

(A) Change Society

A collaborative research into the possibilities of changing the society through participatory theatre.

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*I could say that it is time to release ourselves from our metal chains.
I could say that it is time to liberate our minds, to grow out of our roles as victims.
Because believe me, we are great, no matter how small they want us to be.
I could say that it is time to look ahead, knowing what is behind us.
And even though this is easier said than done, I refuse to accept that we can only
stand aside powerless. I could say that it is time to appropriate our own lives.
Take matters into our own hands.
Change, revolution, endlessly.*

-Manu

Words of Gratitude

I wish to express my gratitude to Kees, Sandra, Thamar, Olivier, Hanne, Ana, David, Maike, and Jania - all Jokers who participated with trust, joy, seriousness, questions, doubts and openness. I am happy with the way we have been searching together, to find new ways of working and develop our practice to be able to change in this world what should not exist. I wish you joy and strength to succeed in every change you facilitate.

Pieter, thank you for your precision to correct my inaccuracies, your time to help me improve my English writing, and your curiosity to ask questions which support my thinking.

Abstract

In this collaborative research, different theatre facilitators have been involved in order to develop new participatory theatre practices that aim to change structural inequalities and oppressions. In this thesis these different techniques are understood from the perspective of different social theories, namely Marxism, system theory and the ethics of care. On the basis of these theories, different possibilities are explored to examine how participatory theatre can change society.

The final argument of this thesis is that participatory theatre facilitators should understand and develop the theoretical foundation of their work more than they have tended to do in the past and accordingly change their theatrical practices. This would enable them to develop participatory theatre practices to influence a society that is currently more and more focusing on individual responsibility and which neglects the social structures that create inequality.

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Introduction

0.1 My introduction to theatre

One of my first memories of theatre concerns myself as an 11-year-old boy, playing a barber in the Middle Ages. Just after creaming the chin of a beardless boy, I realized I forgot the towel to clean his face. Therefore, I started to point towards random directions, telling stories while cleaning his face with my sleeves. The public laughed, and I remember that moment still sharper than any other memory of that time.

For me theatre becomes alive when it is done in full concentration at that specific moment and place- when playing a character is not a lie anymore but is done in full interaction with everyone who is together with me in that same space. Theatre then is not fiction but becomes a reality, a reality which can change the one we live in.

For my internship with the organization PLEK, I return to my love for theatre. This thesis starts from our shared interest in the power of theatre to change society and to support a meaningful life, full of playful awareness. For me both theatre and the Academy should be interacting with the living world around us and should not remain in its own secluded domain. Therefore, I consider this thesis not only to be relevant for the scientific community but also for the people who are engaged in theatrical practices.

0.2 PLEK

PLEK is an organisation that employs the methods of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Participatory Theatre (PT). PLEK was formed inside the cultural organisation Critical Mass by people who were interested in TO. When Critical Mass in 2012 decided to stop using TO, a group of five people decided to move on independently and formally organized themselves as the foundation PLEK.

PLEK started by organizing a yearly recurring international collaboration, and open weekly meetings - called laboratories - to research TO and to develop their practices. Furthermore, PLEK used TO to create a forum play concerning unemployment among higher educated people, experiment with a democratic theatre group that developed a play on gender inequality, and a group within a psychiatric activity centre which created multiple plays over three years.

From the original members only Maïke Koolhaas is still active within PLEK. David Limaverde and Ana Barona are the other current members of PLEK. Maïke has been educated in drama therapy and used different internships and courses to develop as a TO practitioner. David has been educated in performing arts and after different participatory art projects he is now developing himself in facilitating TO - together with Ana - at Kuringa, a well established TO organization based in Berlin. Ana has a professional background in the corporate world, and after some experiences with TO she is eager to learn new skills and to contribute to a more just society.

All members of PLEK are focused on learning new skills to facilitate TO processes. However, they also think that TO, a method originally developed by Augusto Boal, does not suit our contemporary society, if we strictly follow Boal's guidelines. Consequently, they are

searching for new ways to use theatre to create spaces in which people can understand and can change their lives and society. The essence of this kind of theatre is the participation of people interested in change. This thesis aims to contribute to this search for new Participatory Theatre (PT) practices.

For David, art should be part of everyday life and there should be no distinction anymore between artist and non-artist. PT can help to create a place where all participants function equally and explore actions that they can later apply in real life. He believes that Participatory Theatre in this way can inspire a society without hierarchies. Furthermore, it can help to break down stereotypes.

Ana would like to integrate PT in education, healthcare, development aid and the corporate world. Both Ana and Maike think that PT can contribute to creative thinking, more egalitarian distribution of knowledge and in helping people to relate to their bodies and to each other. They also envision PT as a means to positively influence oppressive social structures.

The people involved in PLEK change frequently. Therefore, the ambitions, possibilities, and areas of interest of PLEK as an organization are flexible. The flexibility of PLEK obscures the boundaries between members - Ana, Maike and David - and other PT practitioners and participants of their projects. The openness of PLEK to cooperate with others also makes it possible for this research to be done in the same spirit. Therefore, other PT facilitators are included in this collaborative research process. This research not only aims to contribute to PLEK and the knowledge of its members, but to everybody who is interested in searching for new methods and knowledge to create PT that fits our contemporary world.

0.3 Theatre of the Oppressed

TO is a collection of theatrical methods developed over multiple decades by Augusto Boal. As Paul Dwyer (2004) points out, TO has been developed on the basis of Boal's experiences. Dwyer shows how TO's ideals, techniques, and aims change over time together with Boal's experiences of working around the globe. Since TO is intricately connected to Augusto Boal's personal experiences, it is important to understand how TO has been developed on basis of these experiences. I will use the autobiography of Boal (2013) to show how different experiences in his life shaped TO.

0.3.1 Boal's first steps on the stage

In 1931 Augusto Boal was born in Brazil in a middle-class family. Boal started directing professionally at the Arena Theatre after two years of theatre education in the USA and his graduation in chemistry. Boal and his friends were at this time mostly interested in the great Russian plays and in Stanislavski's theories on acting. Boal says the ideas of Stanislavski¹ would remain one of the cornerstones of his career. He considers this method to resemble the

¹ Stanislavski was a Russian actor, director and theatre theorist who lived between 1863 and 1938. His ideas acting and training actors made a deep impact on the western theatre tradition. According to Stanislavski, actors should base their acting on personal experiences and feelings to create realistic theatre.

Socratic method, in which we ask questions to help people to deliver the truth that is buried within them. With the method of Stanislavski the director helps the actors to give birth to their characters. (p. 144)

In the Arena Theatre Boal started training people to write scripts, in order to create authentic Brazilian plays and reach out to the working class. Within the Arena Theatre there was a growing interest in the relation between politics and theatre, partly due to the growing interest in communist ideology. (p. 179)

In this period two important events happened that inspired Boal to create TO, although TO only crystallized ten years later.

- In one of their shows, after they incited the audience to revolt against the oppressors, the local farmer Virgilio came to the actors and asked them to take their weapons and come fight with him against the local landlord. With some shame they explained to him that they were just actors, and the play was only imaginary. After this encounter both the man and the actors realized that the oppressed were invited to fight, while the middle-class actors would remain safe. Boal understood that delivering a political message through theatre, without taking the same risk as the people he addressed, is meaningless political theatre. (p. 194) This experience was a wake-up call for Boal. He needed to find a way to allow people to participate in the theatrical process.
- In one theatre play audience members were encouraged to offer alternatives to deal with a problem of a cheating husband. The actors would play out their suggestions. A woman in the audience did not agree with the way the actor played out her suggestions and after expressing her frustration Boal asked her to come on stage and play out the suggestion herself. On stage she beats up very convincingly the actor playing the husband and thus convinced the audience of her solution of the problem. (p. 207) For Boal, this showed the possibility to make the stage really democratic, by allowing the audience to participate on stage.

0.3.2 Dictatorship

In Brazil, the socialist regime was overthrown in 1964 by a military coup. Everybody faintly leaning towards the political left faced the danger of being prosecuted. These new circumstances led to new experiments with theatre. Boal started to develop the Joker System. This was a form of theatre in which all actors interchangeably played all characters to stop the audience losing herself in empathy with one of the characters. (p. 241) The Joker System enabled Boal to create theatre with a Brazilian spirit, reflecting on the society, without – he thought - too much risk of being imprisoned. Nevertheless, Boal did not escape from the violent regime. He was taken into custody, tortured and jailed. In jail, Boal realized liberty and infinity exist within himself. He had no space to move, his time was controlled, but he did have all the possibilities to reflect - what he could have done - and to imagine - what alternatives he has. He described this as the essence of TO, to rethink the past and to invent the future by actions on stage in the here and now. (p. 297)

In the 1970's during workshops in Peru, Boal started to develop Forum Theatre and Image Theatre in order to deal with the language barriers he faced working with illiterate peasants. Image Theatre is used to help people to express their thoughts and feelings through their body. In Forum Theatre, the audience is invited on stage, to offer solutions to problems presented in a performance. The task of the theatre facilitator - from now on called 'The Joker' because s/he fulfills many different roles - is to guide TO processes and performances. The Joker not only facilitates but also 'difficultates' the process, by questioning interventions and helping the audience to discuss the offered solutions. (p. 310)

It is in this period that Boal writes his seminal book *Theatre of the Oppressed*. (1979) In this work he writes down his thoughts on the history of theatre and how it can be used to liberate the oppressed, which he considers to be social, political and economical exploited. In it, he unites the different theatre methods he developed over time under the name Theatre of the Oppressed.

0.3.3 World Wide

Boal is invited to teach TO in Portugal, after this project he travels through Europe where he finally settles in Paris to set up a TO scourse centre. In this new context he develops a new method called Rainbow of Desire. The Rainbow of Desire technique focuses on internal psychological oppressions, created by the society around us. (p. 324) While people in South America faced the oppression of dictatorial regimes, extreme poverty, and lack of education, people in Europe faced internal oppression caused by norms and social relation in society. Therefore, TO changed considerably concerning its method and vision on dealing with oppression.

In 1986 Boal returns to Brazil where he is elected as city councilor of Rio. He starts to use Forum Theatre to make people create their own laws. He calls this new method Legislative Theatre. With his return to Brazil, Boal realises it does not feel like his home anymore. Boal, therefore, keeps travelling around the world, teaching and practicing TO. (p. 328) Independent of Boal, TO as a method also travelled around the whole world and can by now be considered to be one of the most influential theatre practices of the 20th century. (Milling and Ley, 2000, p. 143)

0.3.4 Nothing ends

Boal finishes his autobiography with the words: "nothing ends. Believe me, nothing ends", as if to say his work, and the impact he has made, would live on, forever. On the second of May 2009 at the age of seventy-eight Boal passed away. Adrian Jackson (2009), the translator of Boal's books to English, and director of the London-based TO organization Cardboard Citizens, wrote a short article to commemorate the life and work of Boal.

The importance of Boal's work, according to Jackson, stretches beyond theatre into many areas of engaged social life. The richness of his practices stem from Boal's contact with so many different people and cultures, and his continuous effort to question and to develop his own work.

As a word of warning, Jackson also addresses Boal's struggle with practitioners who misappropriate TO. While the ethos of TO demands that the method becomes available for everybody to be able to use it, Boal hated TO that was used not to liberate the oppressed, but

for instance used in corporations to increase their profits. In this sense Boal's ideas never changed, corporations and other oppressors remained his enemy, which should be fought at all times. (p. 309)

Ch.1 Theoretical Framework of Participatory Theatre

1.1 Theatre of the Oppressed

Boal acknowledges in his autobiography that the stories he tells change over time. Paul Dwyer (2004) points out that these changes correlate with the changes within TO and also seem to fit with the new audiences Boal is trying to reach. For Dwyer, the problem with Boal's reliance on personal experience to develop TO is that the method, for this reason, lacks a clear theoretical framework to support it. Furthermore, Dwyer points out that Boal's experiences cannot be used universally for people worldwide and throughout time.

Boal's book *Theatre of the Oppressed* lays down his fundamental thoughts concerning the history of theatre and the relation between theatre and politics. In the foreword of the 2008 edition Boal still stands firm for the philosophical foundation of TO. At the same time he states: 'nothing can remain the way it is. Let us, in the present, study the past, so as to invent the future. (p. ix)

Boal's basic principles did not change over time. This would mean that all methods he developed are united in a single philosophy. At the same time, TO is criticised for lacking any substantial or clear theoretical foundation. It is, therefore, important to understand what his philosophy is, in order to develop its methods in such a way that they can address the problems we face today.

In the foreword of the 2000 edition of *Theatre of the Oppressed* Boal narrates his version of the history of Greek theatre. Greek theatre started as a chorus, in which all actors sang together in harmony. This harmony was disturbed when the actor Thespis suddenly stepped out of the chorus and improvised his own vision on the world. Thespis was the first protagonist, the one who could be different, who could speak out loud, and who receives the attention of the audience. Aristotle saw the potential of this kind of theatre to make the audience feel empathy with the protagonist. In Aristotle's theatre theory, the protagonist - who defies the law - in the end of a play should face a catastrophe. The public thus learns the lesson never to disagree with the powerful, lest they face the same fate. In this way, the public undergoes catharsis; they are purged of antisocial desires. (p. xviii)

In Boal's vision of the history of theatre, Aristotle's theory of the tragedy legitimized and sustained political inequality through theatre. Boal (1979) analyses how this political function of oppression runs through the whole western theatre and film tradition. According to Boal, Brecht is the first playwright and theorist who aimed to liberate the oppressed from their oppressed position by creating theatre that provoked critical thinking within the audience. Because the audience was activated to think, theatre regained its political revolutionary potential. (p. 106)

For Boal, Brecht did not succeed in reaching the full liberating potential of theatre. Only by giving the means of theatrical production back to the people, as Boal did, theatre could function as a weapon of the oppressed. In contrast to Brecht, in TO the spectator does not delegate action to the actors, but starts acting herself. Thus, the audience becomes, what Boal calls, a spect-actor. Although theatre is not a revolution itself, Boal considers it a rehearsal for revolution. (p. 155)

This focus on revolution changed after Boal settled in Paris. In his book *The Rainbow of Desire* (2013), Boal describes theatre as a tool for comprehension and a search for solutions of individual problems. Theatre becomes therapeutic. (p. 15) *The Rainbow of Desire* is a method to

dynamise oneself and purge oneself from all blocks that stop us from acting freely. Boal considers this a healthy form of catharsis. (p. 37)

Milling and Ley (2000) almost violently criticize Boal's theories as 'a pseudo-history of theatrical theory'. (p. 162) They describe his writing and arguments as overly simplistic - for instance his notion of Marxism (p. 148), confusing - because of the amalgamation, reformulation and misrepresentation of Aristotle's writings (p. 152), and contradictory - in his representation of the debate between Hegel and Brecht (p. 162). According to Milling and Ley, Boal is continuously misinterpreting and even consciously altering theories of Aristotle, Hegel, Machiavelli and Brecht. They argue that his theoretical writings offer us no clear ideas to understand the history of theatre or Boal's own practices.

Paul Dwyer (2005) analyses more in detail the problems of the claims Boal makes on Aristotle and consequently what this means for the practices Boal himself developed. According to Dwyer, Boal's description of Aristotle is based primarily on concepts that Aristotle himself never clearly defined, such as catharsis. For Dwyer, the crude arguments that Boal then develops tend to overemphasize the possibilities of the ruling classes to subordinate the oppressed through an Aristotelian theatre system. Boal also overemphasizes the possibility of liberation of the oppressed by TO, since TO always runs the risk of being co-opted by those in power who can use its techniques to make people function within an oppressing system. Dwyer argues that the ruling class can easily incorporate TO and make it function within existing social structures. Therefore, TO practitioners need to understand how their practice functions within the system and they need to develop theory that grounds convincingly its radical potential. (p. 653)

Davis and O'Sullivan (2000) argue that Boal's theories and methods are based more on individual idealism than on politically motivated Marxism. Therefore, it becomes difficult to understand TO as a rehearsal for revolution, and can be better described as a way for individuals to learn to deal with their problems, through their imagination. A rehearsal for revolution becomes in Boal's (1995) words a "rehearsal for life", (p. 44) or as Mady Schutzman (1994) calls it "a rehearsal for healing." (p. 137) Further on in this thesis I will elaborate more on these criticisms on and changes of TO, and argue how they can help us to strengthen the political significance of TO.

Regardless of the criticism, Augusto Boal made a huge impact on the world of theatre and beyond. His Theatre of the Oppressed is revolutionary in many ways. More than forty years after the method has been described for the first time, they are still widely used. But over time, his methods have also raised more questions, problems, and criticism.

People face new difficulties and oppressions compared to the years Boal developed TO. At the same time, new theatre practices have been developed that inspire people to change their lives, and new theories have been formed that can help us to understand and change the world we now live in. A theatre practice that wants to have impact on the world, as TO ambitioned, should incorporate – or at least be aware of - these innovations in order to cater more effectively to its participants. We can name this new practice Participatory Theatre. It opens up the possibility for innovation without struggling with the question whether Boal would have approved it or not.

1.2 Participatory Theatre

In my interview with David Limaverde from PLEK he said that in his ideal world artist and art no longer exist as a separate sphere in life. He wants art to be a part of everyday life of everyone. In order to get there, he believes we first need to hijack the word artist and attach it to all participants in an artistic process.

In the *Applied Theatre Reader* Sheila Preston (2009) signals that participation is seen as an effective pedagogic tool, whilst it also would be the most ethical one. At the same time genuine participation is difficult to reach in the complex interplay between different agenda's, ideological interests and the power play among participants and other stakeholders of a project. (p. 127) Furthermore, the idea that participation always creates more democratic power-relations is often not validated. Participation can just as easily sustain existing hierarchies as it can help to change them. The skills of a facilitator to create a relationship with participants that truly enables them to develop their own interests and ownership over creative mediums is key to secure the democratic ideals of participation. (p. 129)

In this section I will describe some challenges that participatory theatre faces.

1.3 Participation

Majid Rahnema (2009) mentions that participation is supposed to support four functions.

- A cognitive function through which new intellectual and practical wisdom can be developed.
- A political function targeted to create an equal political situation.
- An instrumental function targeted to find new ways to deal with existing problems.
- A social function connected with the hope that participation would wipe out poverty in all its manifestations. (p. 143)

Rahnema problematizes the naive assumption that participation will always lead to these ideal outcomes. First of all, it is assumed in many participatory projects that an outsider - in our case the Joker- can go to a community and unproblematically start a collective process of development. The egalitarian sharing of knowledge within the community, guided by an outsider facilitator, is considered to be a simple formula for progress. (p. 144) However, both the outsider and the community carry their own knowledge systems, with their respective values, biases, and prejudices. The interaction between two different knowledge systems can lead to confusion, conflict and new structures that support inequality. Furthermore, the outsider can easily miss the existing ways in which those s/he assumes are powerless retain some forms of power. Outsiders who try to achieve forms of development bring their own ideas on what real power should consist of and can disrupt dangerously the existing ways in which oppressed deal with oppressors. (p. 144)

For Rahnema, the second problem with participation is that by itself it cannot help people who have no capabilities to relate in a healthy way to the world. If a person lacks a way to relate vividly and independently to the world, participation alone cannot restore the possibility for independence and power. Therefore, in situations of oppression that create distorted identities, participation in itself is not a solution to the problem. (p. 145)

To deal with the challenges of participation, Rahnema argues that we should firstly recover our

inner freedom, to listen, to share, and to learn together without judgments. In order to achieve meaningful change, participation should be an open quest in which genuinely free people interact. Participation can, therefore, not be part of macro changes planned from above, since planned development hinders free interaction. Possible macro changes through participation can only occur as a result of millions of individual changes. (p. 146)

For Rahnema, real participation should be defined by such qualities as attention, sensitivity, compassion and should be supported by skills such as listening and bottom-up learning. These qualities cannot be co-opted by those in power and can help people to develop their potential for inner transformation. (p. 147) These ideas of Rahnema remarkably resemble Boal's ideas on freeing the body and the mind from the oppressive systems we live in. Only after our work on the body and mind, according to Boal, our creativity and power can flourish.

As Philip Auslander (1994) points out in relation to Boal's work with image theatre, the idea that we can reach an independent position outside any ideological order, that is to say, a position to listen and to think truly freely, is problematic – if not downright impossible. In this thesis I will address this topic through a discussion on dialogue, to see in what ways we can deal with our own positionality and resultant biases.

1.3.1 Aesthetics

In her book *Artificial Hells* (2012) Claire Bishop argues that participatory art can be considered a means to resist our culture of spectacles, which creates a society of passive consumers. It can be regarded as a way to humanize society by making civilians politically active and by developing communities. (p. 11) According to Bishop, one of the main assumptions in participatory art is that it changes the relation between the active artist and the passive audience. (p. 7) This assumption is clearly recognizable in TO, where the spectator is invited on stage to become a spect-actor, joining the process of creating art live on stage. Boal considers opening up the artistic process to be the best way to make theatre a liberating and democratic force for positive change in society. Bishop argues - based on the thinking of Jacques Rancière - that the aesthetical products of art can unite artists and audiences in an arts activity, by creating a democratic space for discussion and dissensus. For Bishop, the real political power of art resides in this aesthetical and democratic space. I will briefly introduce Rancière's thinking, in order to productively explore how we can understand the relation between participation, art, and politics.

For Rancière (2006), aesthetics are that which is visible and sayable by and for humans; they determine what presents itself to sense experience. (p. 13) This makes aesthetics political because what is visible and sayable is subject to power play. Rancière favours those aesthetics that emphasize the singularity of an artwork. He calls this the aesthetical regime of art. This regime frees art from rules, hierarchies, and genres. Every piece of art has to be experienced for its unique sensible qualities. Rancière emphasizes that when we experience art, we experience its shapes, sounds, and colours for their own sensitive potential. (p. 24) This art is democratic since it gives everybody equal possibilities in experiencing and valuing it. Since we are all capable of this experience, a realm of dissensus is created in which everyone can contribute to the evaluation of the artwork. In this way art can inspire an equal political realm with space for discussion. (p. 43)

Both Rancière and Boal emphasize the political aspect of art, and the need to democratize it. For Rancière participation is situated in aesthetics, which activates the audience to become involved in the interpretation of an artwork. For Boal, the separation between artist and audience has to be removed by allowing the audience and non-artists to become active in the creative process.

In my view, Rancière and Bishop rightly point out the overly simplistic assumption of the separation between the active artist and the passive audience. Rancière's emphasis on the aesthetics helps us to broaden our perspective on the potential of theatre to activate its audience. I think, however, that their definition of the aesthetics in art that could bridge this separation is also limited, since they restrict the aesthetics to the experience of the sensible and exclude other ways to relate to art. Therefore, I will briefly describe how the aesthetics are understood by Boal and in a community art and applied art perspective to broaden this perspective.

Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston (2009) argue that the poetics of Applied Theatre is dependent on the targeted, or context specific, audience. Applied theatre aims to communicate with a specific audience through its aesthetics. (p. 9) While Rancière claims that art that is experienced solely for its sensible qualities becomes accessible universally, applied art uses aesthetics that relate to specific audiences by using aesthetics these audiences can relate to. Kuftinec (2003) describes the aesthetics in community performances as an interplay between recognizability and a Brechtian notion of estrangement.² These two functions of the aesthetic are created to fit with a specific community. Both functions can only be productive if the audience members take into account their experiences from everyday life and are able to relate them to the work of art. In his book *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, Boal (2006) describes the function of the aesthetics as a means to reveal hidden truths. We can explore the world through our senses and in this way examine and change our lives and the world we live in. This is the political power of aesthetics. (p. 36) For Boal, TO projects should focus on conditions in which the oppressed can use their senses and the political possibilities of the aesthetic. (p. 40) Boal emphasizes that the aesthetics should be created by and for a specific community, namely the participants of that certain TO project. In this sense aesthetics relate exclusively to specific communities.

These authors envision a certain kind of aesthetics that are focused specifically on a certain group. In PT projects, aimed at a specific community, context specific aesthetics can attract the audience to become active in their evaluation of the artwork. These audiences can relate to these aesthetics because the symbols, colours and sounds that are used relate to their real lives. Since the audience is addressed on their real life experiences, their values, ethics and ways to understand the world are also addressed. Rancière and Bishop argue that the aesthetics should be experienced independently from the background of the viewer and they are

² Bertolt Brecht was a German theatre playwright and theorist. For him, the audience of a theatre performance should remain aware that they are watching a theatre play in order to keep them critically reflecting on the choices of the characters and their own lives. Estrangement (*Verfremdung*) was one of the means to keep the audience present with the play. Estrangement involves the use of different techniques that break with existing theatre codes to remind the audience they are watching theatre.

skeptical towards art with ethical content since it obstructs the autonomy of art.

In my view, PT can enrich their understanding of participation by understanding that aesthetics can involve the audience in the political process of discussing and creating art. However, I do not follow Ranciere and Bishop in their argument for aesthetics that in no way relate to any ethical position. Aesthetics that relate to the real life of specific communities refer naturally to different values that exist in these communities. This does not obstruct the possibility of any free discussion of the work of art and its meaning for everyday life.

1.4 The Cultural Field

As we have seen PT is considered to be a way to activate people, and to change societal structures that create inequality. At the same time, according to Bishop (2012), art and creativity are more and more used by corporations and governments. Corporations recognize the potential of artists who work flexible, cheap, autonomously and creatively. These skills should help employees to adjust to our unpredictable and changing world and to benefit the profit of the companies. Governments use art to help people who do not fit in the society to develop as entrepreneurs. In a more negative tone, we can say this helps governments to get rid of their responsibilities to support 'difficult' persons. In Bishop's analysis we can see that participatory art can either be supported with the aim to influence society positively, or to help people to adjust to our complex world.

Belfour (2009) signals the influence of the organisations that provide grants on participatory theatre practices. Grants are only given to projects that support predefined individual changes and that promote the development of certain life skills. Facilitators of these projects are required to guide processes with predictable and measurable outcomes. (p. 353) Belfour argues that artistic practices in service of social policy tend to lose their artistic qualities and to start supporting the power structures they originally aimed to defy. Instead, Belfour argues for a 'theatre of little changes'. This creates, potentially, a space for a more playful relationship between practitioners and participants, and can shift the focus from objective-driven work to a greater emphasis on complexity and aesthetics. (p. 356) Furthermore, in order not to be co-opted by the system, Belfour urges artists to develop actively their own social and political orientation and to understand how their practices function within the context in which they work. (p. 357)

Bala and Albacan (2013) argue that cultural policy supports the values of participation, empowerment, and community but in such a way that they become politically ineffective and cannot be used to change societal structures. This radical potential is lost because applied theatre projects are most of the time only subsidized for a short period of time. Moreover, participatory theatre facilitators are forced to work as freelancers, so they are competing with each other and they tend to work in many different contexts to find projects that can support them financially. (p. 390) They also signal that the training of Jokers suffers under the same funding constraints. This results in courses that can only teach different TO techniques, but do not educate in the underlying ethics and theories that support these techniques. These short programs also lack time for students to engage deeper into any social issue. (p. 394)

Thus, Jokers work in a flexible and competitive cultural field, are trained to facilitate different

techniques in a short period of time, and enter communities as theatre experts, without much in-depth engagement with the community they hope to support. (p. 398) Bala and Albacan conclude that in this context theatre can only contribute short-term solutions to systemic problems. Boal's radical mission for a theatre that is a rehearsal for revolution thus becomes a luxury indefinitely postponed. (p. 399)

This postponement became clear in one of the meetings for this research. A Joker explained she has to work on six different projects, with six different topics, at the same time. In this situation it is not possible for her to understand all these topics in their complex social context. Moreover, it is impossible to develop these projects so that they have the capacity to influence society. She ends her statement by saying: "sometimes we should be happy with the possibilities that are there, the rest will come, eventually."

Ch.2 Research questions

All the Jokers who participated in this research recognized the difficulty of making TO practices that can effectively address the structural problems in society. In different degrees the Jokers already use other theatre methods as TO, to make their work fit with their aims. In this thesis I discuss the possibilities of different theatre methods for PT projects. Furthermore, through our collective research we develop new techniques that can support PT practices, in order to increase its activist potential.³ This collaborative research will focus on different aspects of PT, namely: dialogue, 'difficultate', participation, activism, therapy and alternative theatre practices related to TO. These aspects were selected by the members of PLEK, on the basis of interviews and group conversations.

The various authors I have introduced so far urge theatre practitioners to understand how their practices function within the context in which they work, and what theories can help to understand the effects of their practices. I will explore different theoretical frameworks and relate them to the newly developed techniques, to help the Jokers understand the activist possibilities of their work.

2.1.1 Main question

How can the members of PLEK develop their theatre practices to more effectively fit with their activist aims?

2.1.2 Sub-questions

- What PT techniques can help to increase the societal impact of PT?
- How can the members of PLEK use dialogue and the Boalian concept of difficultate in their theatre practice?
- How does individual empowerment relate to societal impact through PT?
- What theatre methods would help to improve PLEK's practices concerning their activist aims?
- What theories can support the practices of PLEK concerning their activist aims?

³ A note on terminology. For this thesis I make a distinction between theatre methods and techniques. A method is a collection of principles, techniques and structures with a significant coherence, such as TO or Playback Theatre. Techniques are skills that can be incorporated in different theatre methods, such as dialogue or performance structures. Participatory Theatre is a combination of methods and techniques based on participation.

2.1.3 Scientific relevance

This research contributes to the knowledge in the field of Participatory Theatre. Bala and Albacan (2013) point out that the role of the Joker is still not clearly defined (p. 399), This thesis will contribute to the academic debate concerning the role of Jokers in the field of PT. I have described that there is a lack of theoretical understanding of the societal impact of PT practices. With the exploration of new theatre techniques and by relating them to social theories, this research will help us to better understand how PT practices can have a societal impact. Finally, this research will include action research and playbuilding. Within academic research the value of these types of research is being debated and questioned. This research can give insight into the (im)possibilities of these types of research for data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

2.1.4 Social relevance

Participatory Theatre aims to contribute to a more democratic, inclusive and egalitarian society. By developing broader and deeper knowledge of its practices in this research I hope to contribute to the efficacy of Participatory Theatre and to increase its effects on society. Furthermore, through this research process I hope to contribute to the cooperation of Jokers involved, which could possibly help them to develop their own practices.

Ch. 3 Methodology

Together with PLEK we agreed that this research should contribute to their understanding of Participatory Theatre and should help them to develop their theatre practice with regard to their activist aims. In this research other Jokers will be involved to share their knowledge and to help to develop new PT practices. These goals resemble the ambitions of participatory action research (PAR). PAR uses democratic collective research methods to help people, communities and organizations with their development towards goals the participants set for themselves. PAR aims to integrate researchers and participants in such a way that both provide knowledge and action to bring about change. (Brydan Miller et al., 2003, p. 14)

3.1 Participatory Action Research

In PAR, theory and action are integrated to answer research questions. Researchers together with participants can integrate theory with the knowledge and actions of the participants to increase the understanding of the social practices in the field, and jointly develop ideas for change. (Brydan Miller et al., 2003, p. 16) As a researcher I will analyse and share literature during the process to develop a dialogue with the Jokers involved in PLEK. In this thesis, knowledge from the literature will be integrated with the data generated in the field, which will lead to new questions and insights that can be used in their theatre practice.

Although action research (AR) has a long tradition within the social sciences, it remains a disputed approach. Seen from a positivist view on science, AR does not generate scientifically valid knowledge since researchers influence their research 'objects'. AR critics claim this engagement cannot lead to objective and generalizable knowledge. Participatory action researchers accept that they don't generate objective knowledge, but argue that in the social sciences detached researchers, who produce value-free knowledge, do not exist at all. According to them, knowledge is always socially constructed and situated in a system of human interaction. (Brydan Miller et al., 2003, p. 11)

Checkland and Holwell (1998) claim that the validity of PAR is situated not so much in reproducibility, as is the case in natural science, but rather in 'recoverability'. Recoverability is achieved when outsiders can retrace the research and can make sense of the knowledge as interpreted by the researcher. In order to stimulate recoverability, researchers should be open about their theoretical and methodological framework. (p. 20) Furthermore, the validity of PAR increases because the participants of the research contribute to the generated knowledge and evaluate the change that it has caused in their reality. This cooperation makes it possible to test the created knowledge and action beyond the academic world. (Bryden et al., 2003, p.25)

To guard the validity and recoverability of this research I have included all collected data, shared documents and questionnaires in the appendix. Furthermore, I have done my utmost to guarantee a democratic collaborative research process. Throughout this thesis I describe how choices in topics and research methods were made in a democratic way. Furthermore, I try to let this research correspond to the PT practice I am researching. This can be seen below in the description of the research methods I have employed.

Matthew David (2002) points out that participation of the research population is not without problems. Participants are asked to contribute by setting the goals for the research and to share

the knowledge for solutions concerning the problems they face. However, the goals and knowledge can differ among participants and can even be contradictory between participants and researcher. Therefore, PAR researchers should not only be engaged but should take as much as possible the position of a neutral researcher who transcends these differences. (p. 15) Likewise, I had a special position while facilitating a democratic process and making sure it resulted in a valid and recoverable research product. This required collective decision-making and guarding the limits of this research. In all this, I have involved, through dialogue, the different participants as much as possible.

3.2 Research methods

PAR can include any scientific method to generate and analyse data. For this thesis the starting point of data collection is participatory observation. As an intern in PLEK I participated in their practice and organization and became familiar with the issues they face. During this period the members of PLEK also became acquainted with this style of research and were able to contribute to it. The basic principle of participatory observation is to immerse oneself in a cultural context and then remove oneself from the field in order to reflect on the experience. Participatory observation helps to gather first-hand information in a certain context and to understand the meaning of data. (Russell Bernhard, 2011, p. 344)

To get deeper into the aims, thoughts and methods of the different members of PLEK I used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow comparison between data from different interviews while retaining freedom for the interviewees to explore thoughts and topics that are important for them. (Russell Bernard, 2011, p. 212)

To develop the knowledge and practice of the members of PLEK we organized focus groups sessions. In these sessions, different Participatory Theatre practitioners discussed their work. Abma and Widdershoven (2006) argue that active participation of stakeholders in a dialogue helps to start a learning process. This can be the basis of new creative solutions and development in their practices. (p. 85) In these sessions I acted as facilitator and contributed theoretical knowledge. By allowing the participants of the interviews and the focus groups to react on the summaries I made, I increased the validity of this research.

Another important research device during the PLEK meetings was Playbuilding. Playbuilding is a method utilized to generate, analyse and disseminate scientific knowledge. This is done by creating, playing and discussing theatre scenes based on personal experiences. (Norris, 2017, p. 22) In this research, theatre practitioners used their own experience as facilitators to create theatre scenes. In these scenes they could jump into their role of facilitator and try out alternative actions, which helped them to analyse and evaluate their work. These scenes were filmed with the intention to be disseminated through a private YouTube account, which allowed further reflection and discussion. This method helps to examine closely the theatre practice of the participants.

According to Norris (2017) art-based approaches to research have certain advantages: they shape experience and enlarge understanding, give attention to complexity, and they increase the variety of questions that can be asked. (p. 20) Norris focuses on Playbuilding as a

research method in which the creation, the analysis and the dissemination of knowledge is integrated into one single moment. (p. 22) This allows for a more direct dialogue between participants who will learn from every new performance. (p. 59) These possibilities suit well within the framework of PAR. Furthermore, Playbuilding as a theatrical research method is appropriate because it addresses the artistic idiom of the participants.

After the focus groups the members of PLEK evaluated this research project and discussed what knowledge they gained from it and how it could affect their practices. In this evaluation session we used participatory mapping, a method to gain overview over a location. (Russell Bernard, 2011, p. 352) We used it to analyze how the members of PLEK locate themselves in the theatre field and how they have moved within it in the course of this research process.

A final remark on the validity of this thesis. According to Migchelbrink (2014) the triangulation of research methods increases the validity of research and will generate more diverse data. (p. 251) Triangulation of methods means that in a single research different research methods are used and that the data of these methods are combined within the analysis. The different methods used in this research therefore help us to increase its validity and to answer the research questions in a way that is productive for the participants of this research.

3.3 Reliability

In the Appendix I have included the interview- and focus group guides, interview transcripts, focus group summaries and the written essays used to stimulate discussion in focus groups. This transparency helps me to increase the reliability of this research.

3.4 Analysis

In line with PAR and playbuilding, the data collection and analyses will not be separate processes, but integrated and mutually influential. For this research, the collaborative analysis stopped after the evaluation of the whole project together with PLEK. At that point, I connected the data and analyses with my literature research so that I could present these findings in this thesis. I hope, however, that this project will become part of a continuing process of reflection and development of the practice of members of PLEK. By making the members of PLEK part of this research I hope to establish the basis for the continuation of this process.

Hennink, Hutter & Bailey (2010) describe the tasks of qualitative research analysis as follows: developing codes, description, comparison, categorization, conceptualization and theory development. These tasks are often done simultaneously. Based on one's research goal - which presupposes a certain level of analysis - some of these tasks are more prominent than other ones. (p. 237) For this thesis description, comparison and conceptualization have been the main focus of the analysis.

Hennink et al. (2010) further emphasize that the descriptions, which they call thick descriptions, require the data to be contextualized. (p. 238) For this research it is therefore important to reflect on PLEK as an organization and the context of their work, as well as describing the context of the meetings and participatory observations.

Hennink et al. describe how we can use comparison to identify patterns in the data. (p. 243) In this research, the comparison has both been conducted by me as a researcher and

cooperatively by the focus groups. We discussed important topics and questions identified during the focus group sessions. After these focus group sessions, I compared the different data gathered up to that point to identify differences and similarities between the members of PLEK and other Jokers.

Categorizing the data means we identify categories in a diverse set of data. This helps to conceptualize the data into larger theoretical structures and to understand underlying questions and problems. This process helps us to formulate the questions and issues PLEK is struggling with. This categorization has been the final level of analysis. During this phase, I was still connected to the members of PLEK but began to move away from their direct observations and thoughts. At this level of analysis it is possible to formulate suggestions and new questions to improve the practices of PLEK.

3.5 Ethics

As mentioned before, there can be differences in perspectives, methods and research goals among participants and between them and the researcher. If we keep the dialogue about the direction of this research and the methodology open, we decrease the chance that these conflicts damage internal relations or personal well-being. As a researcher I should also be careful to present my findings and analyses in such a way that they do not harm the other participants. (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001, p. 94) And as a PAR researcher I should be concerned not to present this research in such a way that it serves one person's interest above the interests of other participants involved. (David, 2002, p. 15) Because of these two reasons it remains again important that the presentation of my findings is done in a spirit of open dialogue with the participants.

Through playbuilding participants share personal stories. They are vulnerable because they use their own creativity and body to generate and to present their own stories. For a safe atmosphere it is important that participants are able to guard their own physical and emotional boundaries and can step in and out of an exercise on their own terms. This safe atmosphere will also increase the honesty of all participants and will allow for greater courage to enter the process as learners, which helps us to examine critically our beliefs and to change our lives. (Norris, 2017, p. 60) Furthermore the participants were able to influence the level of anonymity in this publication.

By recording video and post parts of this audiovisual footage in a closed online environment, participants became visible and audible during vulnerable moments. They were made aware of the recordings and at all times had the possibility of keeping the material offline or even have it permanently removed.

Ch. 4 Analysis

In the three meetings we organised the main question of the Jokers concerned the social and political impact of their work. On the basis of different social theories I will analyse the possibilities of PT in this respect. These theories are: Marxism, system theory, and ethics of care. In this analysis, I will use theoretical knowledge to describe the possibilities and impossibilities of Boal's theories and practices and I combine them with the information we gathered in our meetings and with my observations within PLEK. This will lead to suggestions for the Jokers to understand and to practice their work in different ways. In this analysis, I will discuss some new techniques we developed during our meetings. In the appendix I will add an example of how these theories and techniques can be understood in a Participatory Theatre project and a full list of possible techniques we have discussed. However, before I analyse the collected data, I want to describe briefly the potential of the method of research we developed.

4.1 Meetings

This research is a contribution to a dialogue between different Jokers based in the Netherlands and Belgium that has been going on for some time, and that will continue in the future. Although for this thesis we aimed to develop new knowledge on PT, we did not have the ambition to finish this research with a set of definitive answers. Rather, we hoped to develop some understanding of how Jokers can continue this research, to keep adjusting their work to new contexts.

What turned out to be productive was the use of Playbuilding in this research. All the Jokers involved recognized the potential of investigating their own practices through theatre. By creating images and actions that resemble their work, the Jokers felt activated and enabled to develop new perspectives on - and techniques for - their work. At the same time discussion and dialogue were always very much part of this process. With every theatrical intervention we did, a new discussion was created.

For Maike one of the most important aspects of the meetings was that individual practitioners or organizations formed a collective. The meetings helped, through dialogue and theatre, to create trust. She considers it as a very important part of PT that practitioners can learn together and support each other, instead of what she heard and experienced before when PT organizations considered each other to be competitors. When we take into account the critical description of Bala and Albacan (2013) of the PT field - based on short-term projects and competitive practitioners, in which Jokers tend to become each other's rivals - trust and mutual learning are crucial to develop broadly supported projects with a possible societal impact.

I hope this thesis inspires Jokers to continue their mutual research through theatre and dialogue. Finally, I hope this thesis will also make clear the need to understand their work and society theoretically, in order to create real change.

4.2 Theatre of the Oppressed and Marxism

To understand how Boal thought TO could change society, we have to understand its relation to Marxism, since this is the original ideology supporting TO. But, as Bishop (2012) points out, there have been opposing views about what kind of theatre is supposed to fit with Marxist ideology. These views are worth exploring here because they are still present in current debates on PT. Defenders of the communist *Proletkultur* argued that all theatre should be created by collectives, who as a unity would defend the communist ideology. However, Trotsky advocated a culture with a focus on creative freedom and self-education, which would help individuals to form a collective movement. (p. 52) This debate resembles on the one hand PT that urges a collective to create theatre, within the limits of liberal or progressive thinking, or on the other hand PT that tries to create a space for learning and empowerment. Dany Snyder Young (2011) described this dilemma in a classroom setting. There, students were offering solutions to the problem of bullying, but their solutions focused on boyfriends 'saving' their girlfriends tended to reinforce existing dependencies. On the one hand Young tried to raise consciousness about the problematic nature of their solutions, while at the same time she wanted her students for once to be free to express themselves. (p. 41) In this thesis this dilemma will recur in different forms.

Thus, within 'Marxist' theatre - as well as in PT in general - there can be different outcomes desired and different methods used. Because of these differences, my critique on TO from a Marxist position, and my suggestions to develop PT on a Marxist basis, should be seen as a possibility to develop a theatre practice that aims to change our material and social relations, not an absolute idea about what Marxist theatre should look like.

Davis and O'Sullivan (2000) point out some problems with the relation between Boal's theatre practices and Marxism. Marxists argue that personal identities are bound to material circumstances. Within a society this defines the conflict between the capital-owning class - the oppressors - and the working class - the oppressed. Only by changing the material conditions and the social relations this opposition can be challenged. But unlike Marxists, Davis and O'Sullivan argue that - particularly after his move to Europe - Boal does not relate his theatre practice to societal inequalities, but rather urges individuals to imagine different behaviour - or imagine a different future - to deal with their oppressors. They argue that Boal's practice is therefore idealistic and individualistic. (p. 291)

O'Sullivan (2001) explores the idealistic and Hegelian nature of Boal's theatre techniques further on. In Forum Theatre the audience shares ideas which are considered to be the force that change an oppressive situation. This sharing of ideas among the oppressed is done without a reference to the material relations outside the theatrical reality and does not acknowledge the interdependency between oppressors and oppressed. (p. 87)

Thus, the problem in Forum Theatre is, that individuals imagine solutions without acknowledging the (material) circumstances which underlie the problems they face. Furthermore, the oppressor in TO is only acted out on the basis of the *perception* by the oppressed. An imaginary intervention is then countered by an imaginary oppressor.⁴ The consequences in the real material world are not predictable in this way. O'Sullivan (2001)

⁴ To counter this problem the TO organization 'Combatants for Peace' involve both oppressed and oppressors in their projects. Further on I will discuss their main ideas and methods more thoroughly.

criticises Boal because he: 'leads the so-called masses with tentative ideas lacking philosophical rigour. Playing with people's lives, whilst not fully committed or even sensitive to the possible outcomes.' (p. 93)

Davis and O'Sullivan (2000) further argue that Boal's insistence on individual change - as he considers theatre to be a clash of free wills - also contradicts the Marxist principle that empowerment of the oppressed should be achieved through the collective empowerment of an entire oppressed segment in society (e.g. women, workers). Individual solutions, however, obscure structural problems. This can result in two problems: TO helps the oppressed to become oppressors of their own oppressors, by giving the oppressed ideas to fight against oppressors. The second risk is that TO only helps some individuals to adjust to a society that sustains oppressions. (p. 294) Thus for Marxists, rather than changing individual behaviour we need critical thinking to understand and detect within our society possibilities for change through a mutual struggle of the oppressed.

Although these criticisms on TO seem reasonable to me, they don't fully acknowledge the flexibility of the practice itself. In our PLEK meetings we spent most of our time trying out different ways to relate the personal to the larger societal context. In other words, we tried to relate a single oppression on stage to the structures in society that create these oppressions, and checked how PT could change these structures. These possibilities are not inherent to TO. Even Legislative Theatre - which inspires to change society on a concrete level by including politicians in Forum Theatre projects to change existing laws - does not possess inherently the qualities of critical thinking and mutual struggle which according to Marxist are necessary to change society. Therefore, these qualities should be explicitly provoked by the Joker or embedded in the performance.

In our first meeting, we developed a way to let the audience discuss on the structures in society that create oppressions. The Joker could ask audience to create an image of society by letting the audience members create images of people who are influencing the specific situation of oppression. In the forum we explored what could be done to change these interactions and to challenge the sources of these oppressions.

When we use this approach we must remain careful not to imagine the structures we are embedded in, but to stay as true as possible to the material reality. By training the actors in different characters who influence the situation we discuss, they can difficultate the interventions of the audience to make the effects more realistic. Furthermore, it is important that the Joker keeps checking with the audience whether this intervention is based on real life experiences, or not, or how it could work out in real life.

A problem for Forum Theatre from a Marxist perspective is that a focus on changing individual behaviour is considered most of the time as a way to avoid changing the structures of society themselves. From this perspective Forum Theatre can only have a real influence within a very limited range of possibilities. One of the possibilities that is left then, is a focus on the collective. In our second meeting we discussed many ways how we can achieve collective action. One of the most frequently recurring suggestions for having more societal impact was to cooperate with other organizations who can continue the process of the performance and who can unite

audience members in the fight for a cause. For Maïke this cooperation makes a project more activist because we then also influence people outside our own circle. However, we also discussed about the point that this approach can make genuine participation by the actors more difficult, because the project has to adjust to a new organization. Finally, the role and responsibility of a Joker in this process remains open for debate.

Not only through the Joker, but also in the performance itself we can address the structures of society. The 'joker system' developed by Boal and 'epic theatre' as developed by Brecht, offer the opportunity to include a more critical awareness on societal structures in the performance.

Both theatre structures, in different ways, constantly remind the audience that an actor is playing the character. Furthermore, both structures integrate the performance and the analysis of this performance. These are two ways to understand a character: not as an individual, but as a social being formed by its environment and by relating the performance to our own lives and the social context in which we live. In the appendix I include two more detailed descriptions of these theatre practices.

TO is usually based on a Stanislavskian realist acting style which helps the audience to empathize with the characters. The joker system and epic theatre can inspire a theatrical structure and acting style that helps the audience not to empathize but focus on the social and political environment of the characters.

4.3 Theatre for Living

Instead of a Marxist orientation, David Diamond (2007) uses Systems Theory as a foundation for TO, which he renamed as Theatre for Living (TL).

Systems theory considers the simple dichotomy used in TO - the clash between the oppressed and the oppressors - to be false. In Systems Theory, the reality is seen as a complex web of interactions, in which the oppressed and the oppressors are part of the same integrated network. Both the oppressed and the oppressor are partly present in all of us and in every group. The complexity of the system fills the relation between oppressor and oppressed with ambiguity. According to Diamond, only when we understand the complexity and artificiality of this dichotomy we can address the root causes of problematic social interactions. (p. 70)

Through the lens of the Systems Theory, groups and societies are seen as creative and flexible structures that form and change through communication and behaviour. Communication and behaviour are formed by actions and reactions - called feedback loops - that in constant interaction create the system we live in. (p. 49) When persons or groups are unable to speak up or unable to take equal positions, parts of the systems become unhealthy. (p. 19)

TL aims to create spaces where unhealthy patterns can be investigated. By allowing people and groups to speak up and find new ways of behaving, the feedback loops are changed and thus the whole system can be altered. (p. 46) What TL can do is to allow public participation and to create a change of behaviour. It cannot direct systems to a certain point since systems are created through many different impulses that cannot be controlled by a single group of people. The role of the Joker is to enable new voices to be heard and to create space for contesting voices. These disturbances create space for creativity, which can gradually affect rigid systems. (p. 17).

In our first two meetings, Kees stated clearly that he did not consider himself to be an

activist, because he did not want to change society in a certain direction. Furthermore, he said, we should not beforehand decide what kind of impact we want to have. His attitude seems closer to TL as well as to the Theatre of little changes as described by Balfour (2009), and as explained in the introduction of this thesis. Both Balfour and Diamond argue that theatre, or participatory projects, should free themselves from predetermined outcomes. Balfour furthermore believes this can free art from the limitations of social policy and can let the artistic potential of theatre flourish.

In Boal's vision on TO, only people who share the same oppressions can be part of a project and can replace the actors on stage. In contrast to this, David Diamond (2007) wants to address both the oppressed and the oppressor. To deal with the complexity of reality everybody can be part of the project and everybody is able to replace every actor in the performance. (p. 40) An interesting group that incorporates both oppressors and oppressed in their TO projects is Combatants for Peace (CP)⁵. Chen Alon, the artistic director of CP argues that: 'as a former oppressor, I believe passionately in the need for the oppressors to release themselves from their role.' (Chen Alon and Sonja Arsham Kuflinec, 2010, p. 85) Alon claims that by including the oppressed and the oppressors in a project both can be liberated and a genuine dialogue can be achieved. In the appendix I will come back to the CP method as a possibility to bridge the gap between oppressors and oppressed. Hereon I will describe different problems that can arise by including both oppressed as oppressors in a TO project.

In an analysis of a TL project, Catherine Graham (2000) noted that participants from the dominant culture felt more confident to express themselves than non-dominant groups. For instance, in exercises with physical contact men were more at ease to participate than women. To guarantee a safe space Diamond emphasizes that participants should be offered the possibility not to join in some exercises. However, Graham argues that this enforces the idea that a community is created by people who hold the same values and act in the same way as the dominant group. (p. 10) The choice not to join does not create safety but rather increases the distance between participants.

In a workshop Maïke and I facilitated in an asylum seekers camp during Ramadan, we focused on dance and music to deal with the language barrier. However, we lacked a decent preparation since we were not aware that Muslims are not allowed to make music or to dance during Ramadan. Although several Muslims enjoyed the exercises, one Muslim woman who joined the workshop felt very uneasy. She had to balance between staying with the group and not abandoning her values. If we offered her the opportunity not to participate, this would have only been partially beneficial, since it would have meant she could not continue with the workshop. This could reinforce the idea that Muslim women are not able to participate in cultural activities. Therefore, approaching this situation with sensitivity and patience to give space to differences seems to be more important than emphasizing autonomy and self-responsibility.

In Forum Theatre a similar problem occurs when people intervene on behalf of a character that belongs to a different group than themselves. Berenice Fisher (1994) problematizes the intervention of an audience member from a dominant group on behalf of an

⁵ Combatants for Peace is an Israeli-Palestinian theatre organization. In their theatre projects they include former combatants to create and inspire a peaceful co-existence of the Israeli and Palestinian people.

oppressed character, because existing oppressions are reproduced in this way. However, intervening for another group can also be helpful, she argues, to create mutual understanding between different groups. Moreover, in a complex world it is often the case that people can affiliate with a character on grounds that are not obvious at first sight. (p. 195). In order for this open form of replacing characters to be beneficial, the Joker should question the intervention together with the audience or should do a small group discussion before the intervention phase. (p. 196)

Working in a context where oppressors and oppressed are not clearly definable anymore also asks for different performance structures and rules in the forum. Mady Schutzman suggests to include a silent witness in a play which can belong to both the oppressed and the oppressors and who does not know how to align with the oppressed. (p. 144) Furthermore, in a pluralistic world TO should give precedence to ambiguity, for instance by placing multiple protagonists in any one scene, each experiencing mutual oppressions within a co-dependent power relation. (p. 149) In the appendix, I will come back to these suggestions for performance structures with a concrete example.

TL incorporates different groups in their projects, for instance groups who tend to oppress other ones or do not face clearly definable oppressions. Lib Spry (1994) points out that the middle class in the West does not always recognize the oppressions they face or how they could be oppressing others. They seem alienated from their own situation. (p. 173) Mady Schutzman (1994) argues that for western middle-class participants TO becomes a perspective of oppressors on themselves. They learn what the power of oppressors is and how they can overcome their own biases as oppressors. (p. 143)

This situation became very evident in a Forum Theatre project of PLEK in which I was involved. In the process of creating scenes and sharing stories about oppression almost all participants - mostly white middle-class males - found it hard to come up with structural oppressions. Therefore, we focused on several stories brought in by a female participant. But, while creating the scenes for this forum play, the woman left our group for the moment, and we found ourselves in the strange situation that we as men were creating scenes, based on our imagination how men often oppress women (not on our own experiences of course). Finally, when we rehearsed the performance with a woman who joined the group just before the performance, she had to deal on stage with all situations of oppression we created. Although in this process the oppressed themselves were not discussing and staging their own problems, still we seemed to succeed in addressing the oppressions women face, while we were also being confronted with our position as oppressors. This confrontation with ourselves as oppressors happened both in the theatre performance itself and in the process of creating and performing this play. If a process like this is to result in changing oppressive relations, its participants need to reflect on themselves constantly.

In his latest book *Aesthetics of the Oppressed* Boal reacts to TO practices that incorporate oppressors in their projects by arguing that societies advance by means of conflicting structures - the conflict between oppressed and oppressors-. Therefore, we should align ourselves with the oppressed or otherwise we become part of the system that oppresses others. Boal recognizes that some oppressors can be changed - the ones that oppress unconsciously -, but emphasizes that most oppressors should be fought against. When we are working with oppressors - whether

in prisons, in politics or in corporate companies - we must take great care not to become their accomplices. (p. 7)

In our meetings at PLEK we discussed how Participatory Theatre could cooperate with dominating institutions, like corporations or welfare organisations. Advantages of working with these institutions are financial support and the possibility to influence the way in which these institutions function and shape the world. It is, however, difficult to create a safe environment if participants from such organizations face the risk of being fired for speaking up.

One concrete example was a project in Ede with a welfare organization. The management asked for workshops to discuss the power relations between employees and clients who receive welfare. In the workshops it turned out that the biggest problem employees experienced with power dynamics was located in the relation between them and the managers. The project, therefore, focused on this relation and not on the relation between the employees and their clients. In this way the project was able to benefit the employees. Since clients were not involved in the process, it remains, a question whether clients indeed are not concerned about their relation with the employees. This example shows how Participatory Theatre enables participants to become conscious of the power relations they are involved in - also in less safe situations -, but shows also that, depending on who the participants are, a certain oppression is probably more highlighted than an other one.

Another criticism on these forms of PT is given by Jonathan Neeland (2007), who argues that contemporary applied theatre makers are turning away from the original ideal of equality in favour of individual and cultural therapy -, which he calls an idealistic politics of identity. (p. 308). Identity politics asserts that a lack of respect from society leads to negative self-images in a group, which are internalised by its individual members. To counter this, these groups should create their own self-representations collectively and display them in the public sphere. This should lead to healthy individual- and cultural identities. This description of fighting against unhealthy identities resemble almost one on one the ambition of TL. Neeland criticises this approach because a set of empowering images will not address or change the social and economic structures that create the problems in the first place. (p. 310)

Instead of focusing on 'culturalism' Neeland urges theatre makers to create equality of participation in the public sphere. Theatre should inspire participants to engage in a collective struggle to fight against existing injustice. Taking the ensemble - rather than the individual - as the focus of the theatre practice corresponds to the ideals of social dialogue and equality, and is thus a better way to change social inequalities and injustice. (p. 315)

In the Kuringa TO festival in Berlin, a Polish group presented a scene in which a gay couple was not helped by a doctor because of his religious background. We started to work on this scene to find ways to make it less focused on this individual oppression and more on a societal problem. Therefore, we added an additional doctor who - also on religious grounds - refused to give a woman a morning-after pill. In this way the performance could show how a certain oppression is created by bigger societal structures. In the end of the scene the woman went to the same doctor as the gay couple. There she saw how they were denied their right on medical treatment. By joining these characters in the same waiting room, it became a possibility to join forces in claiming their rights. In this way the structure of the play can envision the ensemble - as a group of diverse people standing up for each other - and can counter an overtly

individualistic world and theatre practice.

Systems theory offers a perspective to work against oppression in a complex world and with audiences not consciously affected by these oppressions. The risks of working in this way are that we stop fighting against oppression by allowing different parties to participate and that we focus too much on imagined solutions when people who intervene do not actually understand the situations they are intervening in. Finally, it is not evident that people will fight someone else's struggle. The ethics of care can help us in this last respect.

4.4 Citizenship

As a counterbalance against our individualistic society Helen Nicholson (2014) advocates active citizenship and theatre practices that support this vision on citizenship. She considers citizenship not as a legal right - which emphasises the individual over the social and therefore contributes to inequality - but as a social practice. (p. 27) These practices consist of civic responsibility, political participation, and more domestic practices such as care and community support. (p. 29)

For Nicholson, citizens should be active in the realm of politics. Nicholson follows Mouffe in her description of politics as a site of antagonistic struggle. According to Mouffe, a person builds her identity through identification with and differentiation from other people and communities. Nicholson considers theatre as a space for participants to extend their horizon of experience, trying new identities by playing new roles, while it is also a space that enables public visibility and political protest. (p. 29)

Nicholson also advocates citizens who care for others and who are closely related to their environments. Although Nicholson does not clearly separate a citizenship based on community and care from a citizenship based on critical participation in the public sphere, I will do this since theatre practices that support either of these two types of citizenship also function differently. First, I will examine more closely the notion of a caring citizen using the ethics of care.

4.4.1 Ethics of Care

Nel Noddings (1984) argues that someone cares if they can see the other's reality as a possibility for oneself. (p. 14) Caring resides both in understanding the other people's reality and in acting in such a way that the reality of other people can be improved, for example by the removal of their pain or by the actualization of their dreams. Nodding relates care to creativity. Both creativity and caring are primarily based on activity. Furthermore, care and creativity struggle with the request for objective evaluation. For Nodding, care is made meaningful by the underlying attitude of receptivity, which cannot be measured. (p. 17)

Fabienne Brugere (2014) places the ethics of care against the neoliberal concept of the autonomous, calculating and selfish individual. In the neoliberal system, care becomes a process that should manufacture competent individuals for the labour market. Care is absorbed by market values that dictate the complete mobilization of humanity in the labour market in the service of capitalism. The ethics of care, however, relates care to vulnerability and dependency. Instead of autonomous individuals, we are all considered to depend on the care we receive from - and give to - others. (p. 75)

So far we have seen how the ethics of care depends on people who are intrinsically

motivated to care for others. If care is evaluated too much on the basis of measured change, then its real meaningfulness is lost. For now, I want to point out the similarity between the ethics of care - that flourishes when the focus of objective measurement is loosened up - and my analysis of Systems Theory and Balfour's Theatre of Little Changes. These ideas on change differ clearly from Boal's and Brecht's marxist oriented theatre with their explicit ambitions to change society with more clear results.

Van Heijst (2008) indicates that the ethics of care developed out of feminist theory to counter the ethics of justice - which was considered to be based on male dominance - and to gain more recognition for caring activities. According to Van Heijst, Joan Tronto reconciled justice and care by showing that caring relationships are always embedded in power relations and based on structures of (un)justice. Some groups or people always profit more from the care they receive. For instance, men mostly benefit more from care that women provide than vice versa. (p. 12)

The inequality of caring relations is described in another way by Noddings (1984). People feel urged to care for some persons and not for others. This division between those who are cared for and those who are not, is both created by personal preferences as well as by cultural structures. According to Noddings, we can develop an ethical-self which is open to care for everyone, not as an actuality but as a possibility. (p. 18) This means that although we are not able to care for everybody practically, we can develop our caring attitude towards everybody. I will examine, further on, how theatre can contribute to developing this ethical-self, as Noddings calls it.

The ethics of care also relates to the public sphere. In our world the masculine voice of autonomy is very prominent, while interdependence and care are often invisible. The ethics of care tries to democratize society by claiming equality of voices in the public sphere. The ethics of care creates a pluriform public sphere in which different voices can be heard, in order to become attentive to specific others. (Burgere, 2014, p. 87) We can start to see that the ethics of care, as Van Heijst (2008) argues, is not only relevant on a personal level but also helps to develop just and caring relations in the public and in the professional life. (p. 17) But how is this developed by actual practices?

Irene Mingol (2013) indicates that women for a long time have participated in informal politics and in the civil society. A caring attitude leads many women to participate in environmental, pacifist and democratization movements. (p. 408) Mingol wants to develop care in the public sphere in order to shape a new participatory citizenship in which care is recognized. To develop this citizenship three processes are needed. Firstly, the conception of the relational subject should be acknowledged. The liberal notion of autonomy and abstract moral principles, which create citizens who are alienated from each other, their work and their environment, should be enriched with a language and a value system that incorporates relational values such as interdependence. Secondly, caring citizenship requires motivation. Motivation increases when we are concerned for the well-being of others and with the recognition that we have the capacity to be agents of change. Finally, citizenship is not only a passive right; it should also imply action. As a citizen we should develop our attentiveness for other people's needs, assume responsibility, and carry out caring actions. (p. 411)

Participatory Theatre can contribute to all three processes as described by Mingol. First of all characters in theatre plays can be shown in a vulnerable and interdependent situation. If we understand how people are affected by their close environment and the structures of the society they live in, we increase our understanding of people as relational beings. A danger exists in Forum Theatre when the emphasis is put too much on members of the audience who show smart solutions for a protagonist to deal with their situation, since individual solutions make it seem that everyone is able to live autonomously and do not address the relational aspect of every situation.

Motivation - the second process Mingol described - relates directly to alienation. Motivation can be increased if we let audience members sympathize with the struggling protagonist and by allowing them to change their situation. A similar case was made by Adrian Jackson (2009) when he indicated that members of the audience should feel them invited when they are provoked and seduced by the aesthetics of a Forum Play. Members of the audience should be provoked - in the sense that they want to oppose the injustice showed- and be seduced by the quality of the show, so that they wish to intervene. If this is the case, Forum Theatre gives the members of the audience the opportunity to change the situation actually. (p. 45)

Thirdly, citizenship should be understood not only as a right but also as a responsibility. Theatre should make us aware that we are part of the system that creates inequality and injustice. The audience should, therefore, be addressed on their responsibility and their possibility for action, otherwise they will remain ineffective. Again the words of Adrian Jackson (2009) seem relevant, namely that this should be done by seduction and not by ordering people to intervene on stage or in real life. Coercing people to act will not only prove to be unproductive but also contradicts the ethics of Participatory Theatre itself.

On a theoretical level, we can see how the ethics of care stimulates theatre practices to focus more on the relational level and less on autonomy. For instance, in Forum Theatre the focus could be more on characters supporting the protagonist, than on allowing members of the audience to show the protagonist how s/he can do it her/himself. What are more concrete elements to increase a caring attitude through PT projects?

4.4.2 Playback Theatre, Dialogue and the Ethics of Care

In order to create this caring attitude we need to relate to others. Playback Theatre as developed by Jonathan Fox is a valuable method to strengthen relational bonds. Playback theatre allows people to share personal stories, which are on the spot turned into theatrical performances. For Jonathan Fox (2007) the power of Playback Theatre is the atmosphere of generosity that is created by allowing people to share their story, to give it back through the theatrical performance, while the audience contributes by deep listening. This is the dialogue Playback Theatre can create, and through this may arise a sense of community.

For Linda Park-Fuller (2003) Playback Theatre can contribute to a greater feeling of connectedness. A shared feeling of humanity can help to articulate personal values and to relate to other people's lives. The dialogical activity of sharing of and listening to stories stimulates empathy and creates actor-citizens who feel responsible for the community. In this sense, Playback Theatre is a form of activism that can create a world in which people

understand each other better. (p. 304)

Unlike Forum Theatre, Playback Theatre does not allow members of the audience to change a story or to advise the participants how problems could be solved. The only dialogue which is possible, is the interaction between the sharing of and the playing out of stories. Since the ethics of care is focused on action, we therefore also need to consider what other types of dialogue are possible to make a Participatory Theatre practice able to lead to concrete results. To this end I will use the description of a dialogue, as a method of communication to understand each other, by David Bohm.

Bohm (1996) indicates that in a dialogue we create meaning collectively. We do this by trying to grasp the meaning of each other's words and to understand the world in which the other is living. In this act of moving towards the other we have to give up some of our own beliefs because these beliefs make it hard to listen to and to connect to beliefs of other persons. Giving up on our own beliefs is not a choice we can easily make. What we can do is to become conscious of our beliefs. With this consciousness we can see how they stop us from understanding the other, and then we can handle them more freely. (p. 5)

A dialogue starts with our openness towards each other. In a dialogue we create something we both believe in, it is interactive creation of meaning. A dialogue, therefore, creates a community; it creates a shared meaning that holds societies together. (p. 7) If a theatre process or performance can incorporate these kinds of dialogue it allows us to connect to and understand others. If we want to create relationships of care we need to develop this understanding.

Playback Theatre and dialogue strengthen many values embedded in the ethics of care, such as listening, openness, and sensitivity. According to Rahnama (2009) real participation should also be defined by these qualities since they cannot be co-opted by those in power and should help people to develop their potential for inner transformation. (p. 147) A genuine participatory project therefore enables the development of these values. In the appendix I will include an example to describe how PT can incorporate these values concretely, in order to create a process based on this caring attitude.

4.4.3 Participation in the public sphere

So far, we have focused on a form of citizenship that involves caring relations. I argue that between caring and critical citizenship, as described by Nicholson, there is a partial difference. For Nicholson (2014) a pluralistic public sphere allows alternative voices to be heard equally. In our contemporary global and complex world we need to deal with many different voices, identities, and cultures. Therefore, it is necessary for artistic practices to deal with differences, next to supporting the ensemble. (p. 33) Caring citizenship focuses on developing social relations in a pluralistic public sphere, while critical citizenship considers the public sphere as a site for antagonistic struggle. Therefore the attitude of these two types of citizens is quite different.

The difference between debate and community can be translated to Boal's techniques of difficultate and dialogue. We can understand these concepts better if we don't consider them to be opposites, but rather as two perspectives which both can be necessary and which create

different results. In other words, both are needed in a project to enable critical thinking and, understanding, and to create a feeling of community.

Through dialogue we are able to gain insight in our own and other people's perspectives and to create understanding between people and groups. It relates, therefore, more to a caring attitude. Difficultating, however, is needed to examine critically the intervention of participants in a situation or to contribute to a discussion. Furthermore, it gives the opportunity to the Joker to create a balanced debate by supporting or critically examining certain arguments. If a debate is dominated by a particular group, difficultating can help the audience to position themselves better in a public sphere of oppositions.

4.5 Personal change

So far I have discussed how Participatory Theatre can relate to its marxist origins by focusing on societal structures and how the practice of TO can be reshaped when they are founded upon Systems Theory. After that, I related Participatory Theatre to two different kinds of citizenship that inspire change in the society. Finally, I want to focus on the impact Participatory Theatre can have on the personal level and how this relates to changing the society. As Sandra explained in our second meeting, a TO process can have therapeutic effects on its participants, since in TO “everybody becomes their own therapist.”

Boal (1995) developed the Rainbow of Desire method in Europe, where he encountered the middle classes who internalised their oppressions. The Rainbow of Desire aims at removing these blockades that stop people from changing their lives in a positive way. Thus, as Boal says, TO became therapeutic. (p. 15)

According to Boal, the therapeutic possibility of theatre resides in the aesthetic space that theatre provides. The aesthetic space offers actors a place both to reflect on and relive their lives, while at the same time they remain the subject who is reliving his/her life. In other words, an actor is both the one actively reliving and the person who is being re-lived. This dichotomy creates space to dynamise ourselves and to remove blockades that withhold us from acting. (p. 37)

For Boal, this emphasis on the individual does not deny the possibility of societal change. Firstly he states that every action or social cell contains larger values, systems, and oppressions. (p. 42) In every individual case we can detect larger structures of the society. Secondly, the TO method needs a group that shares an oppression. In TO we start from one account, and then we pluralize it to the group, so that the case can be explored by all participants. (p. 45) This gives the whole group ownership over each case. These two principles allow TO to show the connection between individual problems and societal oppressions. Solving these individual problems can create a movement that changes the societal oppressions at large.

Although Boal distances himself from Moreno's psychodrama, there are some striking similarities, as Daniel Feldhendler (1994) points out. Both Moreno and Boal argue that the therapeutic possibilities of theatre reside in the distance the actors take from their own stories. Theatre creates an as-if space that allows us to play and thus investigate and alter our own experiences and behaviour. Feldhendler relates this to the theory of psychoanalyst Winnicott,

who claimed that play happens in the space between the imagination and the reality. The as-if character of spontaneous play reduces cognitive control and barriers and thus widens the possibilities for action. (p. 97)

Moreno argues for the way in which psychodrama offers a place to test actions for real life, which then can be transferred to real-life, to the community, and into larger social structures. Therapy, therefore, can lead to a therapeutic world order, which enables satisfying relations. (Feldhendler, p. 99). Boal uses the same reasoning to show the possibilities of the Rainbow of Desire to change society. In the appendix, I will include a list of practices from psychodrama, which can possibly inspire PT projects focused on the participating individuals.

Eva Osterlind (2008) explores how TO can help individuals to change their lives. She does this on the basis of the concept 'habitus' as described by Bourdieu. A habitus is located in traditions and lifestyles that are internalised in the mind and inscribed in the body. A habitus is an unconscious framework that controls how we perceive the world formed through personal experiences and social structures. We try unconsciously to maintain this framework by ignoring all aspects of life that could be in conflict with the ideas and routines incorporated in it. Therefore, this framework makes us maintain the status quo, both on a personal and a social level. (p. 73)

Osterlind describes why TO can be interesting to support positive change in the habitus of a participant. Firstly, TO reveals unconscious aspects of our life by making visible our body language, inner dialogues, and social practices. The aspects of our habitus that are usually not perceived consciously, become present to us and available for change. Boal aims to dynamize our internalized blockades. (p. 74) Furthermore, Bourdieu considers it important for real personal change that we take into account how our problems relate to societal structures. According to Osterlind, TO can help participants to see and understand this connection. (p. 75)

TO has the potential to make social structures, hierarchies, power relations and personal habitus visible, allowing an integrated approach to simultaneous work on individual, group, and social levels and at the same time provide tools to prepare change, which involves body, feelings and thoughts, and are quite close to action. TO has the potential to promote change. (p. 80)

Thus, Osterlind argues that TO is a method that can possibly support change since it helps us to become conscious of our everyday patterns and relate these to the society. However, she emphasizes that it is up to the Joker to connect the body and the mind, and the individual and political, to make a TO process actually change our routines.

Osterlind explains that for Bourdieu change occurs only as a result of extraordinary circumstances, and is therefore hard to achieve by personal efforts. To promote change we thus need an impulse to change our patterns, and a supportive environment to practice new actions. What we need eventually, according to Osterlind, is the courage to break the rules. (p. 78.) In this last remark of Osterlind I recognize the language of Boal, whose personal slogan is 'have the courage to be happy'. (Boal, 2013) However, if a habitus is only changed in extraordinary circumstances, I think it is not enough for social change to depend on people who are

courageous. The language Boal and Osterlind tend to use suggests that change does become a personal choice, depending on courage, and this obscures the influence of our social environment on our lives.

The hope that individuals can eventually free themselves is an assumption we encounter more often in TO. Paul Dwyer (2007) examines how Boal's vision on the relation between therapy and theatre rests on the concepts of Freud and Stanislavski. TO tries to help participants to examine and to free different roles that are hidden in their unconscious self. Boal indicates that people suppress their possibilities, because of social restriction and individual choices. Freud suggests that the unconscious can only be addressed through a long process of psychotherapy, and Stanislavski indicates that actors can only play out characters buried within them, based on experiences they had in their lives. (p. 6) Dealing with social restrictions and individual choices - as does Boal - would according to them be not enough to create consciousness of our internal blockades.

Dwyer thinks that TO would be more promising if it would not relate to Freudian premises, but to therapy based on Systems Theory. Instead of focusing on inner selves, this kind of therapy urges its participants to examine the wider social network they are engaged in, because problems are not of an individual kind but are created by interactions in social networks. (p. 7) For Dwyer, TO should deal less with the individual unconscious and more with the social environment of participants.

For TO this means that the methods and questions the Joker uses to explore the lives of participants should focus more on the networks of the participants than on their inner experiences. She should not choose a side but constantly remain interested in exploring, together with the participants, all perspectives of people involved in the situations that are described. The Joker and the group should mostly be interested in the question how the system works, rather than focusing exclusively on the experience of one participant.

One of the problems of this approach is that victims of oppression could feel they are to blame for the situation they are in since their story is considered to be of equal value as the story of an oppressor. This problem reoccurs in different kinds of TO projects when the oppressed are asked to think of other ways to deal with their oppression. In our very first PLEK meeting, we encountered this problem when we worked on a scene in which a woman was beaten by her husband. Ana felt this as if we were making the woman responsible for being beaten. In this meeting we explored ways to deal with the problem of blaming the victim. Maike suggested that the Joker could ask the audience to connect this oppression with structures in society. By exploring together how these oppressions are created in society, and how sometimes the oppressors themselves can be stuck in their role too, we were able to understand the situation of the woman, offer solutions to her, while not making her responsible for the situation she is in.

By staying neutral towards a certain oppression and by focusing on the network around somebody who is oppressed, we risk neglecting the feelings of the victim. At the same time, our focus on this network provides more opportunities to empower somebody to deal with their problems.

Through the Rainbow of Desire participants are given the possibility to change their lives by dynamizing certain blockades they internalized in their minds. For Boal this is a process that relates to society at large because for him the structures of society are inscribed in personal

situations. Eva Osterlind explains the possibilities of TO to change our lives by showing how Boal's theories and methods relate to the concept 'habitus' of Bourdieu. TO can change our personal routines by focusing on unconscious patterns and relating our lives to society at large. Paul Dwyer is critical about the relation between TO and psychoanalytic principles since Boal tends to overemphasize the possibilities of TO to change unconscious structures. For Dwyer, TO has more potential to create personal change if it is based on Systems Theory and focusses on the social environment of any individual. One thing that all these authors share is that they consider TO only effective to change our lives if the Joker stays conscious of the broader societal structures that influence personal oppressions. In this way personal change will also affect broader social structures.

Ch. 5 Conclusion

The main question that this thesis tries to answer is: How can the members of PLEK develop their theatre practices to fit with their activist aims? This question has been collaboratively researched with other Jokers through dialogue and theatre. On the basis of this research process, Jokers can continue to develop their theatre practice through theatrical dialogue, thereby enriching their understanding of the impact these practices can have on society and participants.

I have put the knowledge generated in these meetings in contact with different social theories to better understand the impact participatory theatre can in theory have on society. This thesis is a start to incorporate a more theoretical foundation into this practice, which should be developed more thoroughly by the Jokers and further research.

Firstly, I described how TO relates to Marxist Theory, and how it can be further developed to correspond more to Marxist principles, by focusing on a collective struggle that is constantly related to the real world. This can be done by cooperating with other organizations and by creating performance structures that help the public to understand the character as a social being formed by its environment while at the same time urging the audience to relate the play to their own lives. Then I explored how Systems Theory, the Ethics of Care and a more therapeutic focus can inspire Participatory Theatre practices to achieve social impact. Systems Theory allows Participatory Theatre to relate a complex world by incorporating more ambiguous relations of inequality in its projects and performances. The Ethics of Care focuses on a theatre practice that enables participants to relate to each other and to care for people in oppressed situations. In this perspective the focus of Participatory Theatre moves away from fighting unequal relations towards a focus on creating understanding between people and groups and to facilitate a genuine dialogue and discussion in the public sphere. Therapeutic theatre can empower individuals to understand and change their own unhealthy patterns. Investigating these patterns in their relation to societal structures helps individuals to change these structures in society.

I have discussed the possibilities and the inabilities to change social inequalities of theatre practices based on these theories. Based on the specific problem that a project addresses, a different social theory may prove to be relevant, and thus a different theatre practice is required. Therefore, in this thesis I do not argue for one of these theories as a foundation for PT practices, but argue that a Joker, depending on the situation, can shift the focus in a Participatory Theatre project.

The members of PLEK can develop the activist aims of their theatre practices by continuing their dialogue through words, theory, and participatory theatre, based on their own theatre practices. Essential in this dialogue is their understanding of the society, and how they envision change to happen.

The effects of theatre on society are created in those places where the theatre practice can add something new. In other words, theatre that brings care to a careless place, theatre that connects groups that are separated, or theatre that involves those who are excluded, could possibly create change in their own way. The situation we work in, the theatre practice we use, and our ideas to bring about change, are all dependent on each other. By developing our

practice and the philosophy we build it on, we are better able to articulate the kind of change we want to achieve. But what eventually will be changed will always remain uncertain. We will never know for sure beforehand and even afterwards, what kind of change a theatre process achieved. What unites all theories discussed so far, is, that change in society cannot be forced, but ultimately depends on those who are participating.

Ch. 6 Discussion

This research has explored different ways to develop participatory theatre practices. This exploration happened through dialogue, theatre, and literature. Although on all these levels knowledge was created, how this knowledge development can be improved requires further research.

In the meetings we tried out different ways to use theatre and dialogue to share and develop knowledge. New research could help us to see how theatre and dialogue can best be used to strengthen the learning process within PLEK, and among Jokers in general. This new research could introduce different forms of dialogue and theatre, to analyse how this learning process succeeds in developing new practices and knowledge.

One of the problems I encountered in this thesis is the difficulty of creating a continuous conversation between the Jokers. My first idea to establish a YouTube channel failed because a participant was opposed to placing video material online. Secondly, the interactive documents I created in which the Jokers could continue the discussion online were not used. Furthermore, I only briefly described the positive evaluation of the Joker's of using theatre in the research process. For these reasons more research to enhance the collaborative research among the Jokers is needed which can also benefit the scientific knowledge on the merits of Playbuilding and Action Research as research methods.

In this thesis I have introduced different social theories that can be relevant for participatory theatre practices. All of these theories deserve more research to understand how they can influence participatory theatre practices. There are also many other social theories that could inspire different participatory theatre projects, which could also be the subject matter of a similar research. Further investigation of the relation between PT and one of these social theories could provide more accurate knowledge and practices.

Finally, in this research I did not empirically investigate actual PT practices on their social impact. All knowledge and practices that have been developed so far, in their relation to a social theory, have to be further investigated on concrete results in actual PT projects. However, empirical research on the effects of PT runs the risk, as Balfour (2009) mentions, to measure PT on predefined individual effects and to lose the artistic, complex qualities of PT and its ambition to influence the structures of society.

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Appendix

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Example

So far I have described how different social and ethical theories can support the practices of Participatory Theatre and suggested how different techniques we spoke about in our meeting can fit with those theories and PT. To conclude this analysis I will use a concrete example to show how these different theories and techniques can change a project. I will use the project of Hanne and Olivier, which we discussed in meeting three, as an example.

For the project of Hanne and Olivier in sixty high schools a participatory theatre performance will be performed. The two main characters of the play are a male refugee and a school girl, both 17 years old. They meet by accident in the street and after the meeting she decides to do a school project on the topic of refugees. When she tells her class about her topic this leads to aggressive debates. At the end of the play the refugee is told that next week he has to change to another asylum centre, and thus will lose all his friends in Belgium. He asks the girl for help. She, however, was supposed to go to Amsterdam with a friend, who is opposed to refugees in Belgium. The girl, therefore, has to choose between friendship and politics.

We discussed, through dialogue and theatre, three different but related questions concerning this project. First, how can the forum play relate to and have impact on the political and social level. The second question concerned the relation between audience and actors and in what way they should relate to each other. The third question concerned in what way theatre should relate to or intervene in a polarized situation.

Change the Society

The first question concerned the question how we can let the project be of influence on the macro structures of the society - the political and social structures- that create these oppressions. As Hanne notes in the third meeting, changing the macro level seems difficult when we only show and influence individual choices and behaviour. My first attempt to answer this question will be from a Marxist perspective.

Maike goes to the essence of the Marxist approach when she says we should not focus too much on individual smart solutions because this does not stop the oppressions. It only allows smart people to find a way to deal with oppressions. Instead, it is up to the Joker, she argues, to keep on emphasizing - or helping the audience to find out - how these individual situations are related to social structures in society that create these problems. These techniques require either a lot of knowledge from the Joker or techniques to facilitate and difficultate the dialogue in order for the audience to share their knowledge.

Not only through the Joker society can be addressed but also in the performance itself. Concerning this performance of Hanne and Olivier we discussed that video fragments of debates on refugees could show the audience how this debate is part of our whole society. It is possible to take position as theatre maker by selecting fragments and showing facts on the situation of refugees. Marxists and Boal argue that we should not try to remain neutral but that we have to choose the side of the oppressed. I will discuss further on how this fuels existing polarization.

Finally, a series of performances can connect to a larger project that deals with this issue. For instance, Sandra suggests that a shared platform could contribute to help participants stay engaged as a collective. After a project or performance, participants can feel engaged and

connected to continue but have no place to become active. This platform could entail both physical and virtual activities, used to inform people and to enable them to create their own initiatives.

For whom do we play?

The second question we discussed concerned the relation between audience and actors. I relate this question to the system theory and David Diamond's Theatre for Living. Forum theatre based on this theory can change the structure of the forum- by allowing everyone replace every character- and the structure of the performance - for instance by using two protagonists or adding the character of silent witness.

In the play of Hanne and Olivier this has been one of the main points for our discussions. How can we make a play on the topic of refugees relate to a high school audience? They argue that by making the protagonist a high school student the audience can relate to her life and problems. In this way the audience can relate to the refugee topic by means of the protagonist. However, by making a student the protagonist, the focus on the situation of refugees is somewhat downplayed. Furthermore, we wonder how can the students change structural problems concerning refugees?

From the perspective of the system theory, theatre can create change in society because it can change certain feedback loops. As a wave this can spread throughout the whole system. We have to consider that the system is changed through many conflicting impulses. In order for the performance to have impact it is important to reach many people who feel inspired to change their way of interacting and thus continue the the movement that has been created.

In the second meeting we discussed different ways to let the audience continue the conversation that the performance started. Possibilities we offered are: making a video log in which audience members can share their reactions and/or offer possible solutions, write a collective letter to someone involved and influential on the issue discussed, replay the performance for the same audience or for different kinds of audiences, let people continue an online project, or let audience members formulate what they take from the play and urge them to continue the conversation in their daily life. All these techniques try to make sure the conversation continues.

Ethics of Care

For David the main issue of the performance of Hanne and Olivier is the choice of the girl for friends or to become active politically. Olivier argues that the girl is caught with empathy for a refugee and now is searching for a way to relate to his struggle and to understand our world. Both understanding the other, and seeing possibilities to help the other, are part of care.

This caring attitude is something we can stimulate. Maïke misses in the play a character that is really interested in the presence of the refugee. If this character was there it could increase the need to care for him. The problem with this approach is that we show, by adding this character, that we only become active for people when we have some kind of interest in them. This is problematic since there are many problems - like climate change or the refugee situation - in which we don't have a personal interest or connection, but which do deserve our care.

The three processes, as described by Mingol, that develop care can be translated to this performance. First, the performance could show how important new relations are for refugees in Belgium to start feeling at home and feel strong about oneself. Secondly, the complete performance could enable people to see that becoming active actually matters for the situation of the refugee. Finally, the performance could address that we as citizens are related to a national problem like this and, therefore, we should give it our care and attention.

Another way to approach this is by means of dialogue. Dialogue can contribute to understanding the realities of both the refugees, the audience members who want to help and the people who are more critical of refugees in Belgium. Furthermore, dialogue can strengthen the bond between the people involved. To enable a productive dialogue, participants need to be open to each other. This requires a certain vulnerability from them, to suspend their own values and explore other people's perspective and values.

In our third meeting we discussed that in order to create this atmosphere the theatre makers and actors should also show their doubts about the situation and be open to different perspectives. This differs from a normal forum theatre project in which the project aims for a certain change to benefit a specific group. The principle of playback theatre, therefore, seems to suit better within this framework. In playback theatre all contributions are appreciated and used on stage. This helps to create community and to share perspectives. This does risk the problem of racist contribution, that only threaten a caring attitude.

Polarization

Finally, I would like to discuss the polarization as it is brought up in the performance of Hanne and Olivier. Polarization relates directly to the already discussed topic of dialogue, which can only flourish in an open atmosphere. We can also approach polarization from a perspective, as described by Nicholson, that we as citizens should speak out in the public sphere, which is characterized by debate and oppositions. The focus is then not on dialogue and connection but rather on dealing healthily with oppositional perspectives. We can balance between care and oppositions without losing one or the other. Or as we spoke about in our first meeting, discussion can be part of a dialogue.

In the performance of Olivier and Hanne this balance was also sought in different ways. The main dilemma for the girl was: how do I take a stand?. Maike notes that this question is already polarizing because it requires people to take a stand. In the play this became apparent when the girl introduces her school project on refugees. What follows is an aggressive debate on refugees. In our meetings we discussed several ways to make this play contribute to a more healthy debate.

For a more dialogical approach to this debate Maike suggested a method of Bert Bergsma, to deal with polarization. In this method a couple of things are important. First of all, we should address the middle group and not the radical sides who are not interested in dialogue at all. Secondly, what people tend to do is trying to make somebody understand the other side, but most of the time this only fuels the resistance against the mediator and the other group. Therefore, we should not focus too much on making people feel empathy with the other. Instead, to let people open up and be vulnerable, the mediator (and the play) should do the same. So we should present also what we don't know, what our questions are. Finally, it is important to be

conscious about the impact questions can have. Many questions can polarize a situation even further. We must find a question that all parties can relate to and can answer without attacking the other party. This is a very difficult and delicate process.

The TO group Combatants for Peace (CP) from Israel-Palestine developed a model to use TO to unite groups that are in conflict. Chen Ahon, the artistic director of CP explains that their main principle is the transformation of both oppressed as oppressors, to start understanding and considering 'the Other' as a worthy human being.⁶ Together with CP Formaat wrote the manual 'Bridging the Divide'.⁷ In this manual they explain how TO can help to bring together groups that are in conflict with each other.

Another aspect of creating a healthy debate was built in the structure of the performance. Olivier argues that by making the performance end with a question, the choice between a friend and a refugee, and not only by a crisis of the refugee, the play supports a real choice and does not force students to become activist. To create a real debate, both sides - lining up with or be critical of refugees- are to be represented as plausible in the performance.

Hanne feared that the arguments against refugees given in this scene, or in the forum afterwards, would require complex answers to counter. Opening the debate in this way seemed to risk fuelling the polarization and could create chaos that would make a decent dialogue or debate impossible. David, however, thinks that creating some chaos is OK since it is one of the only times the students are free to speak out and be heard in the public sphere.

A question that underlies this conversation between David and Hanne was the one whether the space would remain safe enough for a true dialogue or debate. To ensure this safety it matters what question a Joker asks, and also the performance itself can influence the debate. We discussed that placing the actors on stage during the classroom scene already creates more distance, and thus less emotion and polarization afterwards. Olivier suggests working with chairs that represent the pro and con camp to visualize the debate. If we add elements of Boal's Joker system- by letting all actors play both the pro and con characters- we also focus more on the ideas and make it less personal.

Finally, in the forum, the Joker could use both dialogical and difficultating skills to make sure all sides are able to express themselves in a safe environment. If a Joker focuses more on difficultating, this could enrich the debate and show the pros and cons of all arguments. If a Joker focuses more on dialogue this could mean that audience members try more to investigate other people's perspectives.

⁶ For more information on the use of their method in the Palestine-Israel conflict see the book Youth and Theatre of the Oppressed.

⁷ You can download the Dutch manual for free on their website.
<http://www.formaat.org/kenniscentrum/publicaties/internationaal/>

Techniques to develop PT

Meeting one

How as a Joker do you facilitate the move between the personal and the collective? Further defined: how can we see the universal in the personal and how can we move from the inequality in the world to what I can do?

- Let the audience make images of a character who is influencing the situation of oppression. Together they form an image of society. The audience can replace these characters to change the system that creates this oppression. The actors involved can rehearse a couple of these characters beforehand, to make the interaction more realistic.
- Create scenes beforehand that show how this situation is created and ask how to challenge these sources.
- Connect the oppression to an issue many people face - losing your job- and start a dialogue on this. Afterwards you can relate this conversation back to the concrete example.
- Create a scene in a public space where everyone could intervene as themselves.
- Allow the audience to insert a character that could logically be there.

Meeting two

To find financial resources

- Standardize a product that you can sell to organizations. For instance, we will train the group in the following skills or create this kind of community by the following activities in a set time schedule

To have societal impact

- Embed the performance in a project with other organizations that continue the work on this topic.
- Create a scene in which multiple characters (who can be different in many ways) face the same oppressor, and allow them to ally in a certain scene to fight this oppressor

when we leave an audience with burning questions what can we do to make these questions remain active; or how we can turn the audience into activists?

- Return with the same performance
- Ask the audience what we should do, how we should continue, how they want to stay involved
- Ask who else should see the performance
- Tell the audience they can contact you if they want to stay involved, and have a plan to become active collectively
- Use a facebook page to keep the discussion on the topic going, and search collectively for new actions
- Let the audience formulate a burning question (maybe with their neighbours) and urge them to ask this question to friends and family
- Ask for suggestions to put in a letter for somebody influential on the issue

- Videotape afterwards suggestions for ideas to fight the problem, or their experience of the performance in general

Meeting three

how can the forum play relate to and have impact on the political and social level.

- Pay a lot of attention to difficultate a situation in order to allow the audience to understand how the oppression is created by society.
- Use professional actors in order to be able to perform the same play many times.
- Focus with the audience on taking a stance towards a certain subject
- Create a background video to discuss the structural issue of the problem

Can we focus on a certain issue and perform it for a group not involved directly?

- create multiple protagonists/ bystanders/ silent witnesses
- focus on a dilemma in the play: whether to become involved or not
- create a character that has interest in the issue

How do we deal with polarization

- Bert Bruinsma's method (address the middle group; be open and show your doubts; ask question that are not polarizing but are uniting.
- Use theatrical aesthetics that create distance between the audience and opinions. To make sure the ideas matter and not the characters. (for instance by the joker system style)
- don't go into the debate, but let people experience what it is to live in a polarized situation
- use playback

The Joker System

Although Boal (1979) stresses that the 'Joker System' was created to fit a specific period of time in Brazil and mostly aimed to destroy conventional theatre practices in order to create an authentic Brazilian theatre, I still believe some of its characteristics can be a source of inspiration.

TO scripts are based on collages of experiences of participants. Although the participants do not play a specific person who actually exists, they create persons who could exist in real life and the audience accepts these illusions and can feel empathy with them. Boal (1979) explains that in the Joker system all actors play all characters. Every character owns certain habits or patterns of actions and speech, so the audience can recognise each character even though the role is played by different actors. This ensures that the character is not considered by the audience as an individual, but rather as a representative of a social group. Its behaviour is, therefore, explained not on basis of personal characteristics but on its social position in society. The second effect of making all actors play all characters is that the actors become a team who collectively tell the story. Therefore they are creating an ensemble. (p. 170)

Two important roles in the the Joker System are the protagonist - who is the only character that acts in a realistic way in order to keep the audience related to the play through empathy- and the role of the Joker who does not function in the realm of fantasy - in the realm of the play- but mediates between the play and the reality of the audience. The Joker becomes the

neighbour of the audience. S/he is the master of ceremonies who understands the play and can intervene at any time and relate the play to the real world. The Joker can interview characters and audience members, explain certain situations and help the audience to understand why this play is relevant for our world. (p. 182)

Boal's joker system offers us through the Joker and through the structure of the play the possibility to think about society's structures and how individuals are framed by their social and economic position.

Epic Theatre

In the Epic theatre of Brecht we encounter some of the characteristics of Boal's Joker System. Important similarities are the integration of performance and analysis and the separation of actor and character.

Brecht (1964) explains that Epic theatre is similar to a story someone tells on the street. In an everyday storytelling it is important that the speaker never creates the illusion of theatre. For the audience there should always remain a clear distinction between actor and character. The speaker may only take over the voice, show the emotions or simulate the actions of what s/he is talking about in as far as it helps to make clear why the accident happened or how people responded to the incident and what this could mean. Just as in a street conversation epic theatre should always have a social practical relevance, for instance, to show who is guilty or the reason why an event happened. (p. 1)

The speaker can only construct the character on basis of his actions, this because in normal life we can't look in someone's head. Some basic theatrical features can be included as long as the audience does not lose itself in the theatrical illusion. Imagination, for instance, can be incorporated only insofar as it relates to the real experience. Someone can imagine how different actions could have changed the course of events that followed on the real story. (p.3)

Epic theatre relates theatre to normal life and functions as a model to help, as seen in their causal relationships.

To ensure that audiences increase their critical thinking and develop their opinions on significant social processes, epic theatre shows the (social) environment as an independent element in the show. This means that as a background of the performance the society is portrayed. This social environment can comment, explain or contradict staged events. This also makes sure that epic theatre can inform the audience with facts, data, and background information, or other reactions are presented to show how things could have been done in a different way. To inform the audience well, we cannot just use our own imagination but we need to use scientific knowledge on the question how society and how people function. (p. 5) This all makes it possible that the audience starts examining the play and their own lives critically. This is the start to the change of their lives, and of the world we live in.

The Joker System and epic theatre are two ways to create a PT performance that helps audiences to focus more on the structural problems of society than on our individual actions. Through questions and theatrical intervention the Joker can also help the audience to explore these structural inequalities.

Psychodrama

The process of psychodrama⁸ starts with a warming-up in which the participants increase their creativity, the group coherence is strengthened and in which participants share and select stories to act out. After this process the director and protagonist stage the situation the protagonist faces. The protagonist selects members from the group to act in the scene(s) that are created. Finally the cast and audience can share their experiences of the performance and relate it to their lives.

There are several techniques that the director can use to enrich the process.

1. Concretization is the process of having the protagonist choose people or objects to represent, or to be, some of the factors relevant to their area of concern. This process is always surprising and demonstrates that we, as human beings, are well able to treat objects as people, and people as objects, indicating an incredible capacity for projection and imaginative engagement.
2. Mirroring is the process of the protagonist becoming self-aware through having group members copy or 'mirror back' what the protagonist has just enacted on the stage
3. Modeling is where members of the audience are invited to act as they themselves would, if they were in the situation that has been set up on the stage.
4. Role reversal is the process whereby the protagonist, who has chosen a person or object to be someone or something of importance in the scene he is enacting, is asked to be that person or object and to respond from that place to what is occurring. Then they are reversed back into their own role and get to experience the response they have just made.
5. Maximization is a technique where one or more elements of the protagonist's functioning are exaggerated or maximized. Maximization is employed to assist the protagonist to include actions in a more integrated manner with feelings, thoughts and intentions by enhancing the action component in a person's response, usually producing vitality as a consequence.
6. Doubling is a technique most often used when the protagonist's misses confidence, or when they are finding it difficult to express their inner world. The protagonist chooses a member from the audience who then attempts, imaginatively, to become the protagonist. They stand behind and slightly to the side of the protagonist, while mirroring their body language and speech. Their job is to 'feel into' the protagonist and, using hunches or interaction with the protagonist, to express what they imagine the protagonist is experiencing.
7. Soliloquy is a technique whereby the protagonist is invited to express what is within him/her, his/her thoughts, feelings and other responses out loudly, as though no-one can hear him/her. It has a long form where the protagonist walks round the whole stage and is finished when they feel they finished. In its short form it is termed an aside, where the protagonist turns his head away from the current enactment, while staying in the enactment.

⁸ Summary of the method and of important characteristics: Howie, Peter. *Psychodrama: The Bare Bones*.

Essays for meetings

Meeting 1: Dialogue and difficultate

“the main principle of Theatre of the Oppressed is to help restore dialogue among human beings” (Augusto Boal)

If we are having a conversation I speak and hear your words. We let information flow from the one to the other, like we do now. It is possible I understand meanings you sent to me and you pick up some of my words. So maybe we both leave with some new knowledge. If it would be a discussion I would try to convince you, or at least try not to be convinced. Our discussion is like a match or a battlefield.

In a dialogue we do not leave with some new information sent by the other, or with the feeling of having won or lost. We do not try to change the other. In a dialogue we connect to each other. We try to grasp the meaning of each other's words, understand the world in which the other is living. In this act of moving towards the other we have to give up some of our own beliefs, because these beliefs make it hard to listen, and because we believe in the truth of each other's beliefs. Dialogue starts from openness towards each other.

In a dialogue we create something we both believe in. A dialogue is a communal creation of meaning. Therefore, a dialogue connects us; it creates community. Moreover, by clarifying our own positions and existing power structures it creates a democratic space of political equality. This is why dialogue is so closely connected to theatre that aims at changing people's lives and society.

Imagine a theatre performance in which the audience is asked to speak up and to give solutions to problems presented on the stage. Imagine theatre which asks for dialogue with the audience in order to create change, to make the world a better place. Imagine an audience member in this theatre who for instance says: in order to stop gender inequality we just need to get 10.000 people on the street to protest, so we can spread love world wide. Or they say that the only thing needed to do to stop this girl being bullied is her boyfriend protecting her; he needs to take his responsibility as her protector. Are these thoughts enough for you to start a dialogue? Enough to dive into the world of this other person?

I guess you would like the audience to think further, to connect to each other and step out of their normal solutions. I guess you would like to inspire the audience and push them out of their habits, to problematize some of their beliefs, and connect them to society as a whole. That seems like serious business. Do you think an audience is waiting for this hard work?

So how do we connect dialogue with our wish to problematize the views of our audience? How do we balance between an open interested attitude and our wish to difficultate the conversation? How do we keep this hard work interesting and inspiring? In the history of theatre the figure of the Joker is the trickster who juggles with different worlds: the official and the popular one; the fictional and the real one,; the spiritual and the material world. In his play the Joker makes fun of those in power and shows us that all power is imaginary. The Joker is a hero because through joy and play s/he connects a possible new world to the darkness of our existing world.

In the sixties Augusto Boal created the Joker system which aimed at opening up the theatre practice by rearranging the relation between characters, audience and actors in order to

show how we are all part of a greater social network. In this system all actors play all characters, different theatre styles were combined, and during the show explanations about the performance were given and characters were interviewed. The Joker was the character that kept unity in this chaos.

In a dialogue participants connect to each other, and in this way create new unity and community. In a dialogue each participant constantly moves between an accepting attitude towards other peoples' beliefs and positioning his/her own beliefs. As a Joker this position has to be varied with a more challenging approach. To get to the level of understanding you think the audience should have a Joker who teaches, teases, confuses and challenges the audience. This is a constant play. A play of creating communion and unsettling what is taken for granted. A play that accepts the audience as teacher and that at the same time teaches the audience. A play between the world of the performance and the real world of the audience. A play with your own beliefs for a better world and the ideals of other people. A play with reflexive and theoretical knowledge. A play of imagining the world as it could be and the world that exists.

Which elements of the Joker do you recognize in your own work? How do you play as a Joker? Which oppositions in this story do you recognize and how do you handle them? How do you balance between dialogue and difficultate and how do you connect them? What are the aims for you of dialogue and difficultate

Meeting 2 Participation, Activism and Therapy

In this essay I will examine three important concepts from Participatory Theatre or Theatre of the Oppressed: participation, activism and therapy. We use participation, maybe we want to empower people and maybe we want to change society, but do we understand the difficulty of these ideas? As a Joker the way you work and the setting in which your work is done determine the effects you have. Therefore the following questions remain important to be asked and answered again and again. What aims do you have as a Joker with your work? How do you think these aims can be achieved? And what does this mean for your practice?

When we consider all the people in the world that are not really heard in public, and when we realize that they remain powerless and ignored when someone else tries to speak up in their name, then all we can do is to create a space for them in which they can express themselves and can be heard. The only way forward is to allow them to participate, so that they can step out of their invisible and oppressed position. Freire argues that only as equal participants we are able to create an equal society. This is why we could start from participation.

Since a few years our government declared the Netherlands to be a participatory society. So it seems our work now finally fits in the place where we live, or maybe not really? We can see that participation can lead to many different outcomes. Participation can lead to an equal democratic society or to a neo-liberal world in which everybody becomes individually responsible for himself. Participation can be used for equality or for corporations to increase their profit. Participation can be critical or it can be used to make people obey to the status quo.⁹

⁹ Bishop, C. (2012). *Artificial hells: Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship*. Verso Books.

Participation can be a collective activity or an individual one. Supporting participation will in itself not lead necessarily to beautiful things like empowerment or equality.

As Jokers we live in two worlds. We try to create equality while we live in a world where we are urged to make quick profits, to increase productivity and to focus on our individuality. Bala¹⁰ points out that in order to earn money Jokers tend to do small projects and single workshops in different situations. Jokers do not take time to grow into certain communities to become familiar with their struggles and the mechanisms that create them. The first question on participation is: what kind of participation do you encourage with your work? The second question is: whose advantage do you serve while working in your current context and circumstances?

Whether we want to have impact on personal lives, communities or society as a whole, there are different methods available and different philosophies possible. These methods and ideas are many times in conflict and determine how you can work as a Joker. First I will, from a 'historical' perspective, examine how social change and individual change relate to TO.

In the Marxist ideology participation in the means of production leads to equality. If everybody would have equal access to production, our material world would become equal. Through this material equality all people would share the same social status. Marxist theatre makers try to help in this process by showing how we are all part of the same material oppressed and oppressor relation, who owns means of production and who does not. By allying with each other in knowledge of societal inequality, this inequality will disappear. O' Sullivan¹¹ argues that Boal used to position himself in this ideology, but that Boal's theoretical and practical framework was flawed from the beginning and that he soon gave up his marxist line of thought. Instead of focusing on material circumstances, Boal put a primacy on thoughts. Boal turned to a theatre of imagination.

What are the problems we face and how can we imagine dealing with them are the main questions of TO. This theatre has therapeutic qualities because actors both played and reflected on themselves at the same time. This double position can help us remove obstacles that prevent us from acting to change our situation.¹² O'Sullivan argues that in TO the fighting itself consists of individual acts and therefore people may change their lives but society as whole remains unchanged. Another risk of therapeutic theatre is that it aims at individuals adjusting psychologically to their situation. Instead we should always aim at the ensemble in order to start a social dialogue in an equal public sphere.¹³

I think TO both has the possibility of social change and of individual therapeutic adjustment. As a Joker it is important to gain clarity on the effect of your work. But are therapy and activism each other counterparts? Or can they exist together?

¹⁰ Bala, S., & Albacan, A. I. (2013). Workshopping the revolution? On the phenomenon of joker training in the Theatre of the Oppressed. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 18(4), 388-402.

¹¹ Davis, D., & O'Sullivan, C. (2000). Boal and the shifting sands: The un-political master swimmer. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 16(03), 288-297.

¹² Boal, A. (2013). *The rainbow of desire: The Boal method of theatre and therapy*. Routledge.

¹³ Neelands, J. (2007). Taming the political: the struggle over recognition in the politics of applied theatre. *Research in drama education*, 12(3), 305-317.

David Diamond¹⁴ refers to the collective as a system. In the system we are all connected, and all behaviour influences the whole. Oppressor and oppressed are part of the same system. Therefore both oppressor and oppressed should be part of the same theatre process to achieve societal change. On a psychological and social level David argues that all parts of the system that are not allowed to speak become sick. Theatre is both activism and therapy for him.

Speaking up in theatre does not necessarily have therapeutic effects. In an interview with Mady Schutzman¹⁵ Eleanor Crowder shows with an example from her own work that facing your oppressions in a TO workshop can as well damage the wellbeing of the participants. She saw how re-enacting oppression made participants sick, and they told us that we were abusing them with the methodology that was used.

Helen Nicholson¹⁶ troubles the clear perspective of the system theory. She argues that we live in a globalised and complex world where many boundaries are blurred. Theatre should trouble absolutes and unfix habits of thought and action. Theatre can resist dominant culture but at the same time it is always part of it. In the 21st century we have to understand that the opposition between self and other, between human and nonhuman, is troubled. Mady Schutzman argues that in this complex world TO should incorporate ambiguity in its plays by abandoning the strict formula of Forum theatre play. We should do this because our lives need therapy based on discomfort and activism, need both social awareness and therapy.

Because there are different philosophies on activism and therapy and different ways to use theatre, as a Joker it remains important to realize how your practice works. What aims do you have with your work? How do you think these aims can be achieved? And what does this mean for your practice?

Meeting 3: Combining Methods

Introduction

In his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* Boal clearly aligns himself with Brecht and Marxist ideology. In the decades that followed on this publishment, Boal distanced himself from Marxism and other ideologies. But if we want to understand how TO works it is necessary to understand some principles that guide the practices. In this essay I will describe some theoretical fundamental elements- and their problems- which can support TO, and see what other theatre methods can enrich the process of participatory theatre.

Not really a Marxist

Davis and O'Sullivan¹⁷ point out some problems with the relation between TO and Marxism. Marxists argue that social relations and personal identities are bound to material circumstances. Within a society they define the conflict between the owning class- the oppressors- and the

¹⁴ Diamond, D. (2007). *Theatre for living: The art and science of community-based dialogue*. Trafford Publishing.

¹⁵ Cohen-Cruz, J., & Schutzman, M. (Eds.). (2002). *Playing Boal*. Routledge.

¹⁶ Nicholson, H. (2014). *Applied drama: The gift of theatre*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁷ Davis, David, and Carmel O'Sullivan. "Boal and the shifting sands: the un-political master swimmer." *New Theatre Quarterly* 16.3 (2000): 288-297.

working class- the oppressed. Only by changing the means of production this opposition can be challenged. But unlike Marxists, Boal does not relate his theatre practice to societal inequalities but rather urges individuals to imagine different behaviour- or imagine a different future- to deal with their oppressors. They argue that Boal's practice is therefore idealistic and individualistic.

The problem here is that individuals imagine solutions without acknowledging the (material) circumstances which underlie the problems they face. Furthermore the oppressor in TO is only acted out on the basis of the perception of the oppressed. An imaginary intervention is then countered by an imaginary oppressor. The consequences in the real material world are not predictable this way.

Boal's insistence on individual change - as he considers theatre as a clash of free wills- also contradicts the Marxist principle that the oppressed- oppressor relation is inherent to societal structures. Individual solutions obscure these structural problems. This can result in two problems: TO helps oppressed people to become oppressors of the oppressors by giving them ideas to fight; and TO only helps individuals to adjust to society.

For Marxist theorists, theatre makers (Brecht), and pedagogues (Paulo Freire), it is essential to train people in their critical thinking concerning societal structures. Rather than imagining personal change, participants are asked to understand and detect within our society possibilities for change through a mutual struggle.

Although these criticisms on TO seem reasonable to me, they don't acknowledge the flexibility and the possibilities of the practice itself. In our meetings so far we spent most of our time trying out and arguing about different ways to relate the personal to the society- a single interaction on stage relates to the structures in society that create these oppressions. This can also involve collective action. But these possibilities are not inherent to the method and should be provoked by the Joker. If we also want to include this societal perspective in the theatre performance we should look for different ways of performing and creating plays. Most of the time TO performances start from Stanislavskian realism - in which the actor relies on internal thoughts and feelings to perform the character it imagines.

Boal's Joker System and Brecht's Epic Theatre can be a source of inspiration for Marxist theatre to create plays that focus more directly on our material world

Joker System

Although Boal stresses that the joker system¹⁸ was created to fit for a specific period of time in Brazil, and mostly aimed to destroy conventional theatre practices in order to create an authentic Brazilian theatre, I still believe some of its characteristics can be a source of inspiration.

TO scripts are based on collages of experiences of participants. Although the participants do not play a specific person who actually exists, they create persons who could exist in real life, and the audience accepts these illusions and relates to them.

In the Joker system all actors play all characters. Every character owns certain habits or patterns of actions and speech, so the audience recognizes each character even though it is played by different actors. This also ensures that the character is not considered by the

¹⁸ Theatre of the Oppressed has one chapter on the Joker system. This is a summary of the method: GÖKDAĞ, Ebru. "Augusto Boal's The Joker System." (2014): 27-37.

audience as an individual, but rather as a representative of a social group. Its behaviour was therefore explained not on the basis of personal characteristics but on its position in society.

The second effect of making all actors play all characters is that the actors become a team who collectively tell the story. Therefore they were creating an ensemble.

Another aspect of the Joker system is the role of the Joker who does not function in the realm of fantasy - in the realm of the play-, but mediates between the play and the reality of the audience. The Joker becomes the neighbour of the audience. S/he is the master of ceremonies who understands the play and can intervene at any time and relate the play to the real world. The Joker can interview characters and audience members, explain certain situations and help the audience to understand why this play is relevant to our own world.

We can recognize many facets in the Joker of TO. Boal's Joker system offers us through the Joker and through the structure of the play the possibility to think about society's structures and how individuals are framed by their social and economic position.

Epic Theatre

Also in the Epic Theatre of Brecht¹⁹ we encounter some of the characteristics of Boal's Joker System. Important similarities are the integration of performance and analysis and the separation of actor and character.

Brecht explains that Epic Theatre is similar to a story someone tells on the street. Important in normal day life storytelling is that the speaker never creates the illusion of theatre. The speaker never creates the illusion that s/he is the person s/he is speaking about. For the audience there should always remain a clear distinction between actor and character.

The speaker can only construct the character on the basis of his actions, because in normal life we can't look in someone's head. The speaker may only take over the voice, show the emotions or simulate the actions of what s/he is talking about in so far as it helps to make a statement about the accident- to make clear why the accident happened, or how people responded to the incident and what this means. Just as in a street conversation epic theatre should always have a social practical relevance, for instance, to show who is guilty or why an event happened.

Some basic theatrical features can be included as long as the audience does not lose itself in the theatrical illusion. Imagination for instance can be incorporated only insofar as it relates to the real experience. One can imagine, for instance, how different actions could have changed the course of events that followed.

Epic theatre relates theatre to normal life and functions as a model to help audiences to increase their critical thinking and to develop their opinions on significant social processes perceived in their causal relationships.

To make this possible epic theatre shows the (social) environment as an independent element in the show. This means that as a background for the performance the society is portrayed. This environment can comment, explain or contradict staged events. Epic theatre needs modern techniques as film and audio to make this possible.

¹⁹ I like this explanation of Epic theatre: Brecht, Bertolt. "The street scene: a basic model for an epic theatre." *Brecht on theatre: The development of an aesthetics* (1964): 121-129.

This makes also sure that epic theatre can inform the audience with facts, data and background information, as well as other possibilities are given how things could have been done in a different way. To inform the audience well, we cannot just use our own imagination but we need to use scientific knowledge how society and how people function. Epic theatre needs an environment to perform in that allows free discussion and a willingness to solve problems.

This all makes it possible that the audience starts examining the play critically and their own lives. This critical thinking is the start to change their lives, and the world we live in.

Therapy

Boal developed the Rainbow of Desire method in Europe where he encountered the middle classes who internalised their oppressions. The Rainbow of Desire aims at removing these blockades that stop people from changing their lives. Thus as Boal says, TO became therapeutic.

Although Boal distances himself from Moreno's psychodrama there are some striking similarities as Daniel Feldhendler points out²⁰. Both Moreno and Boal place the therapeutic possibilities of theatre in the distance the actor take from their stories. Theatre creates an as-if space that allows to play and thus research and alter our own experiences and behaviour. Feldhendler relates this to the theory of psycho-analyst Winnicott, who says that play happens between the imagination and the reality. The as-if character in spontaneous play reduces cognitive control and barriers and thus widens the possibilities for action.

The process of psychodrama²¹ starts with a warming up in which the participants increase their creativity, the group coherence is strengthened and in which participants share and select stories to act out. After this process the director and protagonist stage the situation the protagonist faces. The protagonist select members from the group to act in the created scene(s). Finally the cast and audience can share their experiences of the performance and relate it to their lives.

There are several techniques that the director can use to enrich the process.

8. Concretisation is the process of having the protagonist choose people or objects to represent, or to be, some of the factors relevant to their area of concern. This process is always surprising and demonstrates that we, as human beings, are well able to treat objects as people, and people as objects, indicating an incredible capacity for projection and imaginative engagement.
9. Mirroring is the process of the protagonist becoming self-aware through having group members copy or 'mirror back' what the protagonist has just enacted on the stage
10. Modeling is where members of the audience are invited to act as they themselves would, if they were in the situation that has been set up on the stage.
11. Role reversal is the process whereby the protagonist, who has chosen a person or object to be someone or something of importance in the scene they are enacting, is asked to be that person or object and respond from that place to what is occurring. Then they are

²⁰ Cohen-Cruz, Jan, and Mady Schutzman, eds. *Playing Boal*. Routledge, 2002.

²¹ Summary of method and important characteristics: Howie, Peter. "Psychodrama: The bare bones."

- reversed back into their own role and got to experience the response they have just made.
12. Maximisation is a technique where one or more elements of the protagonist's functioning are exaggerated or maximised. Maximisation is employed to assist the protagonist to include actions in a more integrated manner with feelings, thoughts and intentions by enhancing the action component in a person's response, usually producing vitality as a consequence.
 13. Doubling is a technique most often used when the protagonist's confidence fails them, or they are finding it difficult to express their inner world. The protagonist chooses a member from the audience who then attempts, imaginatively, to become the protagonist. They stand behind and slightly to the side of the protagonist, while mirroring their body language and speech. Their job is to 'feel into' the protagonist and, using hunches or interaction with the protagonist, to express what they imagine the protagonist is experiencing.
 14. Soliloquy is a technique where the protagonist is invited to express what is within them, their thoughts, feelings and other responses out loud, as though no-one can hear them. It has a long form where the protagonist walks round the whole stage and is finished when they feel they finished. In its short form it is termed an aside, where the protagonist turns their head away from the current enactment, while staying in the enactment.

Playback Theatre

Playback theatre allows people to share personal stories which are on the spot turned into theatrical performances. Jonathan Fox²² recognizes the similarities between Playback Theatre, TO, and Psychodrama: working without a script; the personal and communal touch; and the focus on the past to imagine a positive future. The differences he discerns are: the acceptance of positive stories in PT; no reliance on dialogue after the performance in PT; and PT is not based on the therapeutic domain - in PT the stage does not become an as-if.

For Fox the power of PT is the atmosphere of generosity that is created by allowing people to share their story, give it back through the theatrical performance while the audience contributes by deep listening. This is the dialogue PT can create and by way of this a sense of community can arise.

PT can contribute to a greater feeling of connectedness- a shared feeling of humanity-; it can help to articulate personal values, help to relate to other people's lives, and give ownership over cultural production and thus challenge dominating cultural forms.²³

In PT people alternate between sharing stories and listening. For Park Fuller this dialogical activity stimulates empathy and creates actor-citizens who feel responsible for the community. In this sense PT is a form of activism directed to create a world of mutual understanding.

Conclusion

²² Fox, Jonathan. "playback theatre compared to psychodrama and Theatre of the Oppressed." (2007).

²³ Park-Fuller, Linda M. "Audiencing the audience: playback theatre, performative writing, and social activism." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 23.3 (2003): 288-310.

I described four theatre methods that could help to enrich a participatory theatre performance or process. For sure, these methods have their own deficits. Just like TO they are also developed a long time ago, under different circumstances. Still I think parts of these methods remain valuable.

In this essay I created the false dichotomy between therapeutic theatre and theatre that relates to the changing society. By separating these two different we can more clearly relate relate different theatre methods to TO.

If you are interested we can try some of these methods in our next meeting. Therefore, pick one or more of these methods that you find interesting; see if you understand the method; and which questions you still have. For now this will allow us for some try outs, which can later maybe be further developed. For me these methods are also new, so it will be a mutual research process.

Summaries of Meetings

the first meeting - the story as it happened

The title of this document is immediately the most dramatic part. From here on this text will be a little dry, but insightful. Right now this is a description of our meeting. For my thesis I will distillate the questions and solutions we found and present it in a more clear way.

Dialogue on Dialogue

Starting questions of this dialogue

What is a good dialogue for you? What do the participants need to do to realize this? And what can you achieve with a dialogue?

In our dialogue on dialogue we sketched a certain attitude and qualities which participants should have. Tamar mentioned openness and listening. Concerning listening Maike brought up that we should try to put aside our ideas in order to create space to understand really each other. Kees suggests that in a dialogue we try to stay away from judgements, what enables us to open up really to each other. Ana brings in the quality of empathy which allows us to open up borders we create between each other, so that we can communicate with people who are different from ourselves.

One of the basics of dialogue is questioning. Which questions do you ask, with what intention to understand really the other and the self. Maike emphasizes that we should question ourselves so we can be open for new knowledge. This makes the dialogue a research space. For Tamar the start of a dialogue are participants who do not have the answers yet. Concrete situations and moments help us to get to the right questions she argues.

Openness, questioning and listening enable us to understand the other and to understand oneself. Tamar suggest this gives us the possibility to understand our values and identity, Ana emphasizes that it enables us to learn, and Maike says it gives the possibility to enrich our lives, to discover multiple perspectives.

In addition to this Tamar addresses the power of a dialogue to connect to the other, to the rest of the world. Maike on the one hand agrees that dialogue creates a connected society, but on the other hand is not convinced that it creates community.

For Kees the aim of dialogue should not be defined beforehand. To what a dialogue leads should be an open question..

This exploration into dialogue also opens up new questions. Ana puts forward that a dialogue and talking openly about oneself is frightening, even more when it concerns traumatic events. Therefore willingness to dialogue is crucial. And for Ana this willingness can be problematized when one is confronted with a radical different political opinions. For Maike the discomfort is also important because otherwise we would already agree.

Another issue of dialogue is disagreement, and how dialogue relates to a debate. A debate concerns different positions that are defended. Kees suggests this becomes a dialogue when participants also change positions and opinions. At the same time the Jokers agree that a discussion can be part of a dialogue.

This also leads to the question of truth and facts. Thamar says Boal's conception of dialogue comes from the Socratic metaphor of the birth of knowledge, which leads to new questions, and this dialogue eventually leads to some truths. In a dialogue Thamar argues facts are existing and relevant. They help us to broaden the dialogue from personal experiences to a collective or societal level. Kees adds that facts help us to make decisions. For Maike it helps when the facilitator knows the field and topic for the discussion, but Thamar also brings up that knowledge sometimes stops our curiosity and makes us into some kind of teachers.

Questions

We discussed what kind of questions we had concerning our theatre practice relating to dialogue and difficultate.

Thamar aims with her work to fight social inequality. This raises the question how she can bring the political and societal perspective to the theatre in which we focus on behaviour. Both the structure of the play, and the joking of the forum are important for this search.

Related to this question is the ethical concern of bringing own insights to the group and creating some kind of awareness which possibly affects the participants. For instance thamar facilitates a group of people who she considers to be lonely. This loneliness can be caused by social exclusion. Bringing this awareness can possibly hurt the wellbeing of some participants. Is that justifiable for the good cause of the positive change awareness can also have to change their situation. Maike recognizes this from talking about women rights. By focusing on the problems the pain grows, but at the same time it is a possibility to change the situation. Thamar also fears that this bringing of knowledge makes the role of the Joker something like a teacher.

Ana notices that dialogues in TO are mostly done with friends and likeminded people. She wonders therefore how to get out of this bubble. At the same time she wants to think about possibilities to reach a larger audience, to scale up the effect of TO in order to have real impact on society.

Kees states clearly he is not an activist. He want to create a safe environment where people can try possible solutions for their problems. Everybody has their own responsibility to feed the dialogue they are in. This safe environment ensures that difficultating does not cause a big disturbance for the participants.

For Kees the main principle is to question but not to judge every intervention. All we can do is find possible solutions. What tools we have to invite people to question themselves asks Maike asks. Kees suggest to question the participants like: are there other ways to do this and can we try it. Afterwards check whether the participant thinks it works for them. Thamar suggest to open it up to the audience: What are the possible consequences of this intervention and do you accept it or would you try something else?

A third strategy involves the counter play by the actor . The actors can be trained to difficultate the interventions but time always feels short to prepare actors for this improvisations.

But this approach to interventions does not mean all forums are satisfying. After a forum it can feel that no realistic or effective solutions are offered. Kees argues that some audience members will feel the same dissatisfaction and that this will be enough to continue the process for themselves. As a Joker you are only a snippet in a project.

Thamar goes further that forum can not only be dissatisfying but even harmful for the participants and audience. For instance on a school project against bullying she sometimes felt as if they taught the children new techniques for bullying. It sometimes seemed that through the performance and the forum they were not able to get to the students.

Thamar recalls a conversation with Boal in which she asked what to do with an audience full of racist. Boal said he wouldn't play for them. In this meeting everybody said they would. Then the question remains open, how not to feed racism?

The questions that came up in this part of the meeting:

- how to scale up?
- how to reach new audience?
- how to create an atmosphere of questioning?
- when do we have a dialogue in the process?
- how to prepare actors to difficultate?
- what are the tools of a Joker when s/he is dissatisfied with the offered solutions?

Forum

In the Forum we chose to investigate the following question: How as a Joker do you facilitate the move between the personal and the collective? Further defined: how can we see the universal in the personal, and how can we move from the inequality in the world to what I can do?

First we collected different examples. Maike tells about a play in which a person kept her psychiatric background hidden in a job interview. The interventions focused on who had the smartest solution, but it is also about going into the background of the stigmas and thought processes of the employer. How as a Joker do you move to these different layers and how can we change the play to make the social layer more visible?

Ana brings in the problem of racism when almost all participants don't consider themselves racist. It becomes important to create bystanders in the play to create an collective.

Thamar tells about a play which also showed domestic abuse against a women. After the forum an audience member felt as if the women were to blame since the audience had to change her behaviour. This became the case we worked with by first put it on the stage and then try different ways to Joker it.

Almost from the beginning Ana disagrees with the scene: "the women in the scene is doing nothing wrong, she is perfect the ways she is. Also it seems as if there is no hope for her, she will be beaten anyway. By changing her behaviour it is like she needs to be an ally of him, his psychologist and then still be beaten. Maybe this scene can be forumable after the fights, or after a couple of fights."

Thamar argues that it is an explosion of violence which has its reasons. The man in the household is also victim of a certain situation which makes him violent.

From this point Maike started as a Joker to see if she could take away Ana's objections. "I hear you, it is not only up to her. Do you see that this is a problem in society? (Ana: yes) Is it only these two people or does it happen more? (Ana: globally) Who and what is influencing them that this happens? (Ana: so many things, financial problems?)" For Maike this is a way to connect it to society.

After this intervention Ana asks what Thamar intended with the replacement of the protagonist. Thamar replies: "to empower women and to confront the man doing this. People started to understand both positions in the household." Both Maike and Thamar now emphasize that a Joker should be clear that it is not the fault of the women, that she is not the only one who can change it or only her responsibility. But she has possibilities. Hereafter Kees suggest we should make both of them protagonist.

This leads Maike back to connecting it to society. "We should never blame only the victim. If we only focus on behaviour that it becomes finding solutions for smart people who can get out of it. That is why we need the system to come in because we need to find a solution for everyone. Than it is not only up to you, what you can do, but also how can we intervene into the bigger question that exist. We don't only heal this household, but how can we go to the system around it."

To make this interactive Thamar suggest we can make an image of this social issue, of everyone around them. Kees goes further that after this image we can go back to forum to see what we learned and can do.

Maike puts on the Joker cap and asks: "can you make an image of something that you see in society, or a character that influences this in society?" Now we make different images that influence this situation till Kees makes an image as if he is taking the man away, fighting the man. We see different characters in this image like the violent father, Kees himself wanted to show a policeman who takes the man to jail. Then Thamar realizes the police is the reason the women does not tell others about the violence.

Thamar asks the policeman one sentence starting with I want. I, Joep, ask if this is enough for the audience to get the right insight about how the policeman influences this situation. Kees argues that as a Joker you can only decide on the moment what the audience needs. Here comes back the question: what can you do as a Joker to stimulate understanding that helps the audience to become active and imagine solutions that are satisfying?

Maike now wonders how to get from this image of society back to what we can do in real life. Ana suggests to add the office for women violence, to create an ally. Maike suggest herself to talk with the landlord. If we place the landlord in the situation the question becomes relevant whether he is responsible or not?

Overall the audience can suggest many new roles which could be involved either positively or negatively. Thamar imagines to rehearse many of these roles up front with the actors so they can play out these scenes when the audience introduces them.

Maike offers two other ways. The performance can include scenes which show how this situations are created in society and to than to ask the question how to challenge these sources.

A second option is to connect a central issue, for instance difficulties finding a job, to the audience and ask if they face the same issue. This broadens the issue again. And asks for another step to get it back to concrete actions.

Ana thinks with a mixed audience the play and forum should involve the whole society, for instance by using a scene in a public space. Here everybody can intervene. Maïke brings up a tool of Kuringa where the audience can insert a new character that logically fits in the scene.

Finally some questions remain:

- How Forum can change the structures in society itself?
- how to bring the larger picture to the Forum?
- Or should we end with a larger picture without interventions?

Meeting two on participation, activism and therapy

Balancing between extremes

We started the meeting with positioning oneself between two extremes, and discussed what this position meant.

- theatre for fun or theatre for learning

The group positions itself almost as a collective in the middle.

Kees first expresses his discomfort with the question: What is theatre for fun? And theatre is always learning. I am floating. When you are stressed out, you don't learn. Even if you could, it can never be the aim to create a stressful situation,

Maïke sometimes emphasizes fun, sometimes seriousness. But these positions are interconnected. At the same time learning sometimes occurs when you stretch your comfort zone, in moments of discomfort.

For Sandra learning through discomfort is therapeutic. It is inherent in cops and rainbow exercises because people are confronted with something they don't want or what is out of reach. This can be okay as long as it is done in a safe environment and when facilitators know when the stress is too much so she can intervene.

- Augusto Boal is right or is history

People laugh and doubt.

Kees walks firmly to the right (he is right): we are still talking about him, so his thoughts are not history. Augusto was not a dogma, he gave us crystallization points which we have the right to change. We have to create our own practice. What do you want reach, and use theatre to do it.

For Ana it matters that the situation in which TO was created differs a lot from our situation here and now. For instance people here can struggle to find oppressions. So the work has to change.

Thamar noticed that the methodology became more fixed when he died. THIS because the people who learned from him wanted to protect the ethics of humanizing humanity. Also Boal himself got troubled when David Diamond's approach to TO.

Maike recognizes the struggles whether the techniques or the ideas underneath them can be changed. At the same time there are different perspectives on them, so there is not one method or idea fixed.

- Do you aim for activism or therapy

Tamar walks to the therapeutic site, then changes to the middle where Sandra stands. Maike and Jania stand on the therapeutic site. Ana on the activist site. Kees says: I am out. Can you tell me what is therapy. tell me who there is to be healed, what is the illness and who are you to be a therapist?

Ana theorizes that the process of TO can be therapeutic and that after this personal process you are here to change things, stand up- go out and shout!

Sandra recognizes the therapeutic effects TO can have for instance by being able to openly discuss problems. Participants are their own therapist. But this can also go very wrong by hurting participants. At the same time Sandra wishes TO to be more activist, but when we engage an audience for a moment, after the engagement nothing follows. The next step is missing.

Also for Maike it is easier to see the individual change. This individual change is for her not, therapy but because we live in a society where open emotions are so uncommon, openly expressing them it is immediately called therapy.

Tamar positions herself as theatre maker. Theatre stands in a triangle with therapy and activism. It can be important to collaborate with a therapist because you can damage people and to increase the individual effects, as it can be important to collaborate with democratic or political powers for the societal effect.

Kees calls himself a facilitator. TO enable a process where participants can safely talk and rehearse for life. This can have therapeutic effects, but these are not predictable. It should for everybody be clear that it is theatre and not therapy because that gives different responsibilities.

Participation

We started a conversation about the first part of the written essay about participation.

working in a capitalist society

Tamar recognizes the influence of a neoliberal system and funding on TO. It determines the principles you can hold on, the topics you choose and the way TO is measured - for instance on amount of participants or on a 'measurable' therapeutic effect.

For Kees it is frustrating that you cannot validate your work on your own terms, that there has to be a measured result and that you are fixed to boundaries in time, you can't go on with a project. But in principle you don't know exactly what impact you have when people walk out of the door. In a process a lot can happen but your funder just measures a final product, the outcome.

Sandra has seen how in recent years long term projects became impossible and that organizations now ask for a performance for subject for which there is not much funds and time

Maike emphasizes the freedom it gives when a manager likes the work and does not require a rapport. This also matters for deciding on forehand or to follow the process.

Community

Ana sees that most of TO facilitators work solo and earn money by training other facilitators. This means it is difficult to get yourself financially of the ground and that facilitators don't connect deeply to communities.

Kees signals that there are a lot of community art organizations that do work longer periods in communities and that they also can have activist or therapeutic effects. So what is the difference then?

Thamar thinks that a difference is the explicit aims of TO such as creating dialogue or change on personal level, while in community theatre the aim is just to make theatre and the rest is side effect.

Maike argues that in community theatre the personal stories presented remain stories of those individuals while in TO we are searching for a social problem. What social norms we all face.

For Kees a difference is that TO aim to heal the audience, and through the audience the world. We bring a problem and start a discussion. But also in community theatre something can happen to the audience, but you never know exactly what.

Sandra thinks TO as more universal topics and community theatre is more personal oriented. This gives TO facilitators the responsibility to tune in with the people we work with to prepare for a new setting, so it can be relevant for this group. For instance in a project in Ede she worked with social workers. But it turned out that the conditions in which they work are completely different from those in Rotterdam. This requires preparation and openness and the moment to adjust to a new environment.

Both Kees and Thamar acknowledge that beforehand you never know what you do and for who, even when you think you know the audience you still don't know what is relevant for the people at moment and place.

Impact

Maike puts forward that a project differs whether the question for a performance comes from. It can either come from a group itself who decide who to invite, or it can be a question by an organization who want to work on a certain topic. In this last case it becomes more activist because you influence the dialogue outside your own circle. But another aspect of working in organizations are the hidden agendas or rules which can appear later in the process. Therefore it is important to always consider are the questions we work with ethically just, do the actors recognize themselves in the questions, or can we shift the questions or the actors a bit. Because in the end I want to start from participation from the actors themselves.

Sandra tells about the short series of workshops in Ede when they were asked by the manager of the social service organization to address a supposed inequality between clients and account managers. In the workshop they realised that this was not a real problem for the account managers themselves. They were in fact facing many assignments given by the

management stopped them from their real work. For them in fact it was about the inequality between the account managers and real managers.

According to Tamar TO can have value in this short workshop series by creating consciousness on this issue of inequality. This consciousness is itself already an important step.

Ana argues we should stretch the places we work in as TO facilitators. Corporations are more and more humanizing themselves and TO can contribute to this while corporations can provide necessary funding. It is about building these bridges. Furthermore the funds coming from corporations can create budget which enables you to go into communities and have impact there.

Ana also sees other aid organizations which have much clearer ambitions and targets. TO could get more funding if it would standardize and create products. This is not activism she acknowledges, but the result is much clearer.

Sandra thinks that if TO projects would be combined with other projects they will strengthen each other results and the commitment from communities and organizations to TO will get stronger. In this way TO will deliver concrete results and be rooted in communities.

Tamar recognizes her need sometimes for concrete results, which she connects to 'direct action' which is part of the three of Boal. At the same time she thinks that the power of theatre is imagination. To create something that is not really there. She quotes David Diamond who said: "the moment I stopped wanting to change the world, I became a better change maker."

Maike sees possibilities for practical needs to come up in a process. These practical needs can be taken care of in follow ups. But if an organization up front says we want this result, there is not much openness in the process anymore.

So we are back at the start of the conversation.

Forum

Aims

We started with presenting the aims of our work in one minute.

Ana: questioning and challenging the status quo. Work on the question: are we happy in the world we live in. More specifically, the situation women live in. Second thing make impact, local people and internationally - with social media. What you have done can be communicated on an international scale.

Tamar: does this work out of a deep feeling of restlessness due to issues in the world; to get know how people live through the magic of theatre and its playfulness. With TO she inspires to make the world a better place. This is necessary but she is conscious of little possibilities.

Jania: TO enables to make new patterns and reflect on life.

Kees: when I do TO, then it is to create a safe environment to rehearse for real life. By doing that, people take their own responsibility. In a safe environment try things they don't dare in the world outside. Gives possibility to try and find other possible practices. I like theatre because it is making a new reality, telling about reality in a different way, so that you can make your own reality.

Sandra: engaged theatre gives energy because it allows all sorts emotion to be there, and not to be identified with them. It has meaning, you engage for a longer period to work for understanding each other and ourselves.

Maike: TO's big power is the doing, I think and understand better when I am doing. So creating images or scenes, is a powerful tool. I love TO because it does not say there is one reality. We can see so many things in an image. I love it because it allows to research reality, a safe space where we can figure out what is happening and find new ways. Being healthy as human being is having different responses and roles, to let voices be heard that aren't heard, and encounter new stories. By this participatory process we make more voices participate in society.

Question to work on

After presenting our aims we formulated and debated a question to start researching.

Last week we discussed how we can go from individual to social change. We want to continue exploring how we can make collective impact on society. What do we do as a Joker to get from personal transformation to collective action.

Kees suggests we take audience as concrete collective. Can we let them do collectively what we want? How can we practice it in the performance, since we don't know what happens after a performance?

This fits with the mission of Jana Sanskriti which is to make the audience become activist, according to Maike.

Sandra problematizes this approach because it suggests you already know what the audience should do. For Ana it can however be positive if the Joker guides the intervention so it opens the possibility for the audience to what they can do next. Kees asks if it is possible that the Joker offers the possibility to sign a petition. Tamar rejects this because it is top down.

According to Maike Jana Sanskriti wants audience to leave with a lot of questions. Because if people leave with a feeling that it is resolved, they signed a petition for instance, then you can think oke. Done. While instead when people leave with so many burning questions, they have to talk with others and it can still continue working.

What is missing for Sandra many times in a TO project is a platform, because if many individuals as a collective engaged, go separate ways it is a lot to ask too re-engage next week. So if we give them a platform.

Forum

We started joking from a situation when we left an audience with burning questions; and questioned ourselves what we could do to make these questions remain active or how we can turn the audience into activism?

Thamar brought in the example when she worked with students from the Hogeschool in which there was an increase in depression and suicides. After the show the teachers, director and students felt strongly how much impact this problem has and were asking themselves how it relates to the school system.

From this point we tried different interventions for the Joker to make this question 'productive'.

- Maïke: I hear there are a lot of questions of what we don't know . We will be back in one month with the same play, same actors, talk to others, see if we find other entry points.

Thamar: when, what day, ooh that is a problem

Sandra: we only get study points for this meeting, not for next meeting. DO I have to come? Or is it voluntary?

Kees addresses Maïke directly: why do you want to do that?

Maïke almost whispers to herself why.....

- Thamar signals that there are still questions in the room and asks the audience what should we do after this?

Sandra: but it is not my problem,

Maïke: I don't agree with you we all

Sandra: yeah I have my problems and she has her own solutions

Thamar: who feels responsible for this problem, not her problem, but this problem in society

Sandra: I am a victim of it, I can't help it

- Ana asks the audience who else should have been here to see the performance?

Sandra: therapist

Ana: I should not say it but the counselor of hogeschool

Maïke: yeah but also all other students of hogeschool

Ana: so we prepare other performances

Kees: but what do we do then about it, this performance does change the problem

Ana: so you think this problem has no solutions?

Kees: everything has a solution but it is hard to find. Stay healthy yourself.

- Jania: where would you like to position yourself to this problem presented on the stage?. You can stand everywhere and relate to this image. What would you like to express?

We make images how we relate to the problem presented Jania asks us what we do and why we and what our relation is.

Ana makes the image of a therapist who wants to work voluntarily one day in the week at the Hogeschool as counselor. And when she can proof this helps she will asks the government for funding.

Jania chose this intervention because it made her feel uncomfortable that we were made responsible for this problem. She thought it would help to invite them on stage to relate to the problem first.

Kees signals that this technique make us to do a new performance with the audience.

- Ana: I have a joker assistant, and if you have a burning follow up and come to my assistant drop your E-mail or phone, and we will contact you. We will create a list, I have my activism bureau in my organization and we will start a movement. And we will start a six months campaign to all hogescholen and it will

Kees: that is a dream

- Sandra: we discussed a lot of issues, I feel we are not finished with the subject, because we already considered need for further involvement. We opened a facebook website to keep you informed on the research we done, and people can post on the actions they have taken. And then we can decide if we want a follow up meeting to do it face to face and to keep the conversation going.
- Kees: We have a burning question here, I have only one question for you. When you are eating tonight at home, sitting at the table, I hope that someone else is at that table. What do you tell them about today?

Thamar: I tell about something that touched me, and how do we solve depression problems

Maike: that depression is such a problem also with young people

Kees: I want you to ask those questions tonight at the table and start a conversation about it. That is it, action enough

- Thamar: We are going write a letter and address it to the hogeschool of Rotterdam. We want to give recommendations to the director what should be in the letter

Maike: in the introduction week clear to who you go, with mental problems

Thamar: we have three cards yellow, red green. Who agrees to this idea?.

- Ana: My video maker is waiting at the end of the show if you like to leave a message, and how we should fight this problem and we will make a collection of these videos.
- Maike: another corner with videos in which you share your experiences, what you recognize, to show that it is a larger problem.
- Kees: leave the video, sit here and say something. So it does not have to be on youtube
- Sandra: we made some suggestions how to continue engaging on the topic. I would like to ask you how do you think you and other can stay involved in this subject. I noticed it is intruding doing it so direct
- Thamar: form little groups, talk to neighbour. What is the burning question, what will you still talk about tonight?

Questions to keep in mind

Maike: a burning question I will still talk tonight about at the dinner table is: what is my responsibility, when I want social change, do I take other actions? Facebook groups, pair up with videomakers or institutes.

Thamar responds that making theatre is already a lot of work. What we for instance can do is what we did after a project to frame all the questions that came up so that the community organization that was involved could continue working on them.

Thamar realizes that finding solutions is difficult many times because people don't know what to do. Kees thinks this is because they relate to the performance only for this show and the groups relates to it for weeks. Maike argues that a performance can have a small impact. For instance she heard from her mother how she approached people without a job different after visiting a performance on this topic. Ana emphasizes that change does not happen overnight. If I want to be a changemaker I should pick a topic, spend time on it, and repeat and repeat it again. That is the way a lot of people can change. By repeating, scaling it up and connect it to a community and a problem for a longer period.

Maike suggests that our skill is to trigger the questions. And then it is up to others to take it from there. For Kees it is important that we don't only pose questions but at least signpost a way so that people can move forward.

Sandra thinks that if I was just there to facilitate the play, and everything after that is not my cup of tea, then I feel the need to connect to an organization who will work with the questions and solutions posed. This can be very good because the company takes responsibility and ownership. But you have to make them aware of responsibility.

Ana says involving organizations makes the Joker not only a director of the play, but a director of a project. This involves other work and qualities. Kees emphasizes that in this situation you can't do it alone, you need to work together. Instead of being a director, he would call the Joker a facilitator of this process.

Finally Thamar points out in the situation she has to work. 6 different projects, with 6 different topics at the same time. In this situation it is not possible to understand all these topics and make broader projects of them. Sometimes we should be happy with the possibilities that are there, the rest will come eventually.

Meeting three

Introduction

At the start of our meeting we formulated three questions which we discussed and rehearsed on basis of the play Hanne and Olivier are currently developing. The first question concerned the same topic we discussed in our two sessions before: how can the Forum play relate to and have impact on the political and social level. The second question concerned the relation between audience and actors. In what way should they relate to each other. The third question concerned in what way theatre should relate or intervene in a polarized situation.

The macro level

Hanne explained how they make a distinction between the micro level (the individual behaviour); the meso level (how does a group or organization act); and the macro level (the structures of society and politics) Hanne and Olivier find it hard to create scenes and to Joker in order to relate to and have impact on this last level.

David brings forward that this distinction is very in fact very blurry. We also have to remember that behaviour and individuality is a social construction in the macro sphere. What we believe is our decision is not our decision but choices that are given to us. Even our systems of thoughts and believes is a construction, it is shared not mine.

For Olivier activists want to influence the macro level; but indeed as we try to understand individuals then the distinction is not helpful. For Maïke changing the system is important because it stops the problems from reoccurring and in this way we make sure that not only the smart-asses can deal with the system. in order to do this we need to understand the structures that create those problems.

Ana questions then asks: how can we visualise this in a play

The play

Olivier and Hanne explain how the project came about and what general storyline of the play. They did a lot of projects with refugees who wanted to tell their stories. But with these refugees you cannot do too much shows since they were in stressed situations. We wanted to do more, with professional actors - who are refugees. We write the play on the basis of all stories so far.

The two main characters are a refugee and school girl. Both 17 years old. They meet on accident and she needs to do a school project so she chooses the topic refugees. When she tells this in the classroom this her choice leads to polarization. Then we have a crisis scene where he has to change asylum centres. For him this has a very negative impact because he has friends here, learned the language and now has to move to the french area.

The girl experiences the polarization in the class. Her crisis is at the end because she was supposed to go to amsterdam with a friend who does not like refugees, but at the same time the refugee has to move from camp, and he asks her to help him. The topic we bring in is the tension between friendship and politics.

For David the real protagonist of this story is the girl who faces the choice between friends and taking a political stand. For David it is therefore not only about refugees but about teenagers forming an opinion which can mean she later becomes an activist. Olivier agrees that the crisis determines what the impact and meaning of the play will be. But he is in doubt because they started with the theme of refugees and now it is about forming an opinion about the world.

Ana emphasizes how difficult it becomes to give the political context when the girl becomes the protagonist. For Hanne problems like the refugees crisis are a problem for everybody since we are all part of society. Olivier disagrees because in this sense everything becomes everybody's problem.

We decide starting with the last scene where the Belgium girl is asked to choose between going with friends to Amsterdam or to help the refugee she met since he has to move camp.. The

central question for the protagonist - the girl- and also for the audience is: how can I relate to the world, how can I take a stand.

We play the scene and make some changes to improve the dramaturgy which leads to the point where the girl has to choose.

Ana gets confused because both the refugee and the friend now put pressure on the girl and become oppressors. So what in this play is the oppression then? David again emphasizes that she has a legitimate crisis not as important as his. But how as a student do you deal with these questions? Shall I just stay a student, who has fun, or because I was personally affected do something and create disturbance with friends and family. Be comfortable or take a stand?

Hanne does not see how this could become a play about the macro level. How do you choose what kind of person you want to be. That are individual choices, individual behaviour. That won't change the system only if all individuals change.

Maike mentions how Barbara Santos as a Joker always emphasizes that the audience should think about the structures in societies that create these problems. Also she mentions a Polish play in which a catholic doctor refused to help a gay couple. To make this play more about the structural problem they also added a scene where a doctor refuses a women anti-conception. In this way it became visible it was structural.

I (Joep) add that the women and couple in the play could become allies against the same oppressor.

Which topic for which audience

The second question that was raised by Maike, Olivier and Hanne relates to this topic of macro change. Maike was asked by a healthcare organization to create a forum play. Her theatre group, who are normally considered to be clients, will write the play themselves but not on basis of their own stories nor on basis of their own question/dilemmas. For Maike it is a question how involved do the participants need to be, how authentic should stories be for a good process?

For the play of Hanne and Olivier this question becomes relevant since the topic is about- and the actors are- refugees, but it plays in schools. Hanne Justifies this because we are all part of society, se we are part of the problem and solution. But is the crisis of one group enough for the other group?

Hanne and Olivier have thus been debating whether the refugee is the protagonist (and the girl a bystander), or the girl is the protagonist, or they are both protagonists. As discussed before, in our meeting we tended to make the girl protagonist because her problem -taking a stand- is recognizable for the audience. Although high school students were not involved in the process Hanne can imagine being a girl of seventeen to make a character. Imagining a refugee is not possible so therefore refugees were involved in the process.

Ana asks what the problem of the girl is, what is she trying to achieve? For Olivier the essence is she is caught with empathy for a refugee and now she is trying to form an opinion. She is searching for a way to relate to the world.

Maike wonders if there is anything at stake for the girl. She misses a character that really is interested in the presence of the refugee. Now it is only her good heart. For me (Joep) this is

also the power of the play because in climate change and in the refugees crisis none of us is in the need to do something. We only do it because we want to. So if you create this character, it is an imagination. Because there are none of these characters in real life.

Polarization

The third question we were concerned by was how to relate theatre to such a polarized topic as refugees. In the play this polarization is presented in a classroom scene where protagonist presents her plan for a school project on refugees. This leads to a heavy debate. Olivier is hesitant with using TO because in it one chooses side. In a polarized situation we should be careful with this.

Maike tells about a workshop she had with Bert Bergsma who uses a method to deal with polarized situation. For this method a couple of things are important. First of all that we should address the middle group. Secondly what people tend to do is trying to make somebody understand the other side, but most of the time this only fuels the resistance against the mediator and the other group. Thirdly to let people open up and be vulnerable, the mediator (or the play) should do the same. So we should present also what we don't know, what our questions are. Finally it is important to be conscious about the impact questions have you ask. Many questions can polarize a situation even further. We must find a question that all parties can relate to and can answer without attacking the other party. This is a very difficult and delicate process.

For Maike the question how to take a stand is already very polarising. Olivier argues that in the play they already changed the end in order to end with her doubt, we already changed the scene to a question - should I take a side. Which side to take? Before how can I make it better, but what should the character do. Before how can we do something for refugees. Make them better.

This choice she must make is not only political because it determines whether she gets involved in activism, David also points out she gets involved in the polarized public debate on refugees. This also makes the play political.

We started to work on the classroom scene that becomes the big debate. It becomes a debate between her friend who is not welcoming refugees, but not necessarily very racist. And her twin brother who is a leftist activist who stimulated her to do something with refugees. The girl is just proposing a school project not aware of the reactions it will bring.

Maike's first idea was to portray in the background a video of the media where the same discussion happening.

David argues for his statement that the scene does not need a brother who defends refugees, because the girl is doing this already by choosing the topic. For Ana it is a nice image that the girl is caught between two polarized sites. David thinks we will lose the middle ground when the two sites are too polarized. For Olivier the protagonist represents the complexity of the problem

by not knowing what to do. But he wonders if forum is the way to show or work on this complexity.

David thinks the dialogue wont work because people wont feel free to speak up against refugees.

Maike Jokers the scene by making the protagonist still be hesitating about the project, to still be vulnerable if she wants it or not. The actors in the audience criticize her on choosing the topic.

Olivier fears by staging it like this the audience will think: are we going to defend refugees and activists again? Maike also recognizing how the Jokering can raise more protest against refugees. For Olivier the voice of the anti refugee is not raised enough in the play. It should be able to be said, and afterwards be part of the dialogue

Hanne suggest to create afterwards an image with the whole audience that shows polarization. In this way we can escape the arguments against refugees, which deserve complex answers and talk directly about polarization itself. When we enter into a debate with arguments she fears things can get out of hand.

For David it can be OK to raise this chaos. Because of this safe space, it is nice they can say for the first time what they think. But Hanne is not sure whether the space is safe enough, so things will get too messy and the worst thing would be that the teachers would step in to create order.

For David it is not being against refugees but about am I responsible for it. How can I relate to it? Maike wonders whether TO as a rehearsal for life should deal with the polarization or more with the question for responsibility. For Olivier TO is also a theatrical dialogue through the body.

Maike also thinks the polarization scene can add to the importance of the topic for the girl. It could be nice to end the forum in a scene what could happen, what extreme polarization there could be if we don't do anything. I (Joep) fear that by focusing too much on polarization we run the risk only to increase it. Olivier therefore thinks we should focus on the polarization because it is there. But we should be very specific about what questions we can ask.

Maike thinks that placing the actors in the audience can have too much impact. If you put the actors on stage it creates distance for the audience. Olivier suggests to use chairs on stage on which the actors can position themselves as pro or con refugees. This makes me think of the Joker system in which an actor does not play one character- or pick one side of the polarization- but all. For Maike this makes it less about the persons and more about the ideas.

Forum and Playback

We end our meeting with discussing under what circumstances we use forum theatre, playback theatre, dance or the Slim method.

Maike tells about forum theatre. For her it is a method which helps people to intervene in the workshop or in a scene. In a workshop it could be that it is someone's story. Than I use forum to open up, how we can relate to the story, how we can investigate the story and to invite the knowledge of others in the room. I insist on to use Forum in performances because it has a

healing effect to go to a bigger audience, to present your story, stories that are unheard. What is another small part is that we hear from the audience what they see, what are their stories, how they relate to the actors. We hear questions and try to find new ways. Raise awareness. Activate people personally and socially in their lives differently. But first of all carry new perspectives and questions.

Forum can be used with topics where you can externalise the struggle. It has to be with other people, that can also represent an internal struggle. Also you don't have the answer but a sincere question to the audience. And the actors can relate to the struggles. They have some truths in their lives about them.

David tells about a teacher who said Forum can be used in corporation to discuss problems of employees. He does not believe a corporation is a place safe enough to make people intervene honestly. Hanne thinks as a Joker you can influence this for instance by saying what could you do as a character. Not what would you do as yourself. But Olivier thinks we should not underestimate the intelligence of the bosses.

Olivier also thinks the audience should be able to relate to the presented problem. For Maike the audience can be broader because people can relate to each other in ways we cannot think of before. Or the audience can intervene on other characters. Also it can be good to have a fresh perspective on a problem. Olivier likes this idea but also thinks in our society speaking for someone else is already over present. A lot of people have an opinion about someone else.

Olivier tells about playback theatre. It has no constraints on stories, all are important. We honour the person who tells it. It is good to be heard and there are no other goals. Second layer - stories are heard and being seen - you can give a gift to a fellow of the group. Everything is done by the group which creates a lot of bonding. It gives space to someone who did not tell before his or her story.

David does not believe all stories are just as important. For Maike they are if it is about bonding and feeling free. For Olivier they are if the process is long enough. Than all stories have their moments.

For David the power of Playback is that is based on real stories and therefore makes more impact on the audience. They watch the performance and relate it to real life. For Maike this sharing of stories is a healing process.