A silent revolution: 'Image Theatre' as a system of decolonization

J. Adam Perry

adam.perry@utoronto.ca

Abstract
This article summarizes the ways in which Image Theatre, a practice originally developed by Augusto Boal which continues to be developed in the hands of applied theatre practitioners and critical arts educators worldwide, can be used as a pedagogical and dramaturgical system of decolonization at the level of communities and individuals. Through reference to two examples from my own work, I argue in this article that Image Theatre is a unique cultural practice that can be used to facilitate counter-discursive stories that are shaped by participants" invitation to play in the space between aesthetic representation and social reality. In this way, Image Theatre may invoke an in-between space similar to the post-colonial concept of hybridity which offers educators a way of transforming and reinventing meaning as well as creating new strategies for decolonizing practice.

Keywords: Image Theatre; embodied learning; decolonizing education; Theatre of the Oppressed

Introduction

Image Theatre is the analytical basis of Brazilian theatre director Augosto Boal"s system of the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal 1985; 1995; 2006). This article summarizes the ways in which the practice of Image Theatre can be employed as a pedagogical and dramaturgical system of decolonization. I understand decolonization as a process that involves not only the political transformation of nation-states, but also the articulation and transformation of dominant ideologies at the level of communities and individual bodies. Within the context of a decolonizing dramaturgical practice grounded in a pedagogy of embodied learning, Image Theatre is presented as a holistic process which employs a counter-discursive, embodied language. Image Theatre invites participants to play in the space between aesthetic

representation and social reality for the purpose of developing counter-hegemonic stories,

identities and subjectivities.

Decolonizing practice: From pedagogy to dramaturgy

Kwame Nkrumah described colonization as a process of ideologies becoming dominant

through dominant societies' use of overt (legal and institutional) and subtle

(through cultural practice) instruments of ideology to coerce individual behaviour and to develop the

basis for universal social cohesion. For Nkrumah, the ideology of the dominant group reaches into

every segment of society (Nkrumah 2004). O'Sullivan (2001) broadens Nkrumah's understanding of

ideological domination through his analysis of the notion of „dominant cultures" and the structures

that maintain them. He discusses a „dominator model" rooted in systems based on force or the threat

of force.

The dominator model, which operates through an intricate web of gender, class and race, inhibits

creativity and creates social structures where compassion, empathy, truth and justice are

suppressed. O'Sullivan describes domination as a process that violates the "boundaries of trust

and security" that are normally associated with the concepts of „home," „community" and „the

body" (144). According to O'Sullivan, the dominator model, which he claims is present in both

capitalist and socialist societies, incurs a "deep invasion of the spirit" (144). Incorporating a

decolonizing practice would therefore necessarily integrate a response to both the overt and

subtle instruments of domination that Nkrumah describes. It would also necessitate attending to

community, to the body and to spirit – the basic sites of colonial violation.

Whereas Nkrumah was primarily concerned with political decolonization and specifically

with the rise of a Pan-African renaissance that he believed would oppose dominant ideology on a

continental scale (Nkrumah 2004), this paper is chiefly interested in how decolonization is

practiced at the level of community and inter-

personal relations. Whereas the notion of decolonization in political contexts is generally described as the process of colonial powers transferring control over their colonies to indigenously-based nation states (Duara 2004), dominant ideologies of violence and control persist beyond political decolonization. This colonial legacy is exemplified in the words of Duara (2004), who claims that the "era of decolonization may be over, but the pains of that transition have found their way into the new era of globalization" (17). Echoing O‟Sullivan‟s notion of domination as a violation of boundaries, Ng (forthcoming) presents a notion of decolonization which "dissolves the boundaries between self and collectivity, between the individual and the systemic. It interrogates how we, as individuals living within and being part of collectivities, reproduce and sustain systems of oppression" (13). As an educator, Ng argues for a holistic approach to teaching and learning which incorporates mind, body, emotion and spirit in the pursuit and constitution of knowledge. Her work reflects on the ways in which oppression operates through bodies and how people imitate hegemonic ideologies out of habit. She argues that people become locked into fixed patterns of behaviour and that change is only possible when people develop the capacity to step back and observe these patterns of behaviour through critical reflection.

Ng (forthcoming) describes „embodied learning‟ as an epistemological restoration of the body-spirit in educational encounters. As a pedagogical approach,
Ng‟s work resonates with hooks‟ (1994) notion of a liberatory pedagogy whereby "a simple practice like including personal experience may be more constructively challenging than simply changing the curriculum" (148). This process of including personal and embodied experiences in formal and non-formal educational encounters has its roots in the guiding philosophy of radical educator Paulo Freire, whose approach begins from people‟s experiences and builds towards the development of a

critical consciousness with the objective to facilitate people‟s understandings of how their own experiences of oppression are linked to structures of domination.

The practice of decolonization in general, and Freire‟s ideas in particular, have inspired liberatory practice not only in overtly educational settings such as in classrooms, but also in non-formal settings not normally associated with teaching and learning. Theatre is one of those settings. Amkpa (2006) discusses the use of theatre as a site for decolonization owing to people‟s ability to re-imagine and rearticulate individual and group identities through the cultural practice of theatre in postcolonial contexts. He describes „postcolonial‟ as a process which occurs not at some moment after the emergence of political decolonization but rather as a process that takes place simultaneously with moments of oppression. Mirroring Freire‟s own notion of liberation, Amkpa describes the postcolonial process as one of people coming to terms with the reality of domination and consequently formulating strategies that limit oppressive forces, ultimately transforming themselves from the *objects* of social reality to the *subjects* of social reality. Amkpa highlights theatre‟s capacity to invoke what he coins „postcolonial desire‟: "an act of refusal to assume that passive, static, essentialist identity" of colonial domination which begins "at the very moment in which the subordinated understand their subjugation and launch strategies of defiance and change" (167). Amkpa‟s evocation of a „postcolonial desire‟ arising from cultural practices such as theatre is a reassertion of the liberatory potential of imagination into the postcolonial context, and as such can be applied as a creative transgression of the dominator model described by O‟Sullivan (2001) above. Within the context of decolonization, theatre is a cultural practice which highlights the primacy of embodied knowledge where intellectual, emotional and spiritual encounters occur physically between bodies, and the enactments and re-enactments of which are fodder

for reflection, dialogue, the articulation of counter-discursive identities and the rehearsal of strategies for social transformation.

With an understanding of pedagogy and dramaturgy as related practices of decolonization thus established, the remainder of this paper will explore the ways in which Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal‟s technique of Image Theatre, the analytical cornerstone of his system of the Theatre of the Oppressed, can be used in the practice of liberatory pedagogy.

The language of image

Boal describes the Theatre of the Oppressed as a dramaturgical system of "physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape... the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for solutions" (Boal 1995, 14-15). Boal‟s technique of Image Theatre, a system of non-verbal theatre exercises, is the primary analytic tool of the Theatre of the Oppressed. In Image Theatre meaning develops not from telling or explaining stories, but from the collective creation and analysis of static non-verbal images that are based on a common theme which is usually agreed on by the entire group of participants – for example, language loss (Diamond 2007), critical literacy (Rozansky and Aagesen 2010) or family violence (Boal 2006). Once a group of participants has engaged in the creation of individual and group images, these images are analyzed through discussions facilitated by the Theatre of the Oppressed facilitator, known as the „joker‟. As has been discussed in the literature, in the facilitation of Theatre of the Oppressed processes, the joker plays a crucial pedagogical role with regards to regulating and shaping the

discussions that take place as a response to the images and scenarios that participants create

(Dwyer 2004). It is the responsibility of the joker to

facilitate an efficacious process that carries the potential to influence the "historical evolution of wider social and political realities" through performance and story-telling (Kershaw 2002, 258). Critical joker-led discussions can lead to further exploration of images through the use of a variety of animation techniques that enable participants to delve deeper into their stories and to demonstrate non-verbal narratives through movement. Animation techniques allow participants the opportunity to investigate stories and characters through embodied interactions with other characters. The joker should use these animations as stimuli for deeper discussions about how the dynamics of power and oppression operate in people"s everyday lives, and to open a dialogue on why oppressive conditions exist and how they can be changed.

Boal developed his system of Image Theatre out of a perceived necessity to create stories through embodied meanings – without words. He says:

> Words are like trucks: they carry the loads you put on them. Words do not exist in nature, they did not come into being like trees: they have been invented by people, so it is important to understand that the inventors of the words lived in concrete social situations, some of which may no longer exist (Boal 2006, 174).

"Image is a language" (175) says Boal, and dealing with images, in contrast to words, prioritizes a way of knowing that necessarily involves the body as well as the intellect. Boal invites his actors not to understand the precise meanings of each image, but rather to feel an image and "to let our memories and imagination wander" (175).

Boal stresses that the images created in Image Theatre are not symbolic, as they do not stand for something they are not. Rather, "signifier and signification" are the same. For example, a look of fear is not separable from the emotion of fear such that a look of fear in Image Theatre does not signify fear, it *is* fear (Boal 2006, 175). Images, therefore, do not merely represent language, they *are* the language. The language of image, as the locus of meaning and analysis of Theatre of

the Oppressed, parallels the primacy of dialogue in the practice of democratic education – what

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hooks calls "the central location of pedagogy" (hooks 2003, 44). "Talking to share information, to exchange ideas," she writes, "is the practice both inside and outside academic settings that affirms... that knowledge can be shared in diverse modes of speech" (44). Image Theatre as a language is a unique system of developing counter-discursive stories that are shaped by participants" experiences of material existence.

In Image Theatre, stories are shown and not explained. Showing stories, rather than telling stories, is a way for people to write themselves into the stories of others, as the details of people"s storied images are not offered. As such, participants are able to see themselves in other people"s stories. Participants" only resources are their "interpretations of the stories, their own bodies, their own perceptions of themselves through their bodies, and their interaction with others in the scene" (Linds 2006, 116).

Image theatre is a demonstrative language, one in which meaning is imparted but also one which is malleable, so that through collective analysis, meaning is transformed and reinvented.

In *Colonialism/postcolonialism* Loomba discusses how language is an important means through which post-colonial thinkers have come to understand the process of colonialism (Loomba 2005, 22-42). Through a substantive analysis of a wide variety of post-colonial thinkers, Loomba presents the idea that language needs a shared community and shared assumptions to bestow meaning. Likewise a group needs language in order to think of itself as a community. Subjects are thus constituted through language and all utterances reveal a historical consciousness. By developing a communicative technique that does not rely on the use of words, Theatre of the Oppressed, rooted in Image Theatre, attempts to create a shared communal language through which participants can probe their lived experiences and develop knowledge by creating and analyzing body images, individually and as a group.

Interpretations are based on memory and personal experience, thus grounding Boal‟s system in experiences of societal relations. Image Theatre is a dramaturgical system that attempts to blur ideas and material existence, revealing how the two are interconnected and constitute each other – a system that prioritizes "a sensitivity to the intuitive, the hither side of words" (Linds and Vettraino 2008, 16). The holistic approach to decolonizing theatre that Theatre of the Oppressed employs may offer an opportunity for educators to engage in a disruption of "that objectification that is so necessary in a culture of domination" by way of a return to "a state of embodiment in order to deconstruct the way power has been traditionally orchestrated" inside and outside of traditional educational settings (hooks 1994, 139). Image Theatre may offer a unique method for groups to create meanings that run counter to dominant discourse while simultaneously facilitating the constitution of counter-discursive identities and subjectivities.

Ritual and habit

According to Ng (forthcoming), a key element to a decolonizing pedagogical practice is the critical assessment of hegemonic practices which "have become habitual ways in which we conduct our business, and more importantly our*selves*" (3). Ng‟s development and application of embodied learning, which is grounded in the philosophy and principles of traditional Chinese medicine, is structured within a notion of decolonization which includes enactments of resistance, questioning, reclamation and transformation of ruling ideas which have become embedded in our very bodies and our very behaviours. Ng‟s ideas echo central elements of Theatre of the Oppressed in general and the practice of Image Theatre in particular. In *Games for actors and non-actors*, Boal describes Image Theatre as a technique that attempts to uncover what he terms a society‟s rituals, which he says are expressed through ritual

gestures and signs. He describes these gestures and signs as "*visual expressions* of the oppressions to be found at the heart of society" (2006, 194), and goes on to define what he means by social ritual:

> When a social code does not answer the needs and desires of the people to whom it is addressed, and thus those people see themselves as being forced to do things which run counter to their desires, or obliged to abstain from doing things which they want to do, then we can say that the social code has turned into a ritual. A ritual is therefore a code which imprisons, which constrains, which is authoritarian, *useless* or at worst, *necessary as the vehicle for some form of oppression* (195).

Image Theatre techniques may reveal hidden aspects of images through what Boal calls "the multiple mirror of the gaze of others" – a group of participants looking at the same image, offering their thoughts and feelings and evoking whatever their imaginations produce around the image – often based on experiences from the social reality (2006, 175). By discovering, analysing and imagining alternatives to social rituals and personal habits, Image Theatre may offer a creative structure for teaching against the grain of social convention by pinpointing alternatives to hegemonic practices through identity formation and personal/social reinvention. The facilitation of Image Theatre as a decolonizing practice may provide a way of creating an aesthetic space where dialogue and self-actualization are affected through the body.

At this point I will provide two examples from Image Theatre workshops I conducted in 2010 and 2011, the first with a class of grade 3 children in the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood of Toronto, Canada and the second with a group of migrant agricultural workers from Mexico living in the town of Leamington, Canada. The first workshop was conducted at Thorncliffe Park Public School, where I was invited as a special guest artist. This school, which boasts a student population that represents 47 countries (Toronto District School Board 2011), is located in the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood of Toronto, Ontario. According to Statistics Canada‟s 2006 census, Thorncliffe Park has high immigrant population (68%), many

of whom are recent immigrants (31%). A significant portion of Thorncliffe Park residents (75%) self-identify as a visible minority, 51% of the neighbourhood‟s population speak a language other than English or French and 22% of residents speak Urdu as a first language. The top three ethnic origins in the neighbourhood are East Indian, Pakistani and Filipino (City of Toronto 2008). Most of the participants in this workshop were Urdu speaking whose parents were new immigrants to Canada. This workshop focused on the issue of peer-to-peer conflict. A group of four participants created an image of a schoolyard fight. Two of the participants, a boy and a girl, were physically fighting as a result of a confrontation involving a piece of gossip. The girl, who was frozen in an image of pushing the boy, who himself was in the act of hitting her, was asked how she felt in her body at that very moment. She responded by saying she felt „happy‟. I further asked her about the position of her body (tense, aggressive, defensive), including her frowning facial expression. She stood by her original feeling of happy, but added that it was kind of an „evil happy‟ and not a „good happy‟. The other participants, her classmates, all claimed to understand this feeling. On further reflection and discussion we all agreed that „evil happy‟ meant „powerful‟ in adult speak. Even though the participants had all agreed that they had felt the emotion of

„evil happy‟ in their bodies in moments of conflict or violence, the notion of feeling „powerful‟ or „dominant‟ was not a part of their vocabulary, and was in a sense foreign. Participants were able to articulate this feeling through image theatre, tie it to the action of fighting, and then relate this embodied knowledge to their social realities for future exploration and reference. The act of fighting was thus demystified, and what may have been considered normal or even inevitable social behaviour on the part of the characters was discovered by the participants to be an embodied reaction to social circumstances: a reaction that can be transformed through reflection and action.

The participants were able to discuss how embodied emotions like „evil happy" play a part in fuelling the embodied reaction of ritualistic violence.

My initial reaction as an adult was to think that the girl was not being serious about stating how she felt happy in this moment of conflict. If I had followed the dominant pedagogical model of banking education (hooks 1994), I would not have probed further and would likely have instructed the student that she was probably feeling „angry" given the position of her body, and not „happy" like she stated. This intervention – seemingly normal behaviour in the context of the teacher/student and adult/child relationship – would have interrupted the individual"s and the group"s genuine attempt to understand and articulate the embodied state of „evil happy", the body"s subsequent response of violence and the fruitful discussion around alternative responses.

The second workshop took place with a group of four migrant agricultural workers from Mexico who are participants in Canada"s Seasonal Agricultural

Workers Program (SAWP) (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2011). These workshop participants were taking part in a „theatre action research" project (see Thompson 2008) that investigates the potential for individual and collective self-determination of workers within the context of Canada"s temporary foreign worker programs. Though contract migrant workers have been admitted temporarily into Canada to work on farms and in greenhouses since 1966, in the past decade the Canadian government has been expanding temporary foreign worker programs in both „skilled" and „low-skilled" market sectors, including in agriculture.

In 2009, the Canadian Council for Refugees reported that in the past five years temporary foreign worker programs in Canada have been so active that in 2008 the numbers of temporary foreign workers overtook the number of permanent residents

nationally (Canadian Council of Refugees 2009). SAWP workers can work legally in Canada

for up to eight months before returning to their countries of origin. They are provided housing

(often substandard and overcrowded dormitories located on the worksite) by their employers

and typically live in isolated communities in rural areas (Preibisch 2007). They do not have

access to government newcomer services offered to citizen-track immigrants and refugees, such

as English as a Second Language instruction or settlement counselling. This Image Theatre

workshop took place in Leamington, Ontario, a town notable for its sizable industrial

greenhouse sector, which employs thousands of migrant farm workers every year (Basok 2002).

One of the participants in this workshop had been an SAWP participant for 20 years, two

participants had been in the program for 11 years, and for the fourth participant it was his first

year in the program.

In this workshop an image was developed through the technique of sculpting (Boal 2006,

136-138) that led to an exploration of how power is enacted in the context of the SAWP, both

between workers and between workers and the Canadian employers. The participants created an

image of the Canadian boss entering the immediate workspace of three migrant workers during a

routine round of the greenhouse. This image was created as an exploration of the intense pressure

workers feel to be productive at work. The participants all agreed that this image represented a very

common everyday occurrence in the workplace. As the joker, I entered the image to investigate the

emotional responses from the workers at the moment that this image was meant to be taking place.

The characters‟ emotions in this scenario ranged from „nervous‟ to „confident‟, and were largely

associated with the individual participant‟s level of experience in the SAWP, i.e. the newest

participant in the program felt the most nervous and the ones with the most experience felt more

confident. The

participant who was playing the boss asked what he desired most in this image and responded that he wanted his workers to work faster. When asked what he would say to his workers in this situation, he responded that he would not say anything, and added that he did not have to. His simple response led to vigorous head nodding and an immediate discussion about labour relations in the context of the SAWP.

This simple Image Theatre exercise resulted in a spirited discussion between participants on how the image revealed that the employer indeed did not need to speak in order to instil fear and compliance in the workplace. When probed further to reflect on why this was the case, participants discussed how the employer"s complete control over workers" private (in the dormitory) and public lives (in the workplace) is so complete as to require little in the way of overt discipline. Participants" reflection on individual emotional responses to the employer"s presence revealed the increased vulnerability of younger workers to workplace harassment, such as bullying and teasing, from older workers. The image the participants created, the reported emotions of the characters, and the ease with which the employer was able to perform his position of power led to a discussion among participants that sparked an analysis of power relations within the CSAWP which is consistent with Stoler"s (1995) description of colonialism not as a policy or system that was deployed from the metropole to the colony, but rather a grounded and everyday practice fostered and constituted through interactions, exchanges and performances in colonial settings. Participating in this activity revealed techniques of control, such as divide and rule at the level of the everyday, designed to maximize agricultural production.

These examples show how the facilitation of Image Theatre in decolonizing pedagogical contexts can be a holistic model of learning in which both learners, who began to develop a critical analysis around the everyday performance of dominant

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behaviours, and facilitators (or jokers), who learn to take seriously the emotive and embodied

experiences of participants, are empowered by the process. That this is accomplished within an

embodied approach to learning is an automatic challenge to the way power has orchestrated

itself in particular social and institutionalized settings

– in this case the classroom and within temporary foreign worker programs (hooks 1994, 135-

137). From a Gramscian perspective as outlined by Allman (1999), these examples illustrate

how everyday rituals and practices can be deconstructed through the language and practice of

Image Theatre. This act of deconstruction can be understood as a process of discovering,

articulating and questioning what for the participants seemed like common sense, facilitating a

critical understanding and consequently creating an opportunity for transformation. In the

words of Allman:

"The educator or political activist begins with people‟s concrete perceptions of the world (their

limited praxis) and helps them to come to a critical, scientific or, in other words, dialectical

conceptualization" (115).

Representation ↔ material reality

In *Colonialism/postcolonialism* Loomba reviews the notion of hybridity in the context of

colonialism and anti-colonial approaches. She states that there are many ways to think about

hybridity which, as a general concept, refers to in-betweenness, diasporas and mobilities – in

other words, to the cross-over of ideas and identities generated by colonialism. After a thorough

review of the notion of hybridity in post-colonial literature Loomba concludes that the material

reality of hybridity has been used in two main ways: either as a tool for extinguishing native

populations or as an anti-colonial strategy. Although the notion of hybridity is a key concept in

post-colonial discourse, Loomba remains sceptical of its utility, claiming that it has a tendency

to throw into question a) the binary of opposition between colonizer and

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colonized, a concept that carries a lot of weight in anti-colonialist struggle and b) the anti-colonialist tendency to prioritize the re-discovery of anti-colonial identity. However, Loomba concludes her section on hybridity by maintaining an ambivalence toward the concept, claiming that whereas there may not be a strong ontological basis for hybridity, the concept can be a useful metaphor in the service of liberation (145-153). It is within this context that the language of Image Theatre may best be understood as a tool of discovery, invention and transformation that operates in and draws attention to the ambiguous zone between the aesthetics of representation and material reality.

Metaxic action/reflection: Playing in the in-between

Recall Ng‟s (forthcoming) description of the process of decolonization, which "dissolves the boundaries between self and collectivity, between the individual and the systemic" (13). Image Theatre adds to this the dissolution of the boundary between what Boal calls „aesthetic space‟ and social reality and results in the creation of an ambiguous space between representation and material reality that he calls

„metaxis‟: "the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image" (Boal 1995, 13). In the practice of Image Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed generally, participants rehearse in the aesthetic world in order to practice strategies for modifying the social world. Metaxis emerges through the Image Theatre workshop process, in which participants inhabit both of these worlds at once: they are grounded in both aesthetic space (the image of reality) while simultaneously articulating and reflecting on how their aesthetic creations are rooted in the social world (the reality of the image). It is worth quoting Boal at length on the process of action and reflection in the Theatre of the Oppressed:

Theatre is born when the human being discovers that it can observe itself; when it discovers that in this act of seeing, it can see *itself* – see itself *in situ*: see itself seeing. Observing itself, the human being perceives what it is, discovers what it is not and imagines what it could become. It perceives where it is and where it is not, and imagines where it could go... Theatre – or theatricality – is this capacity, this human property which allows man [sic] to observe himself in action, in activity... It allows him to imagine variations of his action, to study alternatives. Man can see himself in the act of seeing, in the act of acting, in the act of feeling, the act of thinking. Feel himself feeling, think himself thinking (Boal 1995, 13).

This process does not emerge on its own, but rather it is the role of joker to enable metaxis to occur by "constantly stretching the space to engage in a discourse of embodied critique and possibility" (Linds 2006, 123). Image Theatre participants, driven by the joker to be fully engaged in metaxis, are challenged to step back and reflect on actions and behaviours that may be rooted in external structures of oppression and domination and which find themselves enacted in individually and collectively created images and their activations. It follows that the efficacy of the metaxis process often boils down to the knowledge and skill of individual jokers. In his work, Dwyer (2004) has observed that inexperienced yet well-meaning jokers are sometimes "prone to fall back on the clichés and common sense understandings of the dominant discourses into which they have been apprenticed" (205). In a similar vein, other authors have pointed out that when liberatory methodologies are boiled down to mere techniques, there is a significant risk of reproducing oppressive power relations (Kovach 2005). As a response, Weiler (1994) points out that there is a need for critical educators to address and negotiate their own historical position with regards to their personal implication in the production of unequal social relations. In other words, it is imperative that the joker "identify the starting position in her/his conceptual baggage and monitor the changes in her/his questions and perceptions" as the work progresses (Kirby and McKenna 1989, 119). To follow this logic, jokers who facilitate image theatre in the context of a decolonizing practice must recognize and address the power and privilege inherent in the position of the joker. As well,

jokers must actively recognize the starting position of their participants in relation to colonial contexts in terms of gender, race, immigration status and other socially identifiable markers. The joker‟s role in facilitating metaxis is to use her authority as a platform to locate and challenge colonial relations in historical context.

Engaged with the process in this way, metaxis is the dialectical process of rehearsal and reflection. It is the dramaturgical and philosophical foundation of Image Theatre and the Theatre of the Oppressed, and as such the Theatre of the Oppressed is the aesthetic counterpart to Freire‟s concept of conscientization, the melding of action and consciousness where "it is only within the experience of struggling to transform relations and the experience of the transformations that our critical consciousness can fully develop" (Allman 1999, 96). Similarly, Image Theatre, as described by

Rozansky and Aagesen (2010), who use Image Theatre as a tool to engage critical literacy in the grade 8 classroom, "goes beyond high-level thinking by examining how characters are positioned in terms of the power they have or are lacking, where power is located, and whether power is used to oppress others" (459). Metaxis engages in a process described by Freire as „epistemological distance‟ and „epistemological encircling‟, where a learner confronts an object that challenges the process of knowledge discovery and attempts to apprehend its meaning contextually, through its relationship with others (Freire 1997, 92). The process of self-observation that takes place in an Image Theatre workshop allows for this epistemological distancing and contextual analysis to take place and may provide participants a lens through which they can witness instances of domination and oppression as they are enacted by themselves and by others in each moment. The dual process of embodied creation and reflective

observation which is the basis of Image Theatre may enable the disruption of taken-for-granted

actions and attitudes, which is a key element to decolonizing

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practice (Ng, forthcoming). While there may be no ontological basis for the concept of hybridity, as Loomba (2005) suggests, Image Theatre as a dramaturgical system of decolonization not only utilizes the idea of in-betweenness metaphorically in the pursuit of liberation, but offers its equivalent, the concept of metaxis, as the central epistemological tool whereby theatre may be used to counter dominant ideas and produce counter-hegemonic knowledge.

Decolonizing practice: Engaging the silence between bodies

As a cultural and embodied idiom that engages creativity and invites the gathering of ideas in the zone in-between aesthetic representation and social reality, Image Theatre is presented in this article as a holistic dramaturgical system that may provide an opportunity for critical educators to facilitate the emergence of participants" individual and collective stories of domination and oppression for the purpose of developing strategies for personal and social transformation. The paper began by proposing the idea that incorporating a decolonizing practice must necessarily integrate a response to both the overt and subtle instruments of domination that are the legacy of colonialism. It has been proposed that theatre for decolonization attends to the most basic sites of colonial violation, namely community, body and spirit. The article engages with Ng"s (forthcoming) understanding of decolonization. She argues that individuals become locked into fixed patterns of hegemonic behaviour and that change is only possible when people develop the capacity to step back and observe these patterns through critical reflection. Ng, in concert with other writers (hooks 1994; O'Sullivan 2001) whose ideas have been raised throughout this paper, applies a holistic approach to critical reflection for decolonization which incorporates not only the intellect, but also the body and spirit. I have argued that within this context of decolonization, theatre can be approached as cultural practice which

highlights the primacy of embodied knowledge where intellectual, emotional and spiritual encounters occur physically between bodies, and the enactments and re-enactments of which are fodder for reflection, dialogue, as well as personal and social transformation.

Specifically, this paper has argued that Image Theatre, the cornerstone dramaturgical system of Augusto Boal‟s Theatre of the Oppressed, is a unique cultural practice that can be used to facilitate counter-discursive stories that are shaped by participants‟ embodied experiences of material existence. As a malleable and demonstrative process in which meaning is transformed and reinvented through collective creation and analysis, the facilitation of Image Theatre as a decolonizing practice can offer way of creating a space where participants begin with personal experience and from there create new understandings and strategies for transformation. This paper has presented Image Theatre as a process of invoking an in-between space similar to the post-colonial concept of hybridity, whereby participants activate a dialogue between the aesthetics of representation and their own material reality. This concept, articulated by Boal as „metaxis‟, is an epistemological process that emerges throughout the Image Theatre workshop and that challenges participants to step back and reflect on actions and behaviours that may be rooted in external structures of oppression and domination.

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