaced onto the stage by the audience, these works are unable to embrace the notion of a fully formed dialectic.

Figures

Figure 1:



Center: Ryan Schwalm as Arturo Ui.

Background Right: Rey Cordova as Clarke (Far Right) Adrian Zamora as
Dogsborough

Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo

Figure 2:



Center: Alyssa Ponce as The Announcer, featuring a “Nasty Woman” T-Shirt

Foreground Left: Boa Qu as Sheet

Background Left: Kassandra Escamilla as a gangster (far left), Ash Brown as Giri

Up Left: Stage Manager Brianna Grabowski

Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo

Figure 3:



Arturo delivers his final speech to the vegetable dealers.

Upper Level: Left, Stage Manager Brianna Garbowski and Board Op J Gallo. Center: Ryan Schwalm as Arturo UI. Right, The band.

Upstage: Left, Anahita Foroutan. Right, Boa Qu as gun toting gangsters.

Downstage: The Cast as the Chicago and Cicero Vegetable Dealers.

Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo

Figure 4:



The final image of UCSC's 2017 *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, right before the cast exits the theater up the aisles and through the audience.

Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo

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