

Christine Mayor, Naomi Tessler - Rehearse for the Revolution: Creative Resistance with Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the Oppressed, created by Augusto Boal, empowers participants to “rehearse for the revolution” (Boal 1985). The imbalance of power and oppressive nature of the psychiatric system often leaves patients victimized and vulnerable. Using this theatre for social change model, our workshop will offer tools for creative resistance and strategies for enacting change. Theatre of the Oppressed is a series of games, exercises and dramatic interventions used to explore social issues, spark dialogue, and create positive social change. In contrast to the current psychiatric model, these techniques provide an opportunity for participants to use their voices, bodies, and imaginations to discover alternative actions and break the cycle of oppression. This workshop included two of these techniques, Image Theatre and Forum Theatre. First, participants engaged experientially through Image Theatre, which focuses on body response. Following this, we presented a short Forum Theatre piece where the protagonist is struggling within the psychiatric system. Participants then were invited to enter the scene as “spect-actors” (Boal 1985), acting out, as the protagonist, different strategies of personal choice and systemic change. The final portion of our workshop was dedicated to personal reflection and group dialogue. We then invited participants to respond to this process and discuss the role of Theatre of the Oppressed in creative resistance against psychiatric assault. Additionally, we presented information and examples demonstrating how this model is being used by psychiatric patients and advocates in raising awareness and building community. Finally, space was created for a discussion about the potential contribution of Theatre of the Oppressed work to the global anti-psychiatry movement. Reference: Boal, Augusto. Theatre of the Oppressed. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.