



THEO-MUSIC Toolkit

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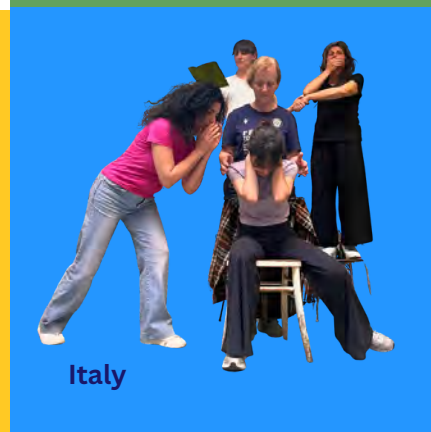
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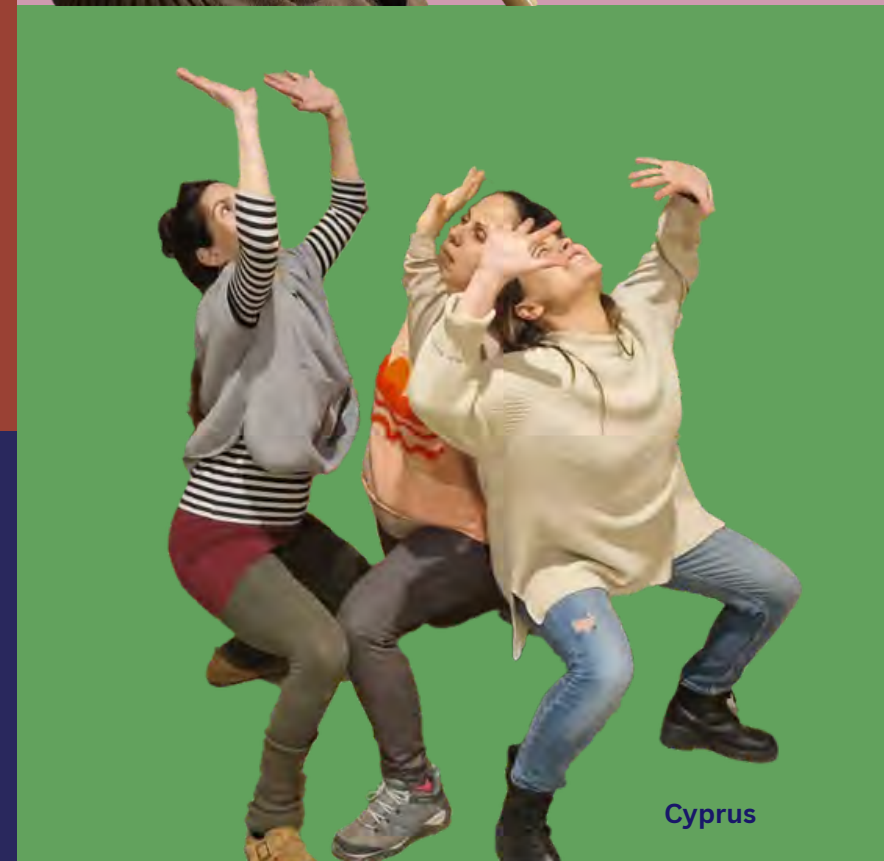
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Welcome to Theo-Music!

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1 Introduction

This Toolkit is designed to travel independently. You may have discovered it on Theo-Music website, on the newsletter you received, but it might just as easily have reached you through other online spaces or even been shared by a friend.

While it originates from the unforgettable experiences of the Erasmus+ project “THEO-MUSIC - THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED WITH MUSIC -New instruments to work with oppressed communities”, it is intended for autonomous life, use and inspiration across a wide range of contexts. It is for anyone interested in fostering conflict resolution, increasing awareness of unhealthy life patterns, and transforming disharmony into greater harmony. It also supports the development of a grounded and realistic understanding of the roots of oppression within groups or communities.

This understanding becomes clearer through the experience of perceiving also what others perceive, and through engaging with one another as reciprocal “mirrors.”

In a society, and in our personal lives, where forms of oppression exist at every level and at every age, a silver lining can emerge from the storm when we learn to listen deeply: to ourselves, to others, and to what each situation is communicating, whether it speaks loudly, silently, or through its actions.

This silver lining appears when we are truly able to be ourselves and express what we feel within a social context. As human beings, we are inherently social, and ultimately we come to realize that we flourish when others flourish as well.

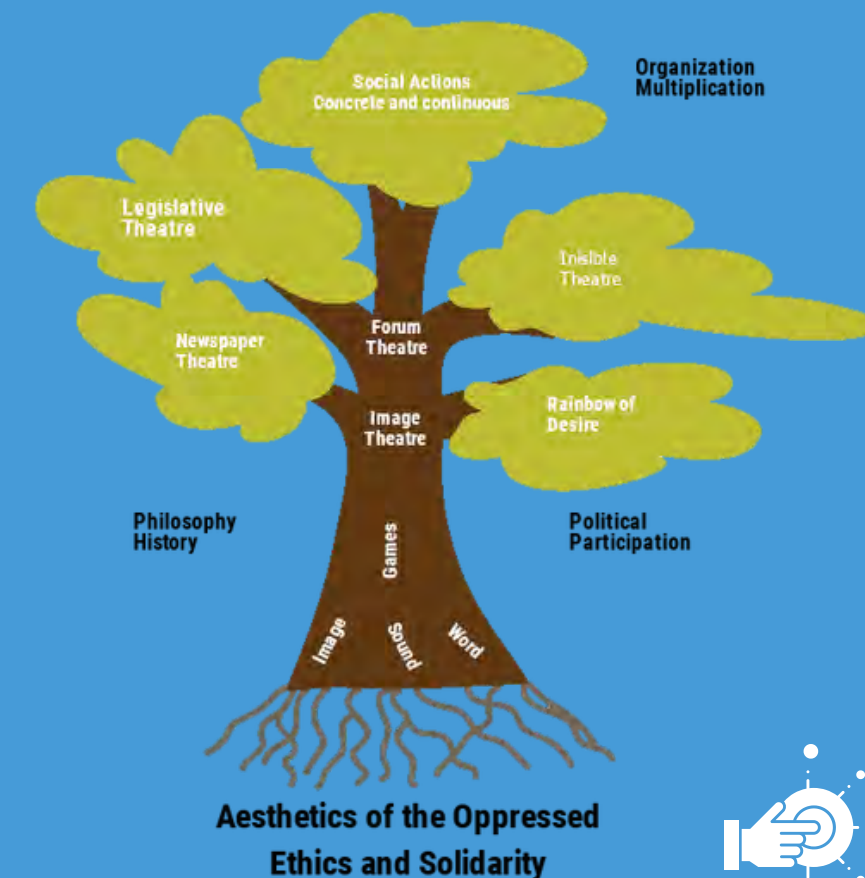
As this Toolkit is intended to “travel on its own,” passing from one adult educator to another, often beyond its original context and the website where it is hosted, we include in this introduction a brief overview of the context in which it was created and the team behind it, adding a few suggestions for its use.



Augusto Boal

A highly influential Brazilian theatre director, activist, and creator of the Theatre of the Oppressed

Tree of Theatre of the Oppressed Techniques



1.1 How the Toolkit is born

This Toolkit is born from the exchange of research, practices, and ideas between the project partners, MUS-E Cyprus NGO and GIOLLI Cooperative from Italy. Its creation was shaped by six intense days of experimentation, where the Theatre of the Oppressed intertwined with deep listening and improvised music/sounds.

Some participants arrived with a familiarity with Theatre of the Oppressed; others approached it with curiosity and wonder. None had ever practiced deep listening as a discipline of its own.

What emerged was the awareness of stepping into something truly transformative, tools that can illuminate hidden realities, urgent yet unspoken, and help us understand ourselves and relations with others in ways that transcend ordinary logic. These tools guide us beyond the repetitive patterns of unconscious, or even conscious, suffering, opening paths to clarity, growth, and to that vital step forward we possibly have long been ready to take, yet we lacked the means to reach it.

Why are these tools so powerful?

Because they move through the arts, through creativity, through expression.

Because we are reflected in others, mirrored and seen.

Because they flow with the natural rhythm of being human.

And their value has been recognized for decades in Theatre of the Oppressed, and for millennia in the timeless practice of listening.

"Listening benefits, the listener.

If one listens completely, then the listener becomes one who understands.

Listening is better than anything else.

Thus, perfect love is born."

Maxims of Ptahhotep (ancient Egyptian vizier), around 2360 BC



Six intense days, three in Rome and three in Limassol with a total of 36 participants who are adult educators, social workers, cultural operators working with migrants, community musicians, social theatre practitioners and community volunteers.

The training was a crucial cornerstone of the project, as it brought to the creation of this new tool for community empowerment.

Participants in the training gained knowledge and skills from both methodologies and actively contributed to the development of the Toolkit.

As Paulo Freire emphasized, an adult educator is not simply a teacher who transfers information but a facilitator who stimulates action and acts as a catalyst for awareness raising.

When you will develop these practices in your contexts, you will engage and empower your community.

You may also gather other adult educators and learn together these techniques by doing them together, and encourage reflection on how these methods can connect personal experiences to broader social structures, then transfer what was learnt in each own's context.

This connection is key to understanding that individual struggles are often linked to wider systemic issues.

When adult educators are equipped to stimulate this kind of critical awareness in their groups, learners are more likely to become empowered to fight for their rights in a constructive and effective manner.

They will also be better prepared to take on active roles in society, fostering inclusion through critical engagement rather than passive participation.

The combination of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), Music, and Deep Listening is an innovation that offers unique ways to explore social dynamics and encourage learners to challenge the status quo, creating pathways for social transformation.

Moreover, by using this training, you will not only enhance your own professional competences but will also develop new skills that allow you to become more effective agents of change.

This growth in abilities empower you to foster greater awareness and engagement within your communities, ultimately contributing to a more just and inclusive society.



1.3

The THEO-MUSIC Toolkit

In this toolkit, you will find detailed descriptions of the activities developed during the 3-day workshops in Italy and Cyprus. You are welcome to use these activities as they are; however, we also encourage you to expand on them through music, through listening practices and through the Theatre of the Oppressed practices, guided by your own expertise and experience. In this sense, the activities can also serve as inspiration for further creative development.

Following the activity section, you will find concise introductory notes on Theatre of the Oppressed (as developed by Augusto Boal), on listening as a practice, and on music as a participatory art form.

The Toolkit also includes a bibliography, a videography, and recommended music for listening.



This Toolkit is designed for:

- Adult educators who wish to implement practical activities with their target groups.
- Adult educators unfamiliar with Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and listening practices, but eager to learn about and integrate these methods into their work.
- Teachers working with migrants, aiming to address the specific needs of their learners.
- Volunteers in the social field, supporting community engagement initiatives.
- Community organisers and individuals working directly with vulnerable groups, seeking to foster empowerment and social transformation.
- Practitioners of social theatre, interested in incorporating TO, music and deep listening into their performances and activities.
- Cultural community animators, aiming to promote creativity and critical thinking within their communities.
- Musicians, who wish to channel their creativity, talents, and expertise towards social change and community needs.
- Activists and organisations within the anti-racist movement, looking for new tools to challenge oppression and discrimination.
- Activists and organisations working with minority groups, seeking structured methodologies to support advocacy, inclusion, and social change.

Nonetheless, this Toolkit is open to anyone with an interest in these topics.



2

Introduction To Theatre Of The Oppressed (TO)

“the theatre is not revolutionary it is the rehearsal of the revolution”

The Origins:



2.2 The Purposes:

The TO aims to develop human theatricality with the aim of analysing and transform situations of discomfort, malaise, conflict, oppression. To do this, it uses different techniques, each with its own specific value, but all of them linked by a common purpose: to initiate collective processes of change.

Theatre is essentially used as a means of knowledge and transformation of the interior, relational and social reality.

Boal is against cathartic methods that allow people to ease the tensions they experience, but proposes as an alternative the concept of "dynamisation" that is stimulation of individual and collective action for change.



2.3

Guiding Principles:

"Everyone can do theatre, even actors. You can do theatre anywhere, even in theatres."

With this provocative phrase Boal intends to enhance the theatre not so much as a profession, but as a capacity of the human being; For him, theatre is the first human invention that is based on the ability to "see oneself in action", that is, to think of oneself in the "here and now", analysing the present and the past and planning the future. The TO is a popular theatre, it does not demand high-level professional and artistic performances. On the other hand, the development of theatrical language expands the expressive possibilities and gives strength to the communication of an oppressed group.

The TO then has two fundamental principles:

- first of all, to help the spectator to become the protagonist of a dramatic action, a subject, a creator, a transformer;
- secondly, to help them not to be satisfied with reflecting on the past, and to prepare for the future.

In the TO, in practice, there are no actors and spectators, but only "spectator-actors" who explore the reality of which they have experience, bring it to the stage, and in this way analyse it and prepare for its transformation.

Theatre thus becomes an instrument of social communication and political debate.

The TO does not offer answers, but asks questions and creates useful contexts for the collective search for solutions.

Another famous phrase is:

"The body thinks".

Learning and change involve the body, mind and emotions, in close relationship with each other.



Gamexercises:

playful tools for exploring the various senses, sensory refinement, creative interaction with oneself and with others, to de-mechanise, get out of one's social mask, explore other possibilities of being, on a physical, emotional, sensory, relational, psychological level.

**Image-Theatre:**

a series of techniques that use images constructed from people's bodies, to synthesise and analyse oppressive situations.

**Newspaper-Theatre:**

11 techniques of problematisation and deconstruction of the dominant news provided by the mass-media.

**Invisible-Theatre:**

a theatrical action that takes place in public places without the knowledge of the bystanders, and which aims to provoke a debate on an oppressive theme.



3

Introduction To Deep Listening

Within THEO-MUSIC, we refer to the act of listening as Deep Listening. We use this term to distinguish it from simple hearing, a primarily physical process, and to emphasize a form of listening that involves attention, presence, empathy, and conscious awareness.

Deep Listening is a capacity that can be cultivated and refined, leading to unexpected, deeply meaningful, and transformative experiences. It has the potential to dissolve conflicts, foster connection, and offer comfort during difficult moments. A good listener can support us in times of uncertainty and suffering in ways that few other things or people can.

Many people describe listening as a “lost art,” neglected in a world driven by speed, constant distraction, technological isolation, and an overwhelming flood of visual stimuli. Yet listening, as we mentioned in the introduction to this Toolkit, was highly valued and deeply developed in many ancient civilizations.

For the philosopher Pythagoras there were different layers of listening: hearing, as the physiological response to sound; feeling as the emotional response; and listening, a fuller, more conscious engagement that included both body and emotion and more activities of the mind. True listening leads toward understanding, while the highest form of listening becomes intuition.

Today, it may still seem unusual to focus so much attention on listening, because modern culture often treats it as an automatic faculty that requires little reflection or care. Nevertheless, listening has become a subject of growing interest across the arts, academia, neuroscience, and many other fields of study. Increasingly, we are being invited to reconsider how we listen.





Over time, many approaches and modes of listening have been described, including, among others: reduced listening (Schaeffer, 1967), deep listening (Oliveros, 2005), profound listening (Lopez in Cox and Warner, 2004), body listening (Leitner, 2008), gestalt listening (Cahen, 2011), ambient listening (Eno, 1978), acousmatic listening (Schaeffer, 1967), structural listening (Adorno, 1962/1982), adequate listening, (Stockfelt in Cox and Warner, 2004) collective listening, (LaBelle, 2006), spatial listening (Leitner, 1970), imaginative listening (Ihde, 1976), absent-minded listening (Yoshihide in Cox and Warner, 2004), affective listening (Wang Jing, 2012), improvised listening (Ultra-Red, 2012), background listening (Truax), schizophrenic listening (Murray Schafer, 1977) causal listening (Chion, 1994).

Among these approaches, one particularly natural and open way of understanding and practicing listening is the Euphonic Listening, developed by Daniel Levy through Euphony training. This practice encourages listening free from expectations and allows us to connect not only with music, but also with other people, nature, animals, space and ourselves. It leads to a profound level of intuition.

The power of deep listening also lies in its ability to reach beyond the convenient and superficial information that is often given through automatic responses to generic questions. Deep listening can reveal hidden or overlooked narratives. Gaining insight into the deeper stories of underrepresented communities is an important step toward addressing many systemic challenges. For deep listening to contribute to meaningful systemic change, people must learn how to practice it both individually and collectively.

An essential part of teaching deep listening is allowing people to experience what it means to be deeply listened to themselves. Reflecting on and integrating this embodied experience enables individuals to truly understand the transformative potential of deep listening, making them more capable of practicing it with others.



3.1

Deep Listening and the TO

How can Deep Listening practices be applied within the Theatre of the Oppressed?

We begin by bringing conscious attention to the act of listening itself and by entering into a respectful dialogue with sound, whether it comes from other people, music, nature or the surrounding soundscape. We value our immediate and subjective responses while observing how we listen.

One simple practice involves working in pairs. For a set amount of time, usually just a few minutes, one person speaks while the other listens attentively and without interruption. Then the roles are reversed. Through this exercise, listening becomes an active, intentional practice rather than a passive act.

We also engage in listening to high-quality music and sharing reflections afterwards. In this process, we try to release the urge to categorize, control, or fully understand the music. Instead, we allow the sound to exist on its own terms, respecting its mystery and permitting it to affect us freely and directly.

This form of listening is deeply respectful. It recognizes both the music and the people creating it as living presences within the shared space. Listening together creates a temporary community, a moment of connection with the art and with one another, without demanding anything in return.

Listening to music together as a group creates a unique collective space in which participants are free to experience whatever emotions, thoughts, or physical responses emerge.

By sharing feedback afterwards, our awareness of the listening experience expands. Feeling accepted within a group of fellow listeners can strengthen trust, build collective spirit, and generate rare moments of warmth, protection, and harmony.

This participatory mode of listening can become a powerful gateway for exploring themes and experiences within the Theatre of the Oppressed.



3.2 The Listening Circle

Another particularly valuable practice is the Listening Circle, which can take place after paired listening exercises and after a shared musical experience, whether through recorded or live music.

The facilitator may introduce the Listening Circle by recalling that the tradition of sitting in a circle goes back thousands of years, to people gathering around fires to tell stories, share wisdom, and learn together as a community.

Many Indigenous cultures, including numerous Native American traditions, have used talking and listening circles as ways of bringing people together to teach, listen, and learn collectively. These practices cultivate respect for different perspectives and encourage participants to listen not only with the mind, but also with the heart.



Guidelines for a Listening Circle

We sit together in a circle.

We begin with one minute of silence, allowing everyone to settle, become present, and prepare to see and hear one another.

We agree on a guiding question. Within our context, this may be: “What is oppressing me?”

Each participant has approximately two minutes to speak about their own experience in response to the question.

The speaker holds an object, for example, a scarf, while speaking. When finished, they pass it to the person on their left. A brief silence may follow before the next person begins.

Anyone may choose to pass without speaking. While someone is speaking, there is no interruption, cross-talk, or interference.

Everything shared within the Listening Circle remains confidential.

We speak from personal experience, using “I” statements rather than generalizations such as “they,” “we,” or “you.”

There is no need to rehearse what we plan to say. When we rehearse internally, we stop truly listening. Instead, we allow our words to emerge naturally in the moment.

The space is protected through compassionate, non-judgmental listening. There are no right or wrong answers.

At the end of the round, those who initially passed are invited again to speak if they wish.

A second round may follow if appropriate.

Through Deep Listening, we cultivate presence, empathy, openness and collective awareness. In doing so, listening becomes a practice to build human connection, trust, and transformation.



4

The Role of Radical Musical Improvisation

Radical Improvisation is an artistic practice grounded in mutual listening, collective creation in the present moment, and the absence of rigid pre-established structures. Emerging primarily from experimental music and contemporary performance practices, it places at its center the relationship between participants, the body, sound, movement, and the ability to respond authentically to what unfolds within the performance space. Unlike more traditional forms of improvisation, which often develop within predefined harmonic, rhythmic, or narrative systems, radical improvisation seeks to free creative action from fixed hierarchies and predetermined patterns, privileging instead risk, openness, vulnerability, and continuous transformation.

Within the context of the Theatre of the Oppressed, developed by Augusto Boal, radical improvisation can play a fundamental role in the construction of scenes, relationships, and characters. Theatre of the Oppressed is itself rooted in collective and political practice, where the body, the voice, and the interaction among participants become tools for reflection, awareness, and social transformation. In this context, radical improvisation enables participants to explore situations of oppression and conflict without immediately imposing a fixed narrative structure or predetermined theatrical form. It creates a space where emotions, memories, tensions, and embodied experiences can emerge organically through action, sound, and interaction.

During character development, musical and bodily improvisation help performers discover postures, rhythms, tensions, gestures, and relational dynamics that arise spontaneously from the creative process. A character may emerge from a repeated gesture, a breathing pattern, a vocal texture, a specific walk, or a rhythmic quality of movement. Through improvisation, actors can explore not only psychological dimensions but also physical and sonic identities. Music — especially when improvised live — can deeply support this process by creating emotional atmospheres that guide the exploration of character. Fragmented or unstable sounds may evoke fear, anxiety, or oppression, while repetitive pulses or open rhythmic textures may generate trust, resistance, solidarity, or transformation.



In Forum-Theatre, music can accompany transitions between performed scenes and audience interventions, supporting the rhythm of the action and facilitating collective participation. Rather than functioning merely as background accompaniment, music becomes a dramaturgical element capable of shaping energy, tension, silence, and attention. Sound can sustain emotional continuity, amplify moments of crisis, or create breathing spaces in which reflection and intervention become possible. Musical interventions may also help spectators move from passive observation toward active participation as “spect-actors,” one of Boal’s central concepts.

In games and exercises devoted to group-building and de-mechanization, the interaction between movement and music strengthens the perception of the collective body. Walking together, stopping, changing tempo, breathing collectively, or reacting to shared sonic cues allows participants to develop mutual attention and spatial awareness. Exercises such as rhythm circles, vocal mirroring, or sound-and-movement games encourage the group to perceive itself as an interconnected organism rather than as isolated individuals. In this sense, improvisation becomes not only an artistic tool but also a practice of collective listening and trust-building.

A particularly significant role within Theatre of the Oppressed is that of the musician, who may assume different functions throughout the creative and performative process. In some cases, the musician remains external to the stage action, accompanying scenes through live improvisation that supports emotional shifts, transitions, and dramatic tensions. Music can underline silences, conflicts, ruptures, or transformations, becoming a kind of invisible voice that dialogues with both actors and audience. At other moments, the musician may effectively “give voice” to characters, expressing through sound emotions, desires, fears, or inner conflicts that remain unspoken.

An instrument may therefore embody oppression, rage, fragility, hope, or resistance, expanding the expressive possibilities of the theatrical language.



In other experiences, however, the musician becomes an integral part of the stage action and acts as both performer and actor. The sound of the instrument no longer functions only as accompaniment, but becomes a form of bodily presence and scenic language in itself. Through rhythm, dynamics, pauses, texture, and improvisation, the musician-performer establishes relationships with the actors and actively participates in the collective construction of dramaturgy. In this way, the boundaries between music, movement, and acting begin to dissolve: the musician communicates simultaneously through sound and body, contributing directly to the emotional and political architecture of the performance.

Musicians can also play an essential role in defining the sonic identity of both characters and scenes. Through collaborative work with actors, they may help each participant discover a personal “sound,” rhythm, or vocal quality associated with a character’s emotional and physical presence. This process does not necessarily require traditional musical instruments. Everyday objects, props, surfaces, breathing patterns, body percussion, and environmental sounds can all become sonic material. Chairs, sticks, paper sheets, footsteps, or improvised percussion may be transformed into collective rhythmic patterns and soundscapes capable of sustaining theatrical action and reinforcing the symbolic dimension of the scene.

Furthermore, musicians can facilitate the construction of choral scenes by working extensively with the collective use of voice. Spoken choruses, vocal drones, rhythmic repetition, breathing patterns, layered voices, chants, and synchronized speech can strengthen the sense of collective presence and mutual listening within the group. Choral vocal practices may intensify scenes of oppression or resistance, amplifying emotional impact and creating a powerful feeling of shared participation. Through these practices, music and voice become tools for group cohesion, dramaturgical composition, and political expression.





As we will see in a possible workshop structure, Radical Musical Improvisation (MI) and Deep Listening (DL) can be integrated throughout the entire process of Theatre of the Oppressed while fully respecting its structure and methodology. Depending on the different stages of the process, we can imagine several intersections between these practices:

1. De-mechanization and group creation

Deep Listening and Musical Improvisation can be used either independently as listening exercises or integrated into existing Theatre of the Oppressed games. Deep Listening practices are particularly effective in creating a positive, attentive, and trusting atmosphere within the group, encouraging participants to become aware of themselves and others through sound and silence.

2. Search for nodes

Deep Listening can be directly employed during the collection of personal stories, especially in pair work. Listening exercises help participants approach storytelling with empathy, attention, and emotional openness, allowing hidden tensions or “nodes” of oppression to emerge more clearly.

3. Creation of theatrical embryos

Musical Improvisation can strongly support the creation of theatrical embryos, particularly during the dynamization of Images in Image-Theatre. Sound and rhythm may help participants explore emotional layers, spatial tensions, and symbolic dimensions within static images, transforming them into living theatrical material.

4. Embryo cleansing

Musical Improvisation can deeply enrich the process of refining and clarifying theatrical embryos, especially during character exploration and development. Through sound, rhythm, and improvisational interaction, participants can uncover contradictions, desires, and physical qualities within their characters and relationships.

5. Transformation of oppression

At this stage, Musical Improvisation may introduce the performance, accompany scenes, and reinforce critical moments within the dramatic action. Music can also frame the beginning and end of spect-actor interventions, helping create continuity between performance, reflection, and collective action.

6. Extrapolation

Finally, both Deep Listening and Musical Improvisation can support extrapolation processes, either by accompanying reflective exercises or by becoming autonomous moments of concentration on possible futures. Through collective sound-making and attentive listening, participants may imagine alternative realities, new social relations, and future transformations beyond the represented oppression.

Radical improvisation, therefore, is not merely an artistic technique but a relational and political practice. Within Theatre of the Oppressed it can become a powerful tool for liberating creativity, embodied knowledge, collective imagination, and critical awareness, helping groups create living, open, and deeply participatory theatrical experiences connected to the real lives of participants.



5 Typical Phases of the Theatre of the Oppressed Cycle and Exercises

**1. De-mechanization
and Group Creation**

2. Search for Nodes

**3. Creation of
Theatrical Embryos**

4. Embryo Cleaning

**5. Transformation
of Oppression**

6. Extrapolation



1. De-mechanization and Group Creation

The first phase focuses on building trust, connection, and collective awareness within the group. Through games, movement, rhythm, and sensory exercises, participants begin a process of “de-mechanization,” loosening habitual physical, emotional, and mental patterns that often condition everyday behavior. The aim is to create an open and safe space for creativity, expression, and exploration. Participants are encouraged to reconnect with their bodies, their imagination, and their capacity for listening, both to themselves and to others. This stage is essential for developing a sense of ensemble and preparing the group for deeper collective work.

The first theatrical embryos are often fragmented, unclear, overly symbolic, or unfocused. For this reason, a further phase of analysis and refinement is necessary. During embryo cleansing, participants critically examine the scenes in order to clarify the central conflict, strengthen the dramaturgical structure, and deepen the relationships between characters and situations. Through repetition, improvisation, discussion, and collective feedback, the embryos evolve into more precise theatrical models — scenes that clearly express the mechanisms of oppression while remaining open to transformation. This stage is crucial for creating performances that are both emotionally engaging and politically meaningful.

2. Search for Nodes



3. Creation of Theatrical Embryos

Once individual experiences have surfaced, the process moves from the personal to the collective dimension. Theatre of the Oppressed does not speak only about “I,” but about “we”, about shared experiences of oppression and resistance. From the identified nodes, participants begin constructing theatrical embryos: images, scenes, gestures, and short improvisations that contain elements of the group’s collective reality. These embryos are not yet complete performances, but rather raw theatrical material charged with emotional, symbolic, and political meaning. Through collaborative creation, personal stories are transformed into collective narratives capable of resonating with others.

In this phase, participants search for “nodes” of oppression: personal experiences, recurring situations, or internalized conflicts that limit freedom and force individuals to act against their own needs, desires, or values. These nodes may emerge from family relationships, social structures, work environments, discrimination, or everyday forms of violence and exclusion. The focus is not only on external oppression but also on how oppression becomes embodied and normalized. Through storytelling, movement, improvisation, and dialogue, participants begin identifying the emotional and social tensions that will later become material for theatrical exploration.

4. Embryo Cleansing



5. Transformation of Oppression

This phase represents the heart of the Theatre of the Oppressed process. Here the focus shifts from representing oppression to imagining and rehearsing change. Rather than portraying the world only as it is or has been, participants explore how it could become different. Through Forum-Theatre and other participatory techniques, spectators are invited to intervene directly in the action, proposing alternatives, testing strategies, and collectively experimenting with possible solutions. The emphasis is not on finding perfect answers, but on opening spaces for critical thinking, dialogue, and action. Individual and collective possibilities for resistance, transformation, and empowerment are explored through embodied practice.

After the exploration of possible transformations, the final phase asks an essential question: what do participants take with them beyond the workshop or performance space? Extrapolation aims to strengthen the connection between theatrical experimentation and real life. Participants reflect on the applicability of the ideas, strategies, and emotions that emerged during the process. How can these discoveries influence daily actions, relationships, and social engagement? How can courage, awareness, and collective imagination continue outside the theatrical setting? Specific exercises, discussions, and reflective practices help participants consolidate their experiences and carry the impulse for change into their personal and social realities.

6. Extrapolation





1. De-mechanization and Group Creation

EXERCISES

These exercises are primarily used at the beginning of the training process in order to build trust, awaken attention, and activate the group physically and emotionally. However, they can also be revisited throughout the workshop and used to open different sessions during the day, helping participants remain present, connected, and energized.

Their function is not only to “warm up” the body, but also to maintain collective focus, stimulate listening, and continuously reactivate the creative dynamics of the group. By interrupting habitual behaviors and encouraging spontaneity, these exercises help participants remain open, responsive, and engaged throughout the entire process.



I introduce myself by miming	We move around the room, and whenever we meet someone, we introduce ourselves and mime something we enjoy doing
I say my name and give a high five	We move around the room, and whenever we meet someone, we say our names and give each other a high five
How are you?	In a circle, participants take turns. Person A asks the person standing opposite (Person B), “How are you?” or another emotion-related question. Person B answers, and immediately Person A steps forward and uses their body to express the feeling they perceived most strongly in B’s response. The two people standing next to A then join in by stepping forward and, using only their bodies, either reinforce, complement, or contrast A’s expression. The turn then passes to the person next to A, who asks the person opposite the same question, and so on until everyone has asked, answered, and mirrored an emotion. Variation: “<i>How are you at this point in your life?</i>” rather than “<i>How are you?</i>”
Luciana’s Name and Mime	Participants walk around the room. When they meet another person, they stop. One person says her/his name and then mimes an activity s/he enjoys. The other person guesses the activity and then introduces herself/himself by saying her/his own name and miming an activity s/he likes. Finally, they say goodbye by addressing each other by name before moving on to meet someone else.
Sociometric Activity	Participants form groups based on different criteria, such as wearing glasses, having blue eyes, number of children, involvement in theatre, playing music, and so on.
Stop and Go	Participants walk around the room. When the facilitator stops moving, the whole group stops; when the facilitator starts moving again, the group moves again, as if it were a single organism. After a while, leadership is passed to one or more participants, or even shared by the whole group. The exercise can be made more challenging by asking participants to make eye contact whenever they meet someone. This requires them to maintain awareness of both the group and the stop-and-go mechanism, while also paying attention to the one-to-one encounter. The activity can then be developed progressively: participants may be asked to greet the people they meet, improvise a brief interaction, exchange a few words, and so on. Throughout the exercise, they are encouraged to maintain a dual focus on both the group and the pair interaction.



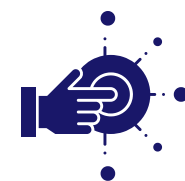
Valentina’s Eight Energies	Participants walk around the room at different energy levels, from 1 to 8. Energy level 4 represents a natural, everyday walk, but slightly more supported: upright posture, clear and purposeful movements, sustained energy, and precise changes of direction. Level 3 has slightly less energy, level 2 involves dragging the feet, and level 1 is so low in energy that it feels as if the person might almost collapse. Levels 5, 6, 7, and 8 progressively increase in speed, intensity, and vitality, becoming more energetic and dynamic with each step up. Throughout the exercise, the facilitator calls out different energy levels, and participants immediately adjust their walking to match the new level.
Eight Counts	Participants begin by walking at their own natural pace. They are then invited to tune in to the group and gradually find a common walking speed. Next, time is organised into a repeating sequence of eight steps. Participants walk while counting the eight-step cycle together. A stop is then introduced on specific counts—for example, stopping on 5 and continuing on 8. The group can be divided into two: one group stops on 5, while the other stops on 1, creating overlapping rhythmic patterns. Participants are encouraged to move in a non-neutral way, creating simple choreographic shapes and responding playfully to the movements of others. Variations: Divide the cycle using different rhythmic structures (e.g., 4, 2, 5, 7, etc.). Introduce accents by stamping the feet on a chosen count (for example, 1) or by clapping hands.



Circle of Emotional Images	Participants stand in a circle. They are invited to reflect on the session that has just ended and to identify the feeling that was most present for them. They then transform this feeling into a physical image that represents how they felt. Participants create and hold their image while observing the images created by the others. Next, they are asked to think of another feeling that was present, but less dominant—a secondary or parallel emotion. They again transform this feeling into a physical image, hold it, and observe the images of the group. The process can be repeated with additional emotions, encouraging participants to explore the different emotional layers of their experience through body images.
Space Series	Participants walk around the room, keeping the space occupied evenly and dynamically. They do not have to stop moving. When the facilitator calls “Stop”, everyone stops and observe any empty or overcrowded areas. Participants may then be asked to adjust their positions to achieve a more balanced distribution, using the metaphor of keeping a raft in equilibrium. The facilitator then says “stop” and a number (e.g., “Stop, two!”), and the group must form as many groups of two as possible, also well distributed throughout the space. Groups can then be formed by touching specific body parts named by the facilitator. For example, “Three shoulders” means that three shoulders must touch, and each person tries to bring their own shoulder into contact with those of the others. Many different solutions are possible. Geometric shapes can also be requested. For example, “Two squares” means that the whole group, dividing itself into two parts, must show two squares to the facilitator. All of this is done without verbal agreement.



Toronto Rhythm Circle	Rhythmic awareness, warm-up, and group attention. Participants stand in a circle. Participant A steps in front of B and performs a rhythmic gesture accompanied by a sound. B repeats the gesture and sound and continues performing them. After three repetitions, A moves in front of C and does the same, then in front of D. After three turns, B begins: s/he steps in front of C and introduce a new gesture and sound, which C imitates. B then moves in front of D, and the process continues until everyone has performed in front of everyone else.
Movement and Music	Participants move with their eyes closed while listening to music, focusing on movement rather than dancing. Using the body, participants explore different characteristics of sound, bringing their attention to one element at a time: Pitch (high and low sounds): related to the speed of sound vibrations and measured in Hertz (Hz). Intensity or Dynamics (loud and soft sounds): related to the energy of the sound and measured in decibels (dB). Duration: how long a sound source continues to vibrate. Timbre: the quality or colour of a sound, determined by the shape and material of the sound-producing body. It is what makes each voice unique. Timbre cannot be measured directly; it is perceived.
Zip zap boing	Participants stand in a circle and, in turn, “pass” an imaginary impulse using codes of sounds and gestures: • Zip: sends the energy to a nearby person, usually to the right or left. • Zap: sends the energy to someone farther away in the circle. • Boing: sends the energy back to the person who initiated it, often accompanied by a spring-like body movement. The game can be progressively developed by introducing new sounds, rules, rhythms, or movements. The aim is not to win, but to foster collective concentration, reduce overthinking, and encourage immediate, creative responses. In theatre and music practice, the exercise develops the integration of body, voice, rhythm, spatial awareness, and group dynamics. It can also become a sound-based exercise: instead of fixed words, participants may use vocal sounds, noises, or short improvised rhythmic patterns. A musician may accompany the game with percussion or sound textures, altering its pace, tension, or atmosphere. In some workshops, Zip, Zap, Boing is also used as a starting point for collective improvisation, helping participants respond quickly to one another and experience the group as a single organism.



Duplan’s Rhythms	Participants stand in a circle and begin by walking in the room. They then try to synchronize their walking rhythm, speeding up or slowing down as needed to match the group. Once a shared pulse has been established and maintained, the facilitator introduces rhythmic patterns using claps. After each pattern, the group immediately echoes it. Both the original rhythm and the echo should remain aligned with the pulse established by the feet that doesn’t stop. When the group has developed a good sense of cohesion, the exercise can continue with participants’ eyes closed. It is advisable to begin with a slow pulse and simple rhythmic patterns, gradually increasing complexity as the group becomes more confident, ensuring that everyone can follow and participate.
Music in the circle	Participants stand in a circle. The musician proposes a sound or rhythmic pattern. One at a time, participants respond with a movement suggested by their body in reaction to the sound. The exercise can also be carried out in pairs. Individuals or pairs may then present their chosen movement to the group, which repeats it as a shared rhythmic movement sequence.

Expectations

What would I like to happen during this training?	Participants stand in a circle. In turn, each person asks the participant opposite them what they would like to happen during the training, their expectations, wishes, or hopes. The person opposite responds with a few words. The questioner then steps into the centre of the circle and translates those words into a body image. The two participants standing next to them join in, using their bodies to express other aspects of what they perceived in the response, creating a three-person sculpture. Once the sculpture is complete, the speaker observes it and may adjust or “sculpt” the positions of the three participants until it accurately reflects what is intended to express. When satisfied, the speaker claps his/her hands and the sculpture dissolves. The process then continues with the next participant. After the exercise has been demonstrated, it is useful to maintain a steady rhythm: ▪ Question ▪ Response ▪ Initial sculpture ▪ Three-person sculpture ▪ Observation and sculpting ▪ Dissolution This exercise can also be adapted to explore other questions, such as “How are you?”, and can be used as an evaluation tool to assess the emotional state of the group
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2. Search for Nodes

In Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) terminology, “nodes” refer to an individual’s perception of an oppression or, more broadly, of a problem, discomfort, or conflict. Not all perceived issues are necessarily linked to oppression.

The exploration of nodes can be carried out in various ways, by asking participants:

- to tell a story or describe an episode they consider problematic (in pairs, small groups, or in plenary);
- to create an image using their own body or by sculpting another person’s body (see the “sculptor-clay” exercise);
- to identify with the oppressor and embody or animate them;
- and other similar approaches.

Furthermore, in a group process within Theatre of the Oppressed, not all nodes can be collectivised and therefore not all are suitable for TO work.

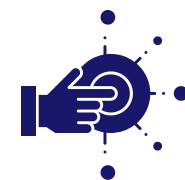
For this reason, once individual nodes have been identified and their representation created, it is necessary to move on to the next phase (Creation of Theatrical Embryos).



Paired Listening Deep Listening to identify personal stories	Participants sit facing each other in pairs. One person shares a personal episode of oppression. The other person listens silently, intently, without speaking, maintaining eye contact. They do not judge, interrupt, advise, or divert the conversation. They stay completely silent, listening. Only at the end may they ask questions to clarify or gain further information. The facilitator keeps time for each story.
Sculptor and Clay	In pairs: A sculpts B using three different methods: • by moving B’s body parts to give them the desired shape • by showing with their own body the form they want B to take (especially for complex shapes that are difficult to shape with hands or facial expressions) • by directing B’s gaze. B’s task is not to anticipate the sculptor and to maintain the shape they are given. Then the roles are reversed. Many variations can be introduced, such as: sculpting an object together with person B, the sculptor entering the image after it has been created, sculpting two people instead of one, and so on. A possible next step may be the following: each person in the group reflects on the group’s macro theme and sculpts the others to build a sculpture. Once the sculpture is completed, the other participants can step out and observe it. The sculptor replaces the observing person so that everyone has the opportunity to see the full sculpture from the outside. Note: If the aim is to create a performance, it may be useful to document the group sculptures through photography. The sculptor can take a photo of the image using a mobile phone.



Sculptures and Monologue	A sculpts B. When the sculpture is completed, B improvises a monologue, embodying the character s/he feels could inhabit the sculpted image. At the end of the exercise, the pair selects one of the two stories and presents it to the whole group in plenary.
Completing the Image	Participants work in pairs and start by shaking hands. One person steps out, observes the image, and then re-enters with a new posture, completing the image and giving it a different meaning. Then the other person steps out, observes, and completes the image in turn, continuing in a cyclical process. Each time, allow space to notice how the interpretation of the image changes.
Duplan's Images <i>Musicians may accompany the movement with rhythm.</i>	Participants walk freely, and at a signal to stop, they create a frozen image with their bodies. The facilitator invites them to feel the image, and then asks them to start moving again, letting go of the previous image. The important point is that each time they create the image that emerges in that moment, without planning it, without thinking about it, and without building a narrative from the previous image. If the facilitator notices that the images are repetitive, they may ask participants to do the opposite of the image they have just created (for example: if upright, then crouched; if tense, then relaxed; if open, then closed, etc.). After repeating this several times, the facilitator asks participants to justify the image they have just created: to imagine where they are, who they might be, what they are doing, what they want, and what they desire. After a few rounds of this, the facilitator may invite everyone to respond to another at the same time (or may focus on one person at a time), using guiding questions such as: Where are you? Who are you? What do you want? Participants may then be asked to express a rhythmic gesture, a sound, an action without words, or a spoken word or phrase, all improvised, without prior planning, but emerging from the sensation of the image, memories, emotions, and imagination. The facilitator may also touch one participant in image and invite them to develop a monologue, then a dialogue, and finally an action, either alone or with a nearby participant.



	Finally, the facilitator may stop the process, ask everyone to create an image, feel it, and justify it, and then guide a collective improvisation of the whole group (or part of the group, or a single participant). This can be done through clapping cues (each clap triggers a movement in the image) or without clapping, allowing a free group improvisation where each participant maintains and develops the character that emerged from the image work.
Exploring personal “Nodes” through Music Listening	The facilitator selects a high-quality musical piece. Participants sit in a circle. At the beginning of the exercise, it is clarified that everything shared within the group will remain confidential, and that all participants are invited to listen to one another without judgment. With their eyes closed, participants listen deeply and attentively to the music. When the music ends, participants take turns sharing what the music evoked for them. This may be a memory, a landscape, a thought, a colour, an image, or virtually anything that emerged during the listening experience. The exercise is then repeated with another musical piece. This time, participants listen while holding the following question in mind: “What is oppressing me in this moment of my life?” The music may help participants perceive the situation with a sense of distance and clarity, through images or symbolic impressions, or it may intensify the emotional dimensions connected to the experience. All responses are considered valid. At the end of the exercise, each participant expresses their reflection through a body image, either frozen or in movement, and will add a few words to explain and share it with the group. They can also skip their turn and choose to express themselves after everyone else has spoken. Note: By “quality music” we refer to music that emerges from a genuine artistic search for beauty, truth, and expressive depth, independently of genre or commercial categorisation. A suggestion? J.S. Bach - The Well-Tempered Clavier: recorded masterfully on the Edelweiss Emission and available on Apple Music and Spotify.

→ In plenary, the stories are collected and grouped into broader thematic areas (for example: work, health, gender-related issues, etc.). The group identifies the themes that feel most significant or urgent, and smaller groups are then formed, each working on a different theme.



3. Creation of Theatrical Embryos

There are various ways to move from nodes to embryos, and the choice depends on the time you have, the type of group, how they work with images and the body, whether there is a commonality of oppressive experiences, etc. It's more of an instinctive and intuitive choice than a reflective one. And it also depends on how well you master the various modalities.

Generally, our paths are based primarily on:

- **Narratives:** for example, after everyone has told their story of oppression, we vote on the most shared one(s) and form working groups that can stage it, discuss it, and improvise.
- **Images:** after everyone has created their own image of oppression, they come together based on similarity and complementarity. From here, the ones most shared by the group can be chosen and dynamically enhanced.
- **Oppressors:** Each person identifies with their oppressor, stylizing their social mask, that is, their bodily mechanisms (how they walk, how they gesture, how they look, etc.), emotional, strategic (how they oppress), linguistic, vocal, etc. Then we join together based on similarities. From there, we form groups and act out imagined situations, discussing and improvising.



There are other, more complex methods that we won't present here but can be found in Boal's books.

A critical moment is when the subgroup enacts a story, or energizes an image, or works with oppressors.

One risk with non-actors is often to continue discussing until everyone agrees on a concept, with little time to improvise.

Another risk is that power dynamics are triggered in which some dominate others with their own ideas.

For this reason, we offer some simple guidelines:

-Instead of discussing the script, each person takes turns directing and having the others do what's needed to stage their idea. Then, at the end, we discuss everything that emerged and what to retain as common elements and of collective interest. In other words: I have an idea, I explain and let's improvise. Or I have an image, I build it and then dynamise.

-Rather than reenacting an entire story, start with an image of oppression at the top (*Chinese crisis*)¹ as it is perceived by the group. Each person will take turns creating an image using the bodies of others and, if necessary, their own. Finally, the group will choose the most convincing image.

Then they will do the same with the image of the causes; that is, each person will analyze the causes of this oppression, one in particular. Then the group will choose the most widely shared image(s).

Finally, each person will create an image of the feared outcome, that is, what will likely happen if the oppression is not broken. Here, too, everyone will make suggestions, and then the group will choose the most widely shared image.

Once one or three images are ready, they can be dynamically enhanced in various ways (see below), that is, by allowing the images—static, fixed, frozen in the here and now—to reveal many possible stories, characters, and relationships implicit in them.

At the end of the dynamic process, guided by the leader, the group will have various things that have emerged, possible relationships to explore, and actions before and after. Then, the group returns to improvise the scenes implicit in the image.

Note: 1-The "Chinese crisis", as theorised by Augusto Boal in Theatre of the Oppressed, refers to the moment of highest dramatic tension in a performance, when the protagonist faces the imminent risk of defeat but still has the possibility of changing the outcome.

The "Chinese crisis" gave Boal the opportunity to understand theatre no longer as a means for actors to "teach" the audience what to do, but as a space in which oppressed people themselves become protagonists of action and reflection.

This key concept, further developed in his book The Rainbow of Desire, can be understood in several aspects:

Meaning of the term: Boal notes that the Chinese ideogram for "crisis" combines two ideas: danger (or rupture) and opportunity.

Function in Forum Theatre: In simultaneous dramaturgy, the scene is interrupted at the moment of the "Chinese crisis," the peak of the conflict when a decisive choice must be made.

Audience involvement: in the Forum Theatre, the actors stop, and the "spect-actors" (the audience) intervene, proposing and trying out alternative solutions to help the protagonist overcome oppression.



Dynamisations

If image work has been performed, the group selects the sculpture that appears the most complete and develops it further, making it more complex by exploring:

- the central conflict or crisis,
- its causes,
- and its consequences.
- The sculpture is then presented to the whole group.

Below are some useful exercises and techniques to deepen and enrich image work:

Rhythmic Gesture, Sound and Word	While remaining in the image, participants perform an implicit gesture of the character and repeat it rhythmically. Then they add a sound that expresses the character’s emotion. Finally, while maintaining the gesture, they say words that are coherent with the image as a whole.
Monologue, Dialogue and Action	Starting from the image, at the signal each participant performs the character’s monologue while remaining in the image, first all together, then one by one. Then, the exercise moves from monologue to dialogue with the character that each participant finds relevant. The facilitator (called ‘Joker’ in the TO context) ensures that the dialogues remain audible and well-structured. Finally, a main desire or intention of the character is identified. After the monologue and dialogue phases, participants begin to move slowly in order to realise their character’s intention. From time to time, the Joker stops the action to allow observation of the dynamic, emphasising the importance of moving slowly.



Before and after	Starting from the image, think about where the characters come from, then zoom back to a significant moment before the ‘Chinese crisis’, where you think it all originated. From there, we begin with a slow action, and the facilitator occasionally uses the "Stop and Think" technique, stopping the scene and having the characters speak their thoughts aloud. → The sculptures can be brought to life by actors and musicians. A double exercise is possible: 1. The actors define a pattern to give movement (dynamize) to the sculpture. The musicians interpret that movement with sound. 2. The musicians observe the sculpture from outside and provide a soundtrack. Listening to the soundtrack brings the sculpture's movements to life.
Movement–Music–Character	1. Free movement in individual space / listening to the sounds and responding with the body. 2. In pairs, arranged in a circle: one musician plays a loop while each pair moves, seeking synchrony, each person maintaining their own movement. 3. Two musicians play different loops. One pair moves into the centre so that they are visible: within the pair, one person follows the loop of one musician, while the other person follows the second musician. The other pairs observe and then repeat the exercise. 4. From time to time, one of the musicians stops playing, and the person following that



4. Embryo Cleaning

To refine the embryos, we first need to analyse them.

Over the years, Giolli has developed a structured approach to this analysis, articulated through six areas:

1. Reality
2. Question
3. Structure
4. Characters
5. Theatricality
6. Micro-Macro



1) REALITY	This first analysis aims to understand whether the oppressive dynamics, contexts, and characters presented are real, that is, whether they reveal something that actually happens in the world. For Augusto Boal, real does not necessarily mean realistic. “Realistic” relates to style, while “real” concerns metaxis, the connection between theatrical representation and reality. A scene may be symbolic or surreal and still contain the real elements of oppression, while another scene may appear realistic yet fail to reveal oppression or lose it within confusing details. The first question to ask is therefore: → Are all the necessary elements present for a truthful representation of the oppression?
2) QUESTION	It can be useful to think of the theatrical scene — especially when using Forum Theatre to explore it — as a question addressed to the spect-actors. This is not a moral question (“Is it right that...?”), nor a philosophical question (“Is the world appearance or reality?”), nor a scientific one (“Will the universe expand forever?”). Rather, it is a pragmatic question connected to oppression, such as: → How can the oppressed person in this story free themselves from the oppression? For this to work, the scene needs a specific underlying structure: the story should not present a simple dilemma, but rather a conflict of wills, needs, or desires.
3) STRUCTURE	The structure depends on the technique that will be used in the following phase. For Forum Theatre, the scene should include: -at least one oppressed protagonist, not a passive victim, meaning someone who struggles to free themselves but does not succeed, rather than someone who suffers powerlessly or is unaware of the oppression (alienated); -at least one oppressor; -a conflict between the two; -an open or negative ending for the oppressed person, in other words, no happy ending.



4) CHARACTERS	In Giolli’s theatrical approach, characters should not be caricatures or ridiculed. Oppressors in particular should be multi-dimensional, showing internal tensions and contradictions between desires and counter-desires. This reflects the complexity of real human beings: every oppressor contains multiple dimensions, and oversimplifying them risks preventing a deeper understanding of how situations of oppression can be transformed. The work to be done, through specific techniques presented later, is to deepen the characters, especially the oppressed person and the oppressor, but ultimately all characters, so that they become sufficiently real and complex.
5) THEATRICALITY	Theatre must remain theatre, not “radio theatre,” as Boal would say, where only words matter. The oppressive dynamics and the characters’ desires must become visible and embodied on stage. For this aspect as well, there are many techniques that help move scenes beyond static representation, banality, or emotional superficiality. The aim is not to exaggerate situations, but to explore the relational dynamics of oppression in depth, paying attention to meaningful details, tones of voice, emotions, and the overall credibility of the scene.
6) MICRO–MACRO	This analysis relates to our understanding of oppression. If we believe that oppression is mainly caused by individual cruelty, we may represent only direct relationships between the oppressed person and the oppressor. However, if we adopt a social and systemic view of oppression, involving not only direct violence but also structural and cultural forms of violence, then these broader macro elements must also be introduced, as they influence the immediate (micro) oppressive situation. There are many possible ways to do this: • symbolic characters representing patriarchy, capitalism, racism, etc.; • texts drawn from real statements, pamphlets, books, films, quotations, speeches, and other materials that either support or challenge oppression; • sung or danced moments that highlight a macro dimension; • dialogues in which these macro elements are hinted at or explicitly addressed; - and others.



6) MICRO-MACRO	In general, the “cleaning” process follows a recurring sequence: • presentation of the story to another group, which applies the six areas of analysis; • use of rehearsal techniques to deepen the characters, introduce macro elements, strengthen theatricality, and so on; • return to the subgroup to revise the scenes based on the feedback received and on the group’s own understanding of oppression; • presentation of the revised story again, continuing cyclically.
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Technical procedures

Presentation of the Embryos	• Presentation of the Embryos
The Theory of the Six Refinements	• Reality (not to be confused with “realism”); • the question the scene raises; • structure; • characters; • theatricality; • micro-macro (the relationship between the specific oppression and the broader social context/external mechanisms). We should remember that the oppressed person is different from: • a victim: someone who understands they are oppressed but does nothing to change the situation (they only complain); • an alienated person: someone who does not recognise that they are oppressed.



Character Interrogation	Each group of actors carries out the exercise independently. One person sits on a chair and becomes the character, while the others stand in a line behind. The first person in line approaches and asks the character a question. The question can be small or profound, concrete or philosophical, provocative or simple, the important thing is that the character responds consistently in role. In doing so, the character invents memories, thoughts, and details that expand its dimension and complexity. Questions of all kinds may be asked in order to deepen the character: open or closed, concrete or abstract. The person seated must answer immediately, improvising while remaining true to the character. After asking the question, the first person returns to the back of the line, the second person steps forward with a new question, then the third, and so on
Hannover Variation of Character Interrogation	It is similar to the interrogation exercise, but it takes place during the action of the scene. The scene begins, and whenever the audience does not understand an action or a character's behaviour (why they do or say — or do not do or say — certain things), they call "Stop" and ask the character a direct question. The character must respond quickly while remaining fully in role. Afterwards, the facilitator restarts the scene as if nothing had happened.
The Rhythm of the Character	• Participants walk through the space with the character's social mask. They explore the speed of the gesture and walk, seeking a rhythm that is typical of the character in both movement and physical expression. Once this rhythm is established, participants meet in pairs, stopping to interact using only rhythm and gesture. • A sound is then added to the rhythm, and finally a melody is introduced. • The musician either picks up and amplifies the sound or proposes it and develops it musically. • Variation (in pairs): While one participant works in character, another joins in without a character, using complementary or contrasting movements. A second musician accompanies this interaction.



The Character's Song	Once the character's intention has been identified, the actor is asked to find a short, clear sentence that expresses that intention. They then experiment with saying it repeatedly, exploring different rhythms until a suitable one is found and fixed. The rhythm is then repeated and developed into a melody or song. THE MUSICIAN ACCOMPANIES. Once established, this becomes the voice of the chorus: several participants position themselves behind the character. The chorus repeats the sung phrase, and over this soundscape the character improvises their own song, possibly also stimulated by words or questions from the Joker. Many variations are possible, such as creating two choruses, alternating between chorus singing and moments of silence during which the soloist improvises, or increasing and decreasing the volume of the chorus, and so on.
The Music of the Character	The aim is to arrive at a short musical motif that identifies the character and anchors the actor in the role. An actress embodies the character and presents related movement rhythm, possibly also including sound and melody. One or more musicians listen and then begin to improvise with her, responding to and inspiring her movement. Finally, the actress is invited to reflect on what she discovered about the character, and what helped or did not help in the process. Variation: The audience can subtly suggest changes to the musicians, such as variations in volume, instrumentation, or silence. Variation: At the non-verbal request of the actress, or spontaneously, the audience may interact with the character in a non-verbal but sonic way. Variation: The same structure can be used to explore and fix the character's main intention, then their counter-intention, and finally the alternation between the two.



5. Transformation of Oppression

There are a sample of techniques to transform the staged oppressions in liberation but the best and most used, also in the THEO-MUSIC project is **Forum-Theatre**.

Other techniques are linked to internalised oppressions, a field that was not explored in THEO-MUSIC but in another Erasmus project called RoD-AE (see www.giollicoop.it/progetti).



TEATRO-FORUM	Forum-Theatre is one of the central techniques developed by Augusto Boal within the framework of the Theatre of the Oppressed. It is a form of participatory theatre in which spectators are no longer passive observers but become active participants in the dramatic action. Boal called them “spect-actors” because they are invited not only to watch the performance, but also to intervene directly in it. During a Forum-Theatre session, a short story is presented in which a protagonist experiences a form of oppression that remains unresolved at the end of the play. The oppression may involve social injustice, discrimination, abuse of power, economic exploitation, gender violence, racism, or everyday interpersonal conflicts. After the first presentation of the scene, the audience is invited to stop the action at any moment, replace the protagonist (or their allies or potential ones), or add a possible third character, and attempt alternative actions in order to transform the situation. The goal of Forum-Theatre usually is not to find a perfect solution or a “correct” answer, but rather to collectively explore possibilities for resistance, change, and empowerment. Through theatrical experimentation, participants rehearse strategies that may later become applicable in real life. Theatre becomes a laboratory for social transformation, where people can test ideas, confront difficulties, and reflect critically on systems of oppression. A key figure in Forum-Theatre is the “Joker,” a facilitator who mediates between actors and audience. The Joker does not impose solutions or interpretations, but instead encourages dialogue, participation, and critical reflection, ensuring that the process remains open and collective. For Boal, Forum-Theatre was deeply connected to political and social emancipation. Inspired by the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, Boal believed that theatre could help people become aware of oppressive structures and develop the capacity to act upon reality. In this sense, Forum-Theatre is not simply a theatrical technique, but a rehearsal for social action and democratic participation.
BREAKING THE OPPRESSION	A very simple technique, suitable when there is limited time and there is a need to gently close the wounds opened by recalling an oppressive experience.



BREAKING THE OPPRESSION

- The technique unfolds in three stages:
1. The oppressive scene is enacted based on a story told by one of the participants. The narrator plays themselves. The scene unfolds as it happened in reality, maintaining both the oppression and the negative outcome.
 2. The roles are then reversed: the narrator plays the oppressor, gaining greater awareness of the oppressor’s perspective, strategies, and power. The story once again develops toward the continuation of the oppression.
 3. Finally, the participants return to their original roles. This time, however, the oppressed person, having experienced and better understood the role of the oppressor, attempts to free themselves. The other actors continue to sustain the oppressive situation, but with the sensitivity not to overwhelm the oppressed person who is trying to break free. The aim is to show that liberation is possible, although it requires strength and courage. The role of the Joker is crucial here in maintaining the right balance.



6. Extrapolation

As already mentioned, in order to strengthen the insights gained through the previous process and its five stages, we consider it useful to introduce a sixth phase, called extrapolation, borrowing the term from Boal's vocabulary.

Although Augusto Boal stressed its importance as a way to avoid what he called **“demobilising catharsis”**, that is, resolving oppression within the theatrical workshop alone and becoming satisfied with a mere mechanism of emotional release, similar to Aristotelian catharsis, he never developed specific exercises dedicated to this phase.

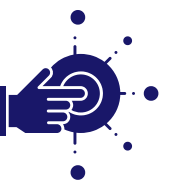


IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE	With their eyes closed, each participant imagines an oppressive situation they may encounter in the near future. Drawing on the awareness, strength, and personal discoveries developed throughout the theatrical journey, they imagine themselves responding to the oppression and creating change. The facilitator may guide the exercise with prompts such as: • Imagine an oppressive situation you may face in the future. • Imagine the oppressor, or several oppressors, you may encounter. • Imagine the context: where does it take place? Indoors or outdoors? At home or elsewhere? • Imagine the details of the environment: objects, shapes, colours, sounds, smells... • Focus on the details of the oppressor. • What do they say or do? What behaviour affects or oppresses you the most? • Imagine yourself responding to and confronting the oppression: what do you do? What do you say? How do you say it? • Repeat your response several times, gradually identifying the actions and behaviours that feel most appropriate for you and for the situation. • If you see yourself from the outside, try to move inside the experience — not as an observer, but as someone directly facing the oppressor. • Continue the interaction in the way you wish until you feel complete, then breathe deeply and slowly open your eyes. The same exercise can also be carried out in pairs with open eyes. One person at a time practices saying and doing what they would like to express toward the oppressor. The person playing the oppressor remains silent, but afterwards offers feedback on the effectiveness of the other participant's actions, words, posture, tone of voice, and overall presence.
CLOSING	Every session, whether long or short, needs a closing phase that may address at least three dimensions: • a cognitive evaluation of the process: what have I learned? • an emotional sharing about the experience: how did I feel? What relational or emotional difficulties emerged? • a closing ritual that helps conclude the session and gently carry the group out of the experience.



Alongside the more traditional verbal group sharing, we present here a few alternative exercises.

Uri's Three Breaths	Standing in a circle, holding hands with eyes closed. The facilitator invites the group to take three breaths, dedicating each one in turn, traditionally to: • the generations that came before us; • the small community created within the workshop; • ourselves. The facilitator may also invite participants to suggest their own dedication.
Sound Bell	One person begins with a sound, and the others gradually join in, listening to their own sound and to the soundscape that emerges: a forest of sounds.
Closing Sound	→ Objective: to emotionally close a session. In a tight circle, almost shoulder to shoulder, participant A begins by sharing what they take away from the course. Then, if consent is given, they place their left hand on the heart of the person to their right. That person places their right hand over the hand on their heart as a sign of acceptance and connection, then continues by sharing what they are taking with them from the experience, and places their left hand on the heart of the person to their right. The process continues around the circle until it returns to the starting point.



Guidelines / Points of Attention

A general recommendation that emerged from our experience is this: “Experiment, explore and enjoy combining these three approaches”.

There is no other way to truly understand their integration except through direct practice. It is precisely through doing, through attempts, mistakes and discoveries, that numerous exercises, interactions and combinations emerged, often surprising, meaningful and generative.

At the beginning of the project, we focused mainly on the integration of Theatre of the Oppressed and Deep Listening, seeking to introduce a quality of deep listening as a fundamental attitude running throughout the entire process. However, already during the first training in Rome, the richness of Radical Improvisation emerged very strongly, and from that moment onwards the work developed through the progressive intertwining of all three approaches.

The encounter between Deep Listening, Radical Improvisation and Theatre of the Oppressed moves in a direction closely related to Augusto Boal's later research, gathered under the name Aesthetics of the Oppressed.

Within this framework, Boal sought to explore other artistic forms, music, painting, dance, sculpture and many others, with the aim of restoring an aesthetic voice to oppressed people and counteracting what he called "the invasion of the brain" produced by the cultural industry.

It is therefore entirely consistent to propose Deep Listening experiences through music when that music arises from an authentic artistic search oriented towards beauty, truth and depth of expression, regardless of genre or commercial categories.

In our experience, so-called classical music and traditional music have proved particularly effective. At the beginning, it is advisable to propose short listening experiences, no longer than five or six minutes, possibly fading out the piece before it ends and, above all, avoiding telling participants in advance what they are about to hear. Information about the piece may be shared afterwards. This allows for a freer, more open and more authentic listening experience, less conditioned by expectations, prejudices or pre-categorisations.



In several THEO-MUSIC practices, the voice is explored as a form of sound expression independent of semantic meaning. Participants are also invited to play simple instruments or to create sounds by using objects found in the working space as percussion instruments. Looking ahead, it will be possible to explore further the different ways of "making music" as forms of expression that are accessible to people without musical training. Indeed, during the experimental activities, the participants' desire to contribute actively through their own personal way of "making music" emerged very clearly.

Boal maintained that every human being is an artist and that oppressed groups, rather than merely consuming dominant cultural products, should be enabled to create their own aesthetic.

Through the training activities and the pilot experiences, it became clear that the combination of these three methods is not only possible but also extremely fruitful. At the same time, this text maintains a principal direction: the central pathway remains that of Theatre of the Oppressed, with its stages leading from de-mechanisation to the transformation of oppression.

Because of time constraints and the need to develop the different stages of Theatre of the Oppressed, it was not possible to explore further the many seeds that emerged during the experimentation. This opens up an important question: what might emerge from a more radical experimentation, in which music itself becomes the guiding thread of the process, without the urgency of necessarily reaching transformation through Forum Theatre?

A second element to consider is that music can strongly influence emotions and therefore shape the development of the improvisation. For this reason, great care is needed when introducing musical material, together with a deep sensitivity on the part of the musicians, so that they do not impose external emotions upon the actors but rather help reveal and sustain possibilities that are already present within the scene. The question of how to cultivate this quality of listening in the musician remains, for us, an open and central one.

A final point for reflection concerns the position of the musicians: should they remain outside the performing group, be fully part of it, or move fluidly between these two dimensions?

We do not yet have a definitive answer. We would have liked to experiment further with musicians being fully present within the scene as characters carrying their instruments. However, because of time limitations, we often returned to the most pragmatic solution: keeping the musicians outside the scene, accompanying the improvisations and theatrical situations through music.



THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

Book - English

Boal, Augusto, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Routledge, London or Pluto Press, 1979-1993

Boal, Augusto, *Games for actors and non actors*, Routledge, London, 1992

Boal Augusto, *The Rainbow of Desire. The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, London/New York (1995)

Boal Augusto, *Legislative Theatre. Using Performance to make Politics*, London/New York (1998)

Boal Augusto and Jackson Adrian, *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, Paperback, London (2006)

Schutzman, Mady e Cohen Cruz, Jan (a cura di), *Playing Boal: theatre, therapy, activism*, London, Routledge, 1994

Howe Kelly, Boal Julian, Soeiro José (editors), *The routledge companion to Theatre of the Oppressed*, Routledge, London/New York, 2019

Book - Franch

Boal Augusto, *Théâtre de l'opprimé, pratique du théâtre de l'opprimé*. Paris, La découverte (2003)

Boal Augusto, *Stop! C'est magique...*, Hachette, Paris (1980)

Boal Augusto, *Jeux pour acteurs et non-acteurs. Pratique du Theatre de l'opprimé*, La Decouverte, Paris (1991)

Boal Augusto, *L'arc-en-ciel du désir Méthode Boal de théâtre et thérapie*, La Découverte, Paris (2002)

Book - Italian

Boal, Augusto, *Il teatro degli oppressi. Teoria e pratica del teatro latinoamericano*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1977 (esaurito)

Boal, Augusto, *Il poliziotto e la maschera. Giochi esercizi e tecniche del teatro dell'oppresso*, Molfetta-Bari, La Meridiana, 1993 (2° ed. 1996, 3° ed. 2001)

Boal, Augusto, *L'arcobaleno del desiderio*, Molfetta, La Meridiana, 1994

Boal, Augusto, *Dal desiderio alla legge. Manuale del teatro di cittadinanza*, Molfetta, La Meridiana ed., 2002



THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

VIDEO

What is TO?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxQ6SsfhiCw>

Augusto Boal talks about Newspaper Theatre

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZGrFwXq1l8>

Forum-Theatre explained

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZhlpnSVRUg>

Augusto Boal, Invisible-Theatre Belgium

<https://shorturl.at/CypKI>

Augusto Boal Interview: April 16, 1931-May 2, 2009 PART 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0L2KHBE2Cw>

Augusto Boal (April 16, 1931 - May 2, 2009) - PART 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXutHbXGQfg>

Augusto Boal, Forum Theater, Harvard-2003

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5B0xx_mG29g&t=197s

Jana Sanskriti extrait (Indian group)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc8dmh3Fzsc&t=61s>

Out of silence (Canadian Forum-Th. On television)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7V0-HDPKmPI&feature=youtu.be>

LegiLab: Experiments in Legislative-Theatre

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zqm5lCxB3A>



LISTENING

Book - English

Levy, D. (1986/2024). *Euphony: The Sound of Life* (4th reprint ed.). Aegis Collection, International Academy of Euphony, Ascona, Switzerland.

Levy, D. (2013). *Pythagoras and Euphony: The Challenge of Learning to Listen*. Aegis Collection, International Academy of Euphony, Ascona, Switzerland.

Schafer, R. M. (1994) *Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Rochester: Destiny Books.

Schafer, R. M. (1969) *Ear Cleaning: Notes For An Experimental Music Course*. New York: Associated Music Publishers.

Lipari, L. (2014). *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement*. Penn State University Press.

Nichols, R. G., & Stevens, L. A. (1957). *Are you listening?* McGraw-Hill.

VIDEO COURSES - Italian

Accademia Internazionale di Eufonia: <https://academyofeuphony.com/it/arte-ascolto-profondo/>

Video-Course: ARTE DELL'ASCOLTO PROFONDO (ART OF DEEP LISTENING)

Accademia Internazionale di Eufonia: <https://academyofeuphony.com/it/saper-ascoltare/>

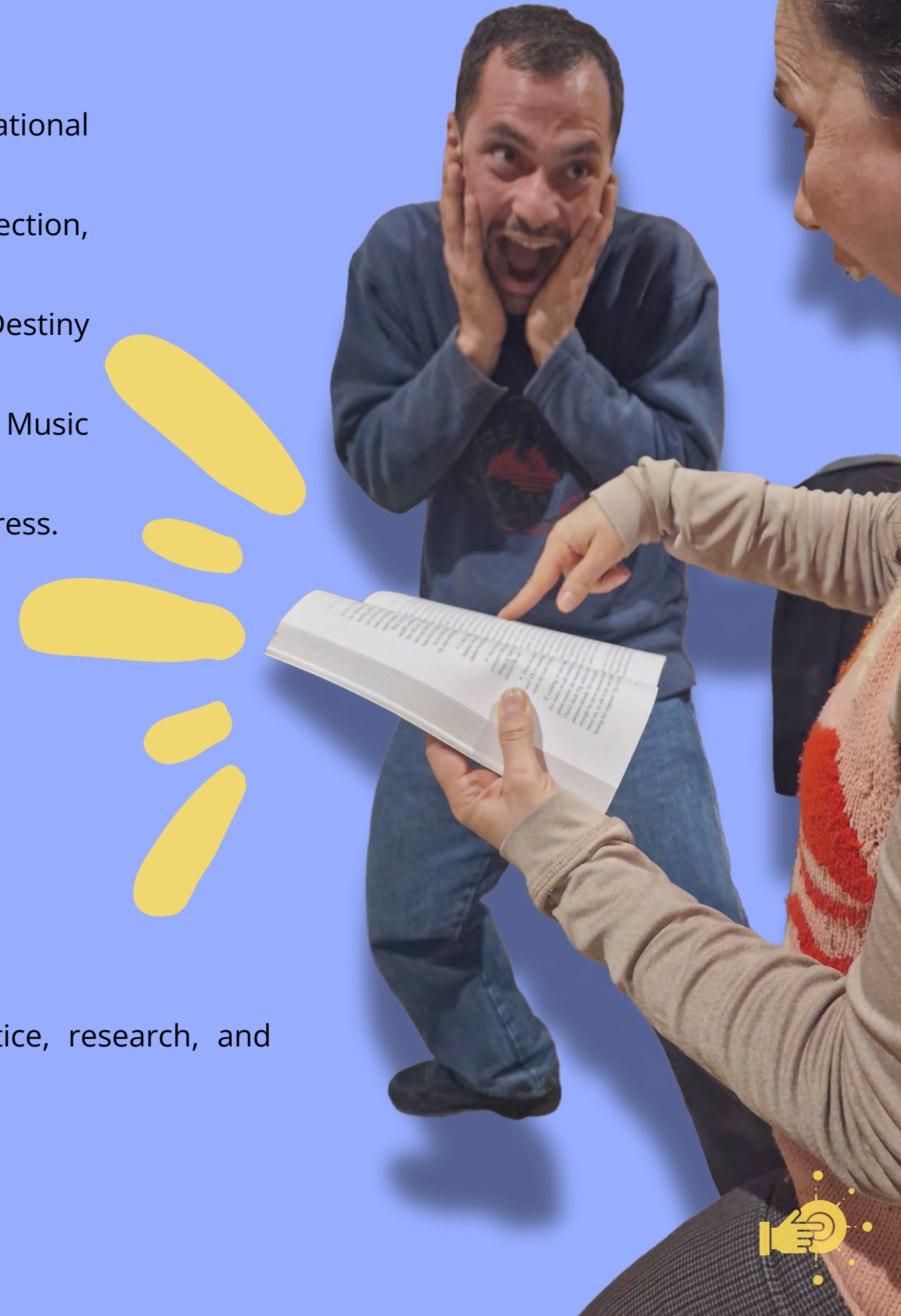
Video-Course: SAPER ASCOLTARE (KNOWING HOW TO LISTEN)

Global organizations

ILA- International Listening Association <https://www.listen.org/>

Cross-disciplinary, global network dedicated to promoting effective listening through practice, research, and teaching.

Global Listening Centre <https://www.globallisteningcentre.org/>





RADICAL MUSICAL IMPROVISATION

Book

Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music — Derek Bailey. A foundational text on non-idiomatic improvisation.

The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now — Catalogue edited by Naomi Beckwith and collaborators. It explores the relationship between radical improvisation, politics, and artistic experimentation.

Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music — Amanda Weidman
Useful for reflecting on the body and improvisation as an embodied practice.

Sync or Swarm: Improvising Music in a Complex Age — David Borgo
Analyzes radical improvisation through complex systems, interaction, and collectivity.

HISTORICAL COLLECTIVES

AMM

Spontaneous Music Ensemble

Globe Unity Orchestra

USEFUL JOURNALS AND ARCHIVES

Critical Studies in Improvisation

Improvised Music Company

EFI – European Free Improvisation Pages

