

Forum theatre



To help people explore how they might change their reality and rehearse possible actions.

In forum theatre a play or scene, usually indicating some kind of oppression, is shown twice. During the replay, any member of the audience is allowed to shout 'Stop!', step forward and take the place of one of the oppressed characters, showing how they could change the situation to enable a different outcome.

Forum theatre was pioneered by the influential Brazilian theatre director and activist, Augusto Boal, as part of what he called the "Theatre of the Oppressed". In Theatre of the Oppressed, theatre is a tool for liberation and empowerment – a means of using theatre as a way of better understanding ourselves and how we fit into the worlds around us – and, most importantly, how we might consequently change those worlds.

Steps in the process

Usually, the subjects and story lines of forum theatre originate from real experiences of the community members, developed during a series of workshops and rehearsals.

1. The actors present a short play, usually indicating some kind of oppression, in which the protagonist does not achieve their goal.
2. The play is then shown a second time. During the replay, any member of the audience ('spect-actor') is allowed to shout 'Stop!', step forward and take the place of the protagonist.

3. The play then continues with the audience member attempting to change the outcome by making new choices.
4. Several alternatives may be explored by different spect-actors. The other actors remain in character, improvising their responses.
5. A facilitator (often known as a 'Joker') is necessary to enable communication between the players and the audience. The Joker serves to support the spect-actors. It is the Joker's responsibility to keep interventions within the realm of reality in order to support tactics that can be achieved in real life.

Here's a video from UK forum theatre company "Cardboard Citizens" which works with and for homeless people:

<https://youtu.be/srvnPJcLmlM>

Suggestions for use

- Rather than stepping up and joining the action as 'spect-actors', audience members can suggest different actions for the actors to carry out on-stage. This gives more power to the actors (rather than the audience) as they have to interpret the suggestions made but it can be a useful alternative, especially where audience members lack the confidence to take the 'spect-actor' role.

Challenges

- As most of the play is to be performed impromptu, forum theatre requires strong acting skills from the actors.

References

- Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed. 3rd edition, London, 2000.
- [Forum Theatre, Beautiful Trouble website.](#)