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**CAN STORY TELLING REALY CHANGE THE WORLD?**

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*Abstract*

Drawn from the Shamanic rituals, Playback Theatre (PT) based its materials on the stories given by the members of the community. PT is a theatric interactive method for changing awareness and one's outlook on reality. It has the power to shape reality through storytelling. The article examines the work of three researchers who analyzed the link between the subject and social structures; Pierre Bourdieu and the term habitat; Michel Foucault and his notion of history of punishment & Michel de Certeau and his practice of everyday life. It suggests that while Bourdieu and Foucault claim for a deterministic reality, De Certeau's approach brings forth a free will and autonomy within the social structures governing the individual. Following de Certeau's approach corresponds with PT in a new fashion so it will contribute to the use of PT in order to challenge and shape reality. PT has a unique potential to influence on the collective – objective of its community. Using PT in such a manner needs to develop a new continues form so it may enable the spectators to reach a social – collective goal. The article will therefore aim to serve as a philosophical anchor for understanding the use of PT in everyday life.

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## 1. Introduction

PT manifested itself in theatres, workshops, and a wide range of educational and organizational settings. PT draws people together and offers fresh perspectives on everyday life. But this is a pretense, for if PT wishes to offer a fresh new perspective it may contradict with the philosophical premise that the ritual is governed by strong social structure, for it is designed to bridle the individual, to adjust him to what pre-exists and by this may block the actual social change (Butcher, 1951, p. 249). Pierre Bourdieu named these forces, governing the individual "habitus". Michel Foucault addressed these forces through the theory of "a-priory history" and added that they are governed by discipline. Both Foucault & Bourdieu tried to analyze the singular action in correspondence to the big structures governing the subject. Through their philosophy one can see how the individual's everyday life may try to influence and shape the big structures shaping reality.

As opposed to both their outlooks Michel de Certeau proposes a different, positive notion of everyday life and names the singular action taken by the individual as 'tactics'. According to de Certeau, we must be aware of the fact that in every story the teller is actually "making a move" – so that the act itself is a "move from the private sphere ....to the public" (de Certeau, 1994, p.2) .

The article will aim to offer, through De Certeau's perception of a social change, that everyday life stories, manifested through a PT ritual, are an active opportunity to engage on social action. The PT actor who enacts the story told is making a choice in a transcended unconscious moment with free will to create a new text, a text that will shape the teller's awareness upon his return to everyday life.

### 1.1. Michel Foucault

Foucault addresses social action through his outlook on power. His argument makes a detour through history by showing that since the middle ages we face a "genealogy of human soul" (Gutting, 1994, p. 75).

Foucault uses a history of punishment in order to illustrate the larger social movement of power from the aristocracy to the middle classes. He is interested in punishment to exemplify how modern society disciplines its subjects. These subjects experience the intersection of social definitions of normality, through material institutions such as school.

Furthermore, punishment is used when non-bourgeois "rebels" (Foucault, 2004, p. 285) are identified. They are judged by the bourgeois in order to stabilize society.

Foucault's outlook on power, describes the move from public, physical punishments to individual, invisible discipline of the soul. He demonstrates how the subject bonds with the object, while both are controlled by the policy required. Foucault further relates to the production of knowledge regarding the three concepts: norm body and knowledge. They govern the subject by use of a pendulum swinging between discipline and punishment. In order for such relations of knowledge and power to exist new technics of individualism are formed (Foucault, 2004, p.305).

In light of Foucault's approach, it may be suggested that PT uses norm body and knowledge in order to enact a scene. But, so long as the contract with the audience is based on obtaining a cathartic experience, the sense of imprisonment will prolong.

## 1.2. Pierre Bourdieu's 'Habitus'

Bourdieu too refers to power relations. His term, 'habitus', relates to the structured social forces governing us. Bourdieu coined the term in an attempt to bridge the gap between two competing sociological approaches: the subjective approach that analysed social processes as the deliberate action of individuals while ignoring the social forces acting on the individual; and the objective approach, focused on social structures, systems and institutions, ignoring the voluntary actions of individuals.

Bourdieu was interested in identifying the functioning of the social structure in the preferences and voluntary actions of individuals. 'Habitus' seeks to clarify how the hierarchical relations between social groups are internalized and experienced as natural and how the social status of the individual is expressed in the cultural capital accumulated during his life (Bourdieu, 1990, p 13).

Habitus serves Bourdieu in order to identify the mechanism of reproduction. In this sense Bourdieu presents a closed world, a replicator - the only way to change it is called "space for taking a stand" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 122). Therefore it may be suggested that Bourdieu regards the source of the theater's power to bring about change is within the habitus rather than outside it.

Since theatre is used in order to control the cultural capital by reproduction it takes place in dialectic positions in the field. PT will best serve these dialectic positions by voicing both the individual teller and the community narrative. The individual teller becomes the community narrator, bringing forth not only his story but that of many others.

## 1.3. Michel De Certeau

Alongside Foucault and Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau recognizes the existence of governing social structures which he names strategies. But unlike Foucault and Bourdieu he recognizes another force, that of the individual over governing social structures. He names the actions of individuals 'tactics' (De Certeau, 1984, p. 38).

In his book 'The practice of everyday life' de Certeau's widens the dichotomy between the self and the potential to overcome governing social powers.

For de Certeau the concept of strategy relates to concrete material, space, and the institutional frameworks. By this it may be suggested that he means that the individual is conditioned to participate in certain social or cultural activities, governed by the structure. For de Certeau the concept of tactics relates to mobile, temporal and personal occupations of space enacted by an individual. Something as simple as walking in the city becomes a tactical act, as the pedestrian creates a personalized path from the various options that the urban grid provides.

While Foucault regards disciplinary procedures as inevitable, de Certeau suggests that tactics are "the unknown forms" taken by dispersed individuals already "caught in the nets of discipline" (de Certeau, 1984, xiv-xv). They use creative, make shift ways in order to free themselves from the grid. De Certeau describes how tactics operate within a space that is becoming 'at once' more homogenous and more extensive.

While strategies tend to 'produce, and impose' places in conformity with 'abstract models', tactics work to "use, manipulate, and divert these spaces" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 29-30). This is done in a voluntary way by increasing the "number of possibilities in a dominated space" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 98). Just as the

pedestrian created a personalized path, so the PT actor improvises on stage, insinuating "himself in the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix).

De Certeau allows us to perceive the seemingly paradoxical co-presence of transcendence and the everyday upon which they are built. This reciprocal relationship, in addition to the empowering presentations of the street-level movement described above, works in many sequences to relate mystifying or normally out-of-reach specialities to our experiential and bodily coordinates. In this way the seemingly constant gap between strategies and tactics is subtly reduced. For de Certeau tactical appropriations are a necessary response to contemporary life – a way of providing narratives to places and so making them liveable (de Certeau, 1984, p.142).

#### **1.4. Playback Theatre – three avenues**

Following the reading into Foucault Bourdieu and de Certeau a new call for action in PT emerges. Through its 40 years of journey playback theatre has developed extremely. Today two main avenues may be detected:

The first is based on theatrical dimensions and usually takes place in front of a random or rearranged audience (Fox 1994, p.119). Most events in this case are cathartic with a theatrical structure. Yet, they usually take place within the governing strategies and limit the possibility for voluntary spontaneous growth.

The second avenue is a vast and varied use of PT in therapeutics, social help groups and training groups. On many occasions these are repeated workshops (on a short or annual basis) and share a content dimension where PT is a crucial and leading means (Salas 2005, p.82) . Here too there is limited possibility for voluntary spontaneous growth because episteme psychic boundaries may be broken but not the governing social ones.

Both these avenues are limited in time and impact.

Therefore this article will attempt to offer a third avenue. This avenue will aim to add the option for social action, by creating a new contract between the audience and the actors. In order to do so the random participators in a one-time PT experience will be invited to continue and participate in an on-going PT experience. Thus the experience will be a deeper and more self-revealing one, and it may be hoped that on the community level an authentic social action will emerge enabling a change of the social structure.

## **2. Conclusions**

Fox's model of PT offers for dimensions (Table 01.).

**Table 01.** Four components of PT (J. Fox. "Gathering voices" p. 5)

Content dimension Individually subjective perspective	Artistic dimension Individually subjective perspective
Ritualdimension Collectively subjective perspective	Social dimension Collectively objective perspective

The first two relate to the individual experience, on both plains of content and art. They also relate to the positions of spectator and participant. Both offer a subjective perspective within the boundaries of governing social structures. The third dimension that of ritual, relates to the collective subjective perspective. The ritual enables the spectator to be in a collective subjective "we" experience- a series of moments that only those who were part of it – share the same thoughts, sights and insights.

Yet, all three dimensions are limited to what is experienced within PT encounter. Still it may be suggested that the third ritualistic dimension may serve as a bridge in order to reach the fourth dimension – that of collective objective perspective, because it contains both the collective impact and the transcendental component.

The fourth dimension is the social dimension focusing on collective objective perspective. This last dimension has potential that has yet to be fulfilled. This potential may be fulfilled by using de Certeau's tactics. This may enable changing the spectator grasp of social action due to a broadened awareness of the sense of community. The overt (conscious) and covert (unconscious) elements that unfold in all the above mentioned dimensions of PT, gain a new collective meaning. By offering a continuation of the PT experience in the form of community action.

The notion of social dimension and its elusiveness (Fox, 1995 ) in PT meets with the conception that social change as a rational and analytic aspect (Arbel, 2006, p. 72). The core factor of any non-script theatre is it's "here and now" reaction to social reality.

Movement in space through ritual based on "pre moral convention" (norm) told as a story by the teller may shape and alter the teller action after the event.

And last but not least is the power of the story as emancipation form (Rivers, 2015) – and the power to break out of the social strategies that symbolled in a "Us- ness" transformed into "Us-ism".

Knowing that this article itself preserves the Habitus and the strategies controlled by the world of academy – its only way to break the vicious circle is a call for an action research exploring the theatrical shape to its full social action potential!

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