Naming the Movement: Recapitalizing Popular Theatre

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The naming of a popular movement of radical grassroots theatre work that countered the professionalized institution of Canadian theatre in the last two decades of the 20th century has entered the historical record as positivist fact. It can be found in reference works, in numerous scholarly articles, in archival references to the Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance and its regional ancillaries, and in memoirs.[1] In this consideration of the historical arc of structures, policies and practices that frames the work of politically activist theatre work in Canada since the 1970's, my attention is drawn to the problem of "movement" as a technique of historical knowledge and a method of periodization. Theatre historians rely on coherent movements to create the narrative structures of history and at the same time accept these movements as positivist evidence of their narratives. The canon of Canadian theatre history progresses through a sequence in which the popular theatre movement follows a narrative sequence that begins with the Little Theatre movement and its antithesis, the Workers' Theatre Movement in the 1930s, to the regional theatre movement of the 1950s and '60s, and the alternative theatre movement of the 1970s.[2]

This trope of movement implies a historically coherent mass effort, but the proposal of movements also implies a governing discourse that defines boundaries. In Canadian theatre discourse, movements are so-named from within, and scrutiny reveals that the act of naming is frequently a regulatory strategy of leadership and organization. The tactics of cultural mobilization produce structures that in effect script subsequent narrations. Consequently, what historians identify as movements can be understood as historically situated attempts to control

the material structures of theatre work for reasons that must be sought within the historical moment of naming. Movements do not arise and disappear as a kind of cultural geology; rather, the operations of power that seek to implement local strategic objectives change according to the conditions to which they respond.

The Workers Theatre Movement (WTM) of the 1930s offers a case in point. The naming of that movement was an attempt to govern the vast and extremely pluralized realm of radical theatre work and agitprop by political factions which in Canada, the UK and the United States were related, more or less directly, to the member parties of the Communist International.[3] The proposition of a movement was an organizational strategy that confirmed the vanguard leadership of the Communist Party and which thereby dictated terms of acceptance. The WTM was unique insofar as it was formalized by the organizational principles of the party and Comintern organizations. In Britain, the famous rupture in the WTM that led to the birth of Unity Theatre in 1936 was in fact not a crisis of a movement but a crisis of the party leadership's attempt to control the terms of radical theatre (provoked by its move to repudiate agitprop as part of the shift to Popular Front aesthetic regime s in the mid-1930s).

In a more recent example, the alternative theatre movement in Canada was in fact a strategy of naming that nationalized the aesthetics of counter-culture performance in order to legitimize it in the structural terms imposed by the arts councils. In this naming, the emergent discipline of Canadian theatre studies was crucial, especially in the pages of *Canadian Theatre Review* under its founding editor, Don Rubin. But if the new wave of self-produced theatres did not constitute a movement, they did indicate a demographic reconfiguration of theatrical process and taste that the arts councils were ill-equipped to handle. The proposition of a movement was in fact a bid for resources.

If the naming of a movement is an attempt to legitimize a field of work in a cultural economy, its success can be measured by the policies it forces. In that sense, movements are generative only insofar as they script structures that are capable of commanding funding; these structures in turn force new policy solutions from the various structures with which they

exchange (such as the arts councils). "Movements" are strategic responses to the conditions of the moment but coalesce into coherent structures themselves when accepted and rescripted by historians as factual evidence.

Seen from this perspective, the popular theatre movement was a lingering remnant of leninist cultural organization, by which a handful of activists depersonalize their work in the narrative of mass action. If the movement has disappeared it is because the organizational discourses of radical work have adapted to the ideological necessities of the era of transnational capital: the movement has become an industry, with the values of professionalism, entrepreneurial initiative and corporatization that implies. In Canada, as in the United States, and increasingly in Australia, the means of that transition has been the radical theatre protocols of Augusto Boal.

The ambivalent space in which popular theatre has worked, in which the movement exists both as fiction and structural practice, can be located in the gap between two critical terms that have recently entered the vocabulary of theatre studies: "theatre culture," as used by Rosemarie Bank (2), and "the theatre estate," a term introduced by Baz Kershaw (91). Bank prefaces her study of American theatre in the period between 1825 and 1860 by noting her "restlessness with the view of cultures primarily as reflections (and so always behind or in front of) the societies producing them" (2). She proposes instead the concept of "theatre culture":

> the notion that peoples in a culture stage themselves and perform multiple roles. In this larger sense of performance, of theatre outside of playhouses as well as within them, culture is not only or even exclusively metaphoric, a figure standing for something else, but is itself constitutive of the relationships we find circulating in and among the many universes of antebellum America. (2)

The idea of theatre culture is critical in Bank's study because she is not only concerned with the developing institution of the theatre and its new cultural tropes, but with the circulation of theatricality in the larger sense through social culture:

> Theatre culture displays historical spaces of production, consumption, change, and appropriation, but also insists upon class as a performance, ideology a creation and the "authentic" as the most compelling deception of all. (8)

For Bank, theatre is a practice that cannot be separated from the multiplicity of fields in which culture operates. Her analysis enables us to understand theatre as the product of material systems of representation, and at the same time a formative principle of those systems.

In these terms, Kershaw's notion of the theatre estate usefully identifies the disciplinary regimes of the theatre as a set of structures and practices that regulates historically situated boundaries in theatre culture. Kershaw insightfully examines the simultaneity of the modernism paradigm of theatre and the postmodernism paradigm of performance, "intertwined like the lines of an unfinished mandala" (7), "between Brecht and Baudrillard." With a gesture to Foucault, Kershaw identifies the theatre as a "disciplinary system" (31) and undertakes a productive shift in the categorization of performance, from the ethnographic model popularized by Richard Schechner, to a politicized practice that can appreciate the performativity of radical engagement in a multiplicity of sites outside and intertwined with "the theatre estate and its disciplines" (91),

This notion of a theatre estate as a disciplinary system reinforces what David Watt and I have called "the fiction of the professional theatre" which has, in a historical progression that we trace from the cultural delivery model of the Second International through to the shifting structures of arts subsidies and cultural policy, defined the field – the disciplines in which radical theatreworkers have operated (Filewod and Watt, 252).

In these terms, the naming of movements can be read as an attempt to relocate marginalized practices in theatre culture into the theatre estate. This was clearly the case in the field of popular theatre in Canada, which became (self)-known as a movement with the formation of the Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance in 1981. The acceptance of the term "popular theatre" to identify a range of radical theatre forms, whether oppositional and affirmative (or, frequently, both) was unique in the lexicon of English-speaking theatre, displacing the more familiar term "community theatre," which retained currency in Australia, the

United Kingdom and the United States. (In Canadian usage, "community theatre" has until recently denoted the amateur work of what was once known as the Little Theatre movement.)

The naming of popular theatre was an attempt to reconcile two different traditions of activist theatre work. The term was introduced into Canadian usage by Ross Kidd, whose ground-breaking organization of theatre projects for popular education in Africa drew on Canadian examples but implemented theories of community animation derived from the writings of Paulo Friere. For Kidd, popular theatre was a participatory "tool for conscientization":

> But what is popular theatre? We have chosen to define it as "people's theatre speaking to the common man in his language and idiom and dealing with problems of direct relevance to this situation." It is "popular" because it attempts to involve the whole community, not just a small elite determined by class or education. […] Its use of local languages and participatory style and its attempt to reflect the audience's own situation from their perspective makes it their theatre rather than an imposition. (3)

Kidd's interest in popular theatre was tactical, instrumental, and pedagogical; he had no real interest in either theatre culture or the theatre estate, but he recognized that in the Canadian context, activist popular theatre was sustained by politically engaged theatre companies such as the Mummers and Catalyst (which had been founded in 1978 in Edmonton as a company to perform role play theatre on social issues). David Barnet, a principal founder of Catalyst, has identified the gap between Kidd's instrumentality and the different but no less socially committed tradition in Canadian theatre culture:

> There are two distinct approaches to popular theatre in Canada, one emphasizing cultural identity through the use of story and character, the other stressing the communication of information and ideas. This dichotomy has been useful, particularly in Third World countries, since it allows theatre workers to respond to local situations in a variety of ways.
>
> In Canada popular theatre evolved out of the collective creations of the 1970s, sharing the objective of reflecting the lives and issues of specific communities. As the

need developed to animate groups to take action for change, so popular theatre narrowed its focus and applied a more rigorous social and political analysis. […] Without such a philosophy popular theatre cannot transcend its cultural base and contribute to political change. (5)

More recent theorizing of popular theatre has rescued it from this structural dichotomy, looking instead at the defining principles located in process. Perhaps the most useful definition has been provided by Julie Salverson, whose scholarship in the field follows on a history of work as a playwright and director in popular theatre projects. Her definition includes the notion of a movement but in terms of process rather than structural discourse. Her movement is a decentering process of popular motion:

> Popular theatre is traditionally a movement from the grass roots where people outside mainstream culture "tell their stories" through all stages of the process: to each other, to the artists and cultural animators who work with them, and to an audience. It is a public and distinctly pedagogical enterprise, with aims historically rooted in the efforts of disenfranchised peoples throughout the world to stage and realize alternatives to the status quo. (36)

The naming of popular theatre to describe the synthesis identified by Barnet and Salverson began 1978, when Chris Brookes, then artistic director of the Mummers Troupe, convened a meeting of representatives of left-wing and collective theatres from across the country in Newfoundland. Delegates at that meeting were introduced to Ross Kidd, who had just returned from several years in Zambia and Botswana. Kidd's African work inspired many of the Canadians he met, but in fact Kidd himself had been inspired by the Mummers Troupe's historic 1973 intervention in Sally's Cove that resulted in the troupes' first community documentary, *Gros Mourn.* Brookes' work with the Mummers had been influenced by the Frierean work of Memorial University of Newfoundland's Extension service, especially its collaboration with the national Film Board's "Fogo Project" which used film as a technique of community animation

in remote Newfoundland fishing outports and demonstrated that cultural action could lead to material change (Evans 163-4).

This common ground of Frierian activism was instrumental in the shaping of popular theatre work in Canada, and it was one of the reasons that the work of Augusto Boal (himself directly influenced by Friere) circulated through Canadian activist theatre a decade sooner than it did in the United States. (The other reason was the circulation of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed through francophone radical theatre in Europe, Africa and Quebec.) Brookes's work, and more critically, his rhetoric when writing about his work, led Kidd to initiate contacts with activist theatre workers across Canada while working towards a PhD in popular education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, a major think-tank of Frierean work. Subsequently, Kidd would lever his contacts with the Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance and Canadian international development agencies to organize an International Popular Theatre Alliance, bringing together radical theatre workers in Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Latin America and South-east Asia.

Having made contacts in activist theatres, Kidd organized an international "community animation" workshop in 1981 in Thunder Bay as part of Kam Theatre's Bread & Circuses festival of small, vaguely left-wing theatres (which became, retroactively, the first CPTA festival). With financial support from CUSO, Kidd's week-long workshop brought a dozen Canadians together to exchange skills with popular theatre workers from seven African and Caribbean nations. By introducing the term "popular theatre," Ross Kidd gave the workshop participants an instrument that enabled them to define their commonality clearly and which relocated the defining criteria for political theatre to the active collaboration with a community in the process of struggle. It was the Canadian contingent in this workshop that drew up the original proposal of a popular theatre alliance for ratification by the companies at the festival.

The original intention of the founders was that the CPTA was to be an alliance of professional companies, however loosely that term might be applied (in general "professional" was a code word meaning recognition by the Canada Council.). A separate category for

individual memberships was accepted but with resistance from those who saw the organization as a left-wing alternative to the entrenched theatre estate. For that same reason "amateur" companies were to be excluded from company membership but could apply for individual membership. This provision of course failed to anticipate the later realization that in popular theatre the distinctions of professional and amateur were always problematic, and both of these conditions very quickly evaporated.

The original principles of the CPTA articulated a vision of popular theatre that owed much to the collective tradition of the alternative theatre. The political definition of popular theatre was a subject of considerable debate when the idea of the CPTA was proposed at the festival's plenary. The term had been introduced in the workshop that preceded the festival to convey political engagement, but was accepted by the companies attending the festival as a description of their shared populism:

> a) [...] We believe that theatre is a means and not an end. We are theatres which work to effect social change.
>
> b) We see our task as an ongoing process in which art is actively involved in the changing nature of the communities in which we live and work.
>
> c) We particularly attempt to seek out, develop and serve audiences whose social reality is not normally reflected on the Canadian stage.
>
> d) Therefore our artistic practice grows out of a social rather than private definition of the individual.
>
> e) Therefore there is a fundamental difference of purpose, priorities and aesthetics which separates us from the dominant theatre ideology in Canada today. (Filewod 202-203.)

The formation of an alliance provided activists with a structural tool that could be offered as proof of legitimacy to the arts councils, and which could provide a letterhead for fundraising. The major funders targeted by the small groups of volunteers who sustained the sequence of

biennial festivals through the next decade were the arts councils (or course) but equally importantly, international development agencies

By formally constituting itself as a movement, the CPTA was a textual fiction given materiality by the signs of institution: an executive, a newsletter and a mailing list. By 1983, when Catalyst Theatre, (which by that time had emerged as perhaps the most innovative popular theatre in North America) sponsored the Bread & Roses festival in Edmonton, the movement was less of a counter-professional structure than an instrument to lever funding for festivals. This festival also saw the introduction of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed methods to English Canada when Théâtre Sans Détour performed some forum pieces in English, translated in performance by Lib Spry.

Bread & Roses established a biennial tradition that was followed in Winnipeg in 1985 with Bread & Dreams; two years later the festival located to Sydney, NS, as Standin' The Gaff. By the time of the 1987 festival, popular theatre had clearly consolidated into a movement very different from that envisioned by the founders of CPTA only six years previously. Now instead of an alliance of professional companies, the CPTA had evolved to include as well a broader network of community based groups and individuals, many of whom were not theatre professionals but popular theatre facilitators and development educators. This evolution may be perceived in effect as the gradual penetration of the movement by the very sector its founders sought to exclude.

But if the structural terms of a movement defined by radical work in theatre culture, bidding for legitimacy in the theatre estate, had clearly shifted, it remained true that the movement was still largely a narrative that kept alive a text of common purpose and enterprise. As the definition of popular theatre shifted from companies and structures, the statement of principles expressed by the emergent CPTA shifted to reflect an emphasis on process. In July 1992, Ground Zero Productions, a small production house that worked mainly within the union movement producing "industrials for the social services", sponsored a retreat of popular theatre workers from across in Ontario (Bouzek 10). Meeting in Peterborough, the group issued a

statement of principles that revised the original CPTA statement substantially to acknowledge the politics of cultural diversity (Bouzek 10):

1. We do theatre for, with and by communities. […] We choose to work with communities whose voices have not been given equal who have not been given access to resources in our society.

2. Our audiences are our judges.

3. We believe in taking theatre to the people, rather than making them come to us.

4. We see our work as engaged in a process of Popular Education.

5. We believe our work does not begin and end with the performance of a play.

6. We believe our work must speak the language of the people.

7. We agree to treat our fellow popular theatre workers with respect.

8. We acknowledge that the conditions of our work must change with the needs of our communities, and we must respond flexibly.

> Resolved that we propose to Councils a category of Popular Theatre work with its own funding. (Ground Zero)

This was not the first time that such an approach had been made to the arts councils. In 1988, as part of the organizing effort of the Bread & Butter festival in Guelph, the Ontario Arts Council sponsored a day-long retreat of over one hundred self-defined popular theatre workers, which led to the formation of yet another structure, the Ontario Popular Theatre Alliance (which existed as the legal shell of the festival and discorporated soon thereafter). From the OAC's perspective, the forum was a strategy of legitimizing the new funding initiative of Artists in the Workplace, which although short-lived, had significant impact by sponsoring the annual Mayworks Festival of labour arts. By the time of the Ground Zero retreat, the promise of those initiatives had stalled, and cutbacks to arts funding at all levels of government had narrowed the

horizon of expectation that popular theatre would secure a place as a structural constituent of the theatre estate.

The defining condition of popular theatre after Thunder Bay had been the process of making theatre with communities in struggle, in partnership with activist organizations. Few companies were able to secure ongoing funding in those terms, and those that did invented new models of partnership that moved away from the theatre estate. Catalyst survived through the 1980s as a funded agency of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission; Ground Zero developed a model of entrepreneurial commissions within the labour movement; in Vancouver, Headlines developed as a Boal-authorized Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed. More typically however, popular theatre work depended on a workshop-based culture funded by non-governmental oganizations (NGOs). There were many such projects, and each of them generated a report as a condition of the project grant. In a very real sense the movement is the narrative that emerges from a vast pile of unpublished, and generally unread, bureaucratic documents of this sort.

The river of funding from NGOs was never lavish but it was constant: through the 1980s, major agencies such as CIDA and CUS0 funded numerous projects that brought theatre workers from the under-developed world to "share skills" with Canadians, This led to a productive series of exchanges, such as the "Food Chain" workshop organized by Catalyst in 1988, which brought together a small group of core theatre activists to Alberta to work with First Nations and Jamaican popular theatre workers. CIDA and CUSO funding was crucial to the CPTA festivals and brought to Canada groups such as Teocoyani from Nicaragua, Jagran from India, The Philippines Educational Theatre Association (more commonly known as PETA) and Sistren from Jamaica. More than anything else, this funding sustained the popular theatre movement. These contacts began to dwindle as successive federal governments pulled the plug on international aid programs. In retrospect, the turning point was the defeat of apartheid in South Africa, after which the Canadian government backed away from its widely recognized stance of moral and economic eminence in the field of international aid, and exposed more clearly its

deeper commitment to transnational corporatism. With no more political capital to be won by sponsoring dissidents, Canadian government policy began to replace sponsoring dollars with pepper spray.

The project/workshop culture produced by NGO funding was valuable on a structural level but as well led to the development of unique theatre projects. The collaboration in 1985 between the Great Canadian Theatre Company and Inter Pares on the *Side Effects* project serves as a useful model of the ways in which the organizational and funding methods of the popular theatre process produced particular dramaturgical forms. As described in the press release for the 1986 national tour,

> The show presents ninety minutes of music, humour and poignant dramatic sketches, developed from a base of solidly researched facts. The play takes us inside a multinational pharmaceutical company and exposes how drugs are marketed internationally. It introduces us to several women whose paths cross in the waiting room of their doctor's office. We see how and why these women end up with drug prescriptions and what effect they have on their lives. (GCTC)

The *Side Effects* project began in 1982 when Inter Pares, an NGO that funds community development health care projects, sponsored a visit to Canada by a group of women from Bangladesh that brought into discussion the politics of international pharmaceutical companies. A follow-up workshop resulted in the formation of a community-based network called Women's Health Interaction, which then sought funding for a larger educational project. As described in the final report of the project, the director of Inter Pares had been part of a working group that had sponsored a national tour of a play about the Nicaraguan revolution by the Great Canadian Theatre Company in Ottawa; another development worker had been involved in a similar project. The women who comprised the WHI workshop agreed to form a "playgroup" to develop a popular theatre piece. As the final report documented,

> The playgroup in its structure and process embodied the tone and intent of the entire project. The group was formed of women who worked as health activists, nurses,

students, development workers, educators, writers, cultural workers, mothers, addiction

counsellors, all drawn together by their common concern for women's health. The-

playgroup worked for the most part collectively, each woman in the group contributed in

an essential way from her own experience and her own resources, and retained

throughout a sense of ownership in the project through her involvement and participation.

(Lysnes)

The playgroup undertook a participatory process of research and creation, working with professional theatre facilitators who built the final script (which was "structured" by Janet Irwin and Barbara Lysnes). The structure of the play replicated its process, as was often the case with popular theatre work: agitprop commentary balanced dramatic episodes and testimonials, building a theatricalized narrative that could be performed in found spaces (community centres and theatres) by a small cast of five women with minimal technical requirements. The text had to allow the five women to carry a governing narrative centered on recurring characters: a wise Granny narrator, an evil pharmaceutical executive who creates a disease to sell his drugs, a nurse who drug abuse leads to a suicide attempt and a Third World woman who sells her chicken to buy useless cough syrup (GCTC). Along with these, the actors represented some forty characters in a satiric and condemnatory overview of the issue.

This is the structure of the panoramic agitprop, as pioneered in the 1970s by groups such as the Mummers Troupe in Newfoundland, 7:84 in the UK, and the Popular Theatre Troupe in Australia. By the mid-1980s it had become a familiar dramaturgy. The template of *Side Effects* is basically that of dozens of similar projects done in the same period. The recurring features of testimony and satire were produced by three conditions: the widespread belief that popular audiences are best served by a kind of down-home "good night out" theatricality, by a need to respect the voices and the ownership of material generated by workshop participants before the text was written, and by the oversight (if not scrutiny) of sponsoring organizations whose interest is invariably pedagogical (if not propagandistic). The demurral (or restraint) of artists from imprinting their own subjectivities on the material quite naturally led to a reliance on proven

forms that could be generated cheaply, quickly and collectively. This seems to have been the case with *Side Effects*.

The national tour of the play, funded by Inter Pares and the federal department of Health and Welfare, marketed the show to local sponsors who recouped costs by selling inexpensive tickets through their networks. As numerous groups found, this, more than the actual content of the show, was the real work of the popular theatre process, because it functioned as a tool of local mobilization around the issue. The 1985 tour played to some 5,000 people in thirty communities in eight provinces. That is in fact a very small number, but a more useful measure of the effect of the process is the number of community organizations the audiences represented, and which took local action to sponsor the performances. These included several dozen groups ranging from local health care unions, Oxfam branches, treatment centres, shelters, churches, schools, and women's action committees. The relatively small audiences expand in significance when considered in these terms. The actual performances can be understood as ceremonial enactments of the networking and community-building around the issue that brought the play to town. This is the model of mobilization that Ground Zero would refine in the 1990s with organized labour and the activist coalitions of the social justice movement

As NGO funding became scarcer, the CPTA slowly fragmented, a process stressed by the politics of new understandings of cultural diversity that exposed the text of a subsuming movement as one that privileged the experience of a small group of (mostly) white, professionally trained popular theatre workers who balanced their activism with careers in the theatre estate. With the slowdown of NGO sponsored projects, popular theatre work began to differentiate into contesting spheres: a large, pluralized and generally unrecorded grass-roots activism that continued to draw heavily on volunteer efforts, and a consolidation of professionalized popular theatre sustained by a few companies that secured places in the theatre "ecology." These spheres overlap in the community play movement based on the model of the Colway Theatre trust in Britain, in which a core group of professionals facilitate a mass volunteer performance that reproduces the history and culture of the host community. The

Colway paradigm has had remarkable currency across North America, in part because it built on a pre-existing tradition of community pageants, and in part because it satisfied arts council desires to fund art in "communities" (however defined) while meeting regulatory criteria of professionalism.

At its best, as in *Ka'ma'mo'pi cik / The Gathering*, in Fort Qu'Appelle in 1992, this form produced a politically productive synergy of community activism in performance, but all too frequently has veered close to the condition that that David Watt has identified in the case of Australian community based theatre, where

> The movement is well into its third generation: the first, which knew that "community theatre" meant "political theatre", has largely fallen exhausted by the wayside or into the arms of tertiary education institutions or the arts bureaucracy, and the second generation of people, who joined because they liked what they saw, are being swamped by a third generation which joined in search of a job, and is mostly concerned to maintain an habituated practice because "it got funded last year." (9)

The vast domain of local activism in which most popular theatre takes place today is so diverse and fragmented, and so localized, that it can no longer sustain the text of a movement. Its very plurality resists regulatory discourses. In this regard, popular theatre has paralleled the desystemization of theatre culture in its wider sense, with its now clear differentiation between a small, funded theatre estate and a much larger, more diverse but unfunded "fringe" culture. The difference is that the fringe is primarily an economic field that produces structures to penetrate the theatre estate; the localized popular theatre is a field that produces structures to meet local political objectives.

A very small number of popular theatres have survived these transitions to secure professionalized status in a theatre culture that has become more volatile, entrepreneurial and competitive. As the relationship of the popular theatre movement and the NGOs suggests, popular theatre structures (and by corollary, the work methods and artistic principles they produce) adapt to meet the economic conditions of funding, as activist theatre workers seek

means and opportunities to continue working. The grant-conditioned climate in which popular theatre work developed in Canada was in fact a benign form of state sponsorship which lasted so long as it served the interests (inarticulate, negotiated and ad hoc as they might be) of state and quasi-state policy. In those terms, popular theatre work was part of the larger hegemonic workings of the liberal social contract. A popular theatre festival, such as Bread & Butter in 1989, typically received funding from five or six different government agencies. Federal and provincial arts councils, touring offices, multicultural programs, women's directorates, job creation programs, CIDA: all contributed their bit, on their own terms, in a funding web that drew on social service funding, community development and cultural programs. Each of these programs saw the festival as a line item that fulfilled program requirements in their annual report.

The collapse of this system, occasioned by the degrading of international development programs and the massive cutbacks to cultural funding that destabilized theatre culture in the 1990s, forced a realignment in popular theatres that sought to sustain professional (that is, paid) work. Arts council funding remained a possibility but rarely does such funding amount to more than twenty percent of a theatre's budget.

The companies that have survived, that have found ways to develop new initiatives and expand their work possibilities, have done so by adapting to the market-driven culture that provides the text of contemporary politics. If popular theatre models social processes, it also models economic ideology. The ground-up, collectivist approach of the grant-driven popular theatre movement has been replaced by a business template in which corporatized political theatres sell their services to left-wing allies. The typifying example is that of Ground Zero Productions' work with unions; in that case, this remodeling has worked to expand the definitions of theatre to include video and street performance.

This recapitalization of popular theatres is part of an identifiable North American social trend towards the corporatization of structures of dissent, as they try to survive in an era of decreased public funding and increased pressure to conform to the discursive practices of the

business "community." Capitalization requires commodity, and in this regard one of the defining traits of the popular theatre estate has been the commodification of Augusto Boal as the currency of legitimization.

In the twenty years since his Theatre of the Oppressed techniques were introduced to anglo Canada, Augusto Boal has become the world's preeminent theoretician and trainer of political theatre, and has spawned a minor industry of publishing, pedagogy and critical analysis. His books have been published in numerous languages, and his authorized Centres for the Theatre of the Oppressed around the world compete for legitimacy as loci of canonical truth. Boal's popularity derives not just from the proven efficacy of his interactive forms of politicized psychodrama (including Forum Theatre and the Rainbow of Desire, and more recently, Legislative Theatre), but because he has released his protocols for free use by anyone who wants to use them. His only condition is that the methods he devised follow rules that must not be changed (although they often are in practice).

Boal didn't invent interactive political theatre. There were synchronic forms at work in Canada and Jamaica in the late 1970s that, like Forum Theatre, derived from the role play techniques of pyschodrama. Boal created a pedagogy around his work, structuring it as a theatrical game with fixed rules that had to be learned. Pedagogy produces pedagogues, and pedagogues establish structures in which to work. As a corps of Boal-trained facilitators grew in the 1980s, their authority functioned as a means of professional legitimization. This invariably produced competition.

The free circulation of Theatre of the Oppressed techniques decreased as Boal became more popular, and the stakes grew accordingly higher. In 1987, Boal led an intensive five-day workshop at the CPTA's Standing' the Gaff festival in Cape Breton, which effectively distributed his model across Canada as the new operating system of popular theatre. Five years later, another workshop, this time on Manitoulin Island, erupted in crisis over cultural, institutional, and regional conflicts in the popular theatre community. For some of the participants, as Eleanor Crowder has described in her analysis of the event, Boal's insistence on

the authority of methodology inscribed a text of universal humanism and hierarchical power that could not accommodate the politics of difference. Crowder's conclusion was "Clearly what Boal means by Theatre of the Oppressed and what we mean by it are two different things"(51).

The deeper conflict in the workshop was one of ownership. Boal's practice of authorizing "centres" empowered to teach his models in his name effectively disenfranchised the caucus of free-lance popular theatre workers and gave the weight of legitimacy to two companies, Headlines Theatre in Vancouver, and Mixed Company in Toronto. Both companies operate a number of community-oriented Theatre of the Oppressed programs and offer training courses and workshops at beginning and advanced levels. Headline's "Theatre for Living" and "Power Play" programs are the more developed of these, and more recently, as David Diamond has described in his production reports on the Headlines website and in *Canadian Theatre Review*, the company has initiated "Legislative Theatre" projects, in which a popular theatre project works closely with a legal team that develops draft legislation to present to politicians.

The crisis of legitimacy may have been accelerated in part by the discursive control over Boalian pedagogy by America centres. Boal's work entered the United States via Latin American, Canadian and European vectors but became naturalized as an American discovery. (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz's 1994 collection *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism*, although edited by two American academics, actually included more Canadian than American material, with major articles by David Diamond, Lib Spry and Julie Salverson, and a "Canadian Roundtable" that exposes quite clearly the tensions that erupted on Manitoulin Island.) In the period since then however, the gravitational locus of Boal legitimacy in the United States has been in Nebraska, where the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed – Omaha, Inc. has been remarkably energetic at sponsoring conferences, workshops and training courses. Its presence has again raised the stakes of power and ownership by furthering the transformation of a freely distributed system into a disciplinary regime.

If the structural contexts of popular theatre reproduce the economic systems in which they operate, the emergence of a corporatized popular theatre profession may be a result of, and

response to, the rapid developments of transnational capital that have dismantled many of the structures of social democracy and have normalized the rhetoric of business in the metaphor of the "marketplace." The idea of a popular theatre movement was one of many enactments of a social democratic notion of culture in Canada, and has since been superceded by a smaller, discursively regulated and corporatized popular theatre estate. The commitment to community activism and social justice continues to produce new theatrical processes and dramaturgical forms, and arguably three decades of experience have resulted in more productive expertise. The popular theatre movement was a narrative fiction that served its purposes, but while the work of popular theatre continues, it may be that its efficacy is mitigated by the loss of the hope and the open field of possibilities that the "movement" expressed, however naively.

Notes

1. See, for example, John McGrath's enthusiastic (and factually incorrect) description of the "60 or so member companies of the Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance" that he encountered in 1987 at the Standin' The Gaff festival in Cape Breton, in *The Bone Won't Break: On Theatre and Hope in Hard Times* (London: Methuen, 1990).

2. These movements have been canonized in a substantial body of texts. The accumulated contents of *Canadian Theatre Review* and the entries in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre*, and the ever-expanding *Canadian Theatre Enclycopedia on the Web* (http://www.canadiantheatre.com) may be considered meta-texts that are informed by the geneological sequencing of movements. The degree to which this sequence shapes the historiography of Canadian Theatre studies can be seen by perusing the following texts in order: Benson, Eugene and L.W. Conolly. *English-Canadian Theatre*. (Toronto : Oxford U P, 1987); Gardner, David. "Little Theatre and Amateur Theatre," *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre*, ed. Benson, Eugene and L.W. Conolly (Toronto: OUP, 1989): 310-309; Lee, Betty. *Love and Whisky; The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival* (Toronto:McClelland and Stewart, 1973); Ryan, Toby Gordon. *Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties* (Toronto: CTR

Publications, 1981); Rubin, Don. *Creeping Toward a Culture: The Theatre in English Canada Since 1945*. (Erin, ON: Alive Press, 1974); Czarnecki, Mark. "The Regional Theatre Movement." *Contemporary Canadian Theatre: New World Visions*, ed. Anton Wagner, (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1985): 37-47; Usmiani, Renate. *Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada* . (Vancouver : UBC Press,1983); Filewod, Alan. "Alternate Theatre," *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre*, ed. Benson, Eugene and L.W. Conolly (Toronto: OUP, 1989): 16-20; Johnston, Denis**.** *Up the Mainstream: The Rise of Toronto's Alternative Theatres, 1968-197*5 (Toronto : U Toronto P, 1991); Filewod, Alan: *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1987). Taken as a whole, this canon affirms a sequence marked by periodic shifts in cultural policy and the capitalization of the theatre as a professional institution. I first began to question the historical logic of the sequencing, without questioning the deeper problem of movements, in "The Alternative Orthodoxy in Canadian Theatre History." *Theatre Journal,* 41.2 (May 1989): 201-210.

3. The naming of the Workers Theatre Movement was in fact several namings, because the name was adopted across cultures and languages. In Britain, the Workers Theatre Movement was both a "movement" of local troupes and a specific troupe so named; in Canada and the United States the WTM was an informal designation for a shifting number of troupes in correspondence with equally shifting centres of authority. Despite this informality, the name was generally capitalized (with or without an apostrophe after "Workers") as if referring to a formalized structure. I look at some of the politics involved in my article, "'A Qualified Workers Theatre Art': *Waiting for Lefty* and the (Re)Formation of Popular Front Theatres." *Essays in Theatre* 17.2 (May 1999): 111-128.

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