Forum Theatre
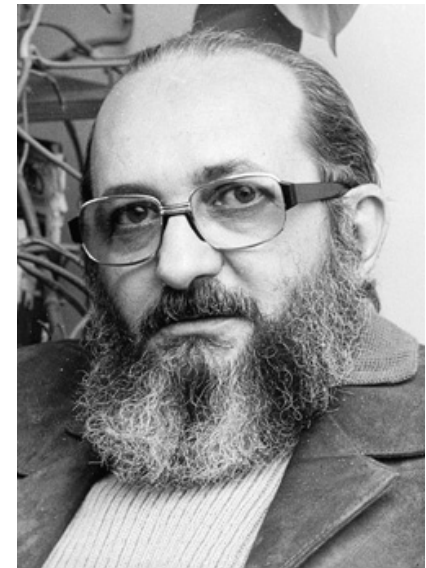
John Eversley & Frances Rifkin

… the mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for the truth. (Plutarch)

Paulo Freire 1921-1997

Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire)

Process

- Dialogue, not didactic
- Starts from relationship between emotions and reason
- 'Generative themes' (broad ideas like 'power' or 'racism')
- Social 'Codes' or "rituals"(concrete examples)- decoded
- Reflection & Action (Praxis)
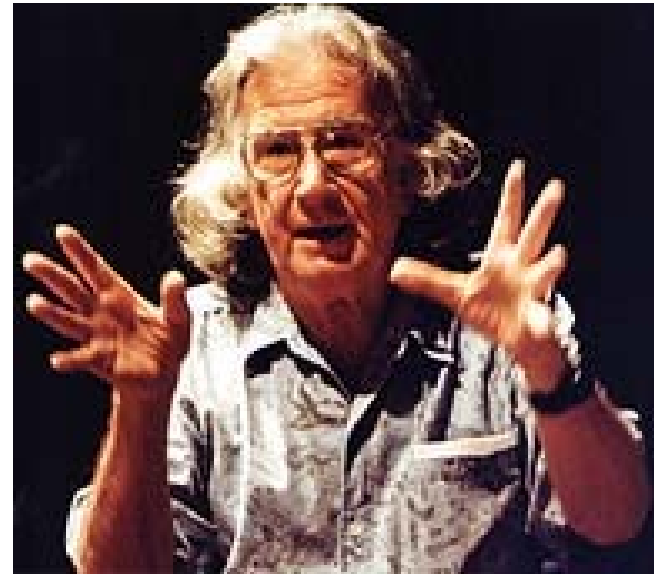
Different kinds of theatre

Not:
- Role play
- "Political Theatre" (c.f.Brecht)
- Drama therapy/Psychodrama (Moreno)
- Theatre of Advice or Evangelical Theatre

Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal)
- Forum theatre
- Legislative Theatre
- Rainbow of Desire (Therapeutic)
- Invisible Theatre

Augusto Boal
1931 -2009

Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal)

- Developed in a context where people were described as 'illiterate' because they were unable to express themselves in a particular language, in this case: Spanish!

  In the 1960s…we made use of our art to tell Truth, to bring Solutions, we …taught peasants how to fight for their lands, we who lived in the big cities…the blacks how to combat racial prejudice….we who were very white; women ….virtually all of us were men. Nevertheless the intention was very good.

- Challenged by a peasant (farmer):

  "when you true artists speak of the blood that must be spilled, this blood is ours not yours"

- *Spectactors:* a member of an audience went on stage after actors failed to resolve the situation on stage and took their place as a spectator/actor.

Forum process…

1. Appears like a conventional play: a problem for the protagonist
2. Spectactors asked if they agree with outcome/'re-solution'
3. Would you like to change it?
4. Spectactors asked who wants to replace protagonist and when?
5. A Spectactor takes protagonist's place
6. More replacements, taking turns
7. (Discussion of model of action for the future)

The Multiling workbook

- Planning a session

- Setting up a session

- Using the video

Planning a session

- Who is it for?
  - Migrant workers
  - Trade union representatives
  - Employers: managers and supervisors, Human Resources
  - Educationalists
- Who is running it?
  - Experienced Forum Theatre facilitators?
  - Educationists
  - Workers from trade unions or migrant workers' organisations
- How long is the session?
  - 3 hours minimum

Using the video

- Background to Multiling project
- Video(s) made by migrant workers in London
- Scenarios developed from their experience and findings of research
- In addition to six scenarios, there are many more scenarios from research
- Take the scene from the video and restage it simply
- Play the scene….
- Make new scenes with colleagues

The scenarios

1. **Actimel**: cleaning staff are given a new product to use. Their health and safety is at risk because they don't understand the very limited information they are given

2. **Darling**: a new employee discovers that the supervisor will not use her proper name. She feels disrespected.

3. **Packing**: there is tension between a new migrant worker and an established local worker about how fast to work. The trade union representative does not want divisions between workers.

4. **Toothbrush**: a misunderstanding between a hotel guest and a housekeeper means she may lose her job

5. **Join the union**: Why? Why not? A group of workers discuss reasons for joining or not joining a union

6. **The union clinic**: individual members who are migrant workers bring their problems to branch official. When he asks the full-time official if the union can help, it is clear that union policies mean that this is unlikely

Joker says

- *Is it familiar? ; Does it seem real? Do you recognise this?*
- *Could it happen differently?*
- *What would you do if you were x?*
- *At what point would you change it? (Spectactors call out "stop", clap or click fingers to indicate)*
- *Play the scene again, several times, and replace x to change it to the way you think it should be. There's no single solution to this*
- *"Who else wants to have a go?"*