



## From Holland: Theatre with Imprisoned Youth

by Floortje van Soest, drama teacher & anthropologist

Somewhere, in the western part of our tiny country Holland, lies an even tinier village called Sassenheim. In the meadows of Sassenheim lies a building surrounded by a large concrete wall, one of the biggest juvenile detention centres of Holland: Teylingereind. Deep down in this institution I work with another drama teacher, Jairi Terpstra, to try to bring positive experiences to youth in the centre. We thought it would be interesting to share our experiences with you . . .

The drama classes happen daily in the school within the prison. We teach small classes with a maximum of seven students each, with unisex and mixed groups. Not all of the students in the classes are offenders; some of them (often the girls) come from problematic family situations and are temporarily placed in this detention centre.

One never knows what to expect: the composition of the group changes every week. The students live a tense and stressful life. They wait for their trial, have appointments with their tutor or lawyer; they suddenly have to move to other centres, or simply go home. In this chaotic atmosphere we work. Most of the time we explore the students' own experiences, transforming them into simple theatrical scenes and role-play. How to handle a judge? How to act in the presence of a police officer? It can be fun, but negativity can be hard to rise above in such an atmosphere. Improvisation techniques are the basis of our lessons, but more and more we use Theatre of the Oppressed principles in our work. In May we will produce our first TO performance with the youth in the facility.

Sometimes suddenly we receive great rewards. This week one student said out of the blue: "At drama course I feel at home." It made my day!

*Part 2 will follow in the next edition of Encounter*

## PEDAGOGY & THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

"At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know."

—Paulo Freire

### Contents:

- *Stories from Holland, England, India, Canada and the United States*
- *Important Membership Meeting Information*
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and Richard J. Piatt

Photos courtesy of :  
Cardboard Citizens  
Jana Sanskriti and  
PTO Members

[www.ptoweb.org](http://www.ptoweb.org)

ALSO from  
CANADA

## TORONTO PTO 2010

Preparations are underway for our 2010 conference, to be held in Toronto . . . the working group there is very excited and working hard!

Be on the lookout for more information this summer at [www.ptoweb.org](http://www.ptoweb.org)

## From Canada: Theatre for Living in a Large Canadian City

By Nathalie Fauteux and Warren Linds, Montreal, Quebec

A large process to democratize a Western Canadian city's organization has been underway since May 2008. In January 2009, this city actively engaged its citizens and community representatives from academia, all levels of government, private and not-for-profit organizations, activists, youth, and aboriginal leaders in a participatory and community-based process. The aim of this process was to find common ground and agree on how to enact crime prevention through social development within their city. Initiatives toward crime prevention had been underway, but they were functioning as a bureaucracy: costly and ineffective. What was required was a collaborative structure that engaged citizens. A Search Conference (SC) brought together forty participants from the community over two days in a strategic planning session to search for the most desirable and achievable future of crime prevention through social development in the city.

Theatre for Living (an adaptation of Theatre of the Oppressed made by David Diamond of Headlines Theatre of Vancouver, British Columbia) was introduced at the beginning of the Search Conference as a method to encourage the group to start listening and develop an open mind about the different perspectives in the community on issues relating to crime. The collective images of crime created by the group during the workshop heightened group consciousness around systemic issues of crime, illuminated group assumptions on crime prevention and social development, and increased listening and trust among participants.

*When I first read Paulo Freire, I was stunned and relieved and exuberant, for he was able to articulate what I knew and felt, but did not have the words for."*

*-David Diamond, Headlines Theatre*

### Membership Meeting at PTO '09

All members should plan on attending a very important membership meeting at the 2009 PTO conference. In addition to the usual business and the election of board members the following will be discussed:

- Proposed Changes in the bylaws of PTO
- The proposed incorporation of PTO in Minneapolis/St. Paul

The common theme from the images created during this particular project was the nurturing and rescuing nature of the community towards crime prevention. The current state of crime prevention is focused on nurturing the victim and punishing the criminal through more law and order. Upon reflection, the community realized through theatre that there is a need to develop a stronger social system to prevent crime. Action plans were developed based on this insight following the Search Conference. A follow-up meeting with community leaders to elaborate the action plans is scheduled for April 2009.

# From INDIA: *Jana Sanskriti* Hosts International Forum Theatre Festival

By Richard J. Piatt

*In November and December of 2008, India's Theatre of the Oppressed Movement Jana Sanskriti hosted Muktheadhara, an international Forum Theatre Festival in Kolkata, India. For the 3rd time, tens of thousands of participants celebrated the power of theatre to make social change. I was privileged to ask founder Sanjoy Ganguly a few questions. Below are a few brief extracts to help give you a taste of the great work happening with this group....*



**RP:** What was your hope for the festival and what was the result?

**JG:** The theatre festival has two principle purposes. First there is the presentation, discussion, and translation of Jana Sanskriti's method of combining acting and activism, theatre and political action, across multiple contexts in the global theatre of the oppressed community. Second, our relationship with the spectators is something we wish to present as a source of inspiration and a lesson for conceiving collective political action. Our festival (normally two – three weeks) offers an opportunity to create and strengthen relations across academics and practitioners.

**RP:** What was the response of those who attended? Did you find anything particularly challenging?

**JG:** What perturbed us most in the practice of Forum theatre is the way in which activism is divorced from acting in the theatre of the oppressed community. The festival has allowed us to highlight the way in which we view the relationship between activism and acting and question the problematic separation of the two rampant in theatre of the oppressed practice. Here, the participants see Jana Sanskriti's style of Forum Theatre where it is not used in a naturalistic manner. The artistic beauty of the play influences the practitioners. Also, here interaction means an intellectual journey of actors and spectators. So the number of interventions is not the primary parameter of measuring the success of Forum theatre.

Meeting actors and spectators is given priority because *in all cases the actors are also activists in offstage political life*. So theatre is politics to them. The spectators are also in politics because they enjoy being spect-actors and therefore they are working with us. In our festivals it becomes apparent how much people enjoy being spect-actors.

**RP:** How do you find funding for your work?

**JG:** There is no institutional donor or sponsor of our festivals. In each context, participants find funds from government sources and private savings because they are committed to the festival. Our first expectation is fulfilled at this stage. In other words, coming to the festival is already a demonstration of people's interests and financial commitment to come and share in our work. The relentless ability and energy of people within Jana Sanskriti to put together a festival of such proportion, let alone to run such a massive organization on meager resources, is another matter of admiration and awe for people who attend the festival.



To learn more about Jana Sanskriti's work, please visit their website at [www.janasanskriti.org](http://www.janasanskriti.org).

## Workshop/Skillshop Connections

Below you'll find some upcoming and/or ongoing workshops that intersect with PTO's mission. This list is by no means complete. If you'd like the dates and contact info for a particular workshop to appear in the next newsletter (October 2009), send a notice about that workshop to [kellybhowe@yahoo.com](mailto:kellybhowe@yahoo.com) no later than September 1, 2009.

### Upcoming, one-time-only, or seasonal

**Title:** Theater Of The Oppressed with Hector Aristizabal  
**Where:** Ojai, California  
**When:** April 11, 2009 10:00 am to April 12, 2009 5:00 pm  
**For more information:** (805) 646-8343 or [www.ojaifoundation.org](http://www.ojaifoundation.org)

**Title:** Highlander Center's Wild and Wonderful Witty and Wacky Workshop Work Week!!—Workshops on Popular Education, Organizing, and Movement Building  
**Where:** New Market, Tennessee  
**When:** May 25-29, 2009  
**For more information:** contact Highlander at [hrec@highlandercenter.org](mailto:hrec@highlandercenter.org) or 865-933-3443.

**Title:** Cop-in-the-Head Workshop at the Brecht Forum  
**Where:** New York, New York  
**When:** Saturday, April 18 from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, and Sunday, April 19 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.  
**Online registration:** <http://brechtforum.org/events/cop-head-0?bc=>

**Title:** Theatre of the Oppressed Facilitator Training: Waging Peace—Designing Justice  
**Where:** The Mandala Center for Justice, Port Townsend, WA  
**When:** June 22 – 27, 2009 (M-Th 9:30 AM - 6 PM; Fri 12-10 PM; Sat 10 AM - 4 PM)  
**For more information:** 360-344-3435, <http://www.mandalaforchange.com>

**Title:** The 12th Annual Theatre for Living Training Workshops  
**Where:** Vancouver, British Columbia  
**When:** Level One, August 11 to 16, 2009 - 9:00am - 5:30pm daily  
Level Two: August 19 to 24, 2009 - 9:00am - 5:30pm daily  
**For more information:** 604.871.0508 or [outreach@headlinestheatre.com](mailto:outreach@headlinestheatre.com)

**Title:** Theatre of the Oppressed intensive training workshops  
**Where:** Cardiff, Wales, UK  
**When:** September 1-5  
**For more information:** Email [theatreversusoppression@gmail.com](mailto:theatreversusoppression@gmail.com)

### Ongoing

**Title:** Theatre of the Oppressed workshops  
**Where:** Springfield, Missouri  
**When:** Second and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays of each month, 4:00 pm to 6:30 pm  
**For more information:** 417-862-ARTS (2787) or email [Info@SpringfieldArts.org](mailto:Info@SpringfieldArts.org).

### Online workshop available for download

**Title:** Incite! Women of Color Against Violence Popular Education Workshop  
**Available at:** <http://www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=96>

## Our Mission

PTO is a not-for-profit (IRS 501C3) organization with the following mission: To challenge oppressive systems by promoting critical thinking and social justice. We organize an annual meeting that focuses on the work of liberatory educators, activists, and artists; and community organizers.

Contact us at:

[www.ptoweb.org](http://www.ptoweb.org)

## ENCOUNTER

Is the official newsletter of PTO, Inc. and is published twice a year, in the spring and the autumn.

The editors are always looking for new ideas for articles that may be of interest to our membership.

If you have an idea for an article that you would like to contribute or know of events happening that would be of interest, please let us know.

Contact co-editor Kelly B. Howe at [kellybhowe@yahoo.com](mailto:kellybhowe@yahoo.com)



## A Message from the President

Dear PTO Friends,

I write to let you know that it has been a full year of work for the members of the PTO Board. We have taken on several important projects, in addition to the initiative to transfer the headquarters of PTO from Omaha to Minneapolis and St. Paul. I'd like to tell you about some of the projects and where we are in the process.

**Scholarships:** Conference attendees have requested more assistance in the form of scholarship funding. Last year (2008), the organization made a commitment to designate 2% of the conference proceeds each year to scholarships for future years. This year, we are able to offer more than a dozen scholarships to participants in the 2009 conference. Watch the website for more information about the recipients.

**Commemorative Ring for Boal:** As part of the ceremony conducted for Augusto Boal at last year's conference in Omaha, the organization pledged to make a ring for him, similar to the one that was taken from him when he was imprisoned. Ellie Friedland has worked with student artists in Boston to create a silver ring which will be given to Boal at the 2009 conference in Minneapolis.

**Newsletter:** With the commitment of Board members Rick Piatt and Kelly Howe, we have, at last, been successful in developing two online newsletters for the organization's members this year. The first issue was published in fall 2008 and the second in spring 2009. It's a commitment of the Board to continue this schedule for the future, offering PTO members information and news. We would welcome interested writers, editors, and other contributors.

**Video Project:** The Board has worked with videographer Scot McElvany to create a DVD of the 2008 Conference. The DVD will be of interest to many practitioners, and our goal is to have copies available for purchase at the 2009 Conference. Watch our website for further details. This is an exciting development for the organization.

**Transition to the Twin Cities:** In the fall of 2008, the Board met for a weekend in Minneapolis for a retreat to plan some of the details of the relocation of the headquarters. Since that time, a number of committees have been working on various aspects of the transition process. One small group is working on revisions to the by-laws that will be presented at the annual meeting for review by the membership. A committed group of folks in the Twin Cities have been meeting regularly to talk about how they can work to support the organization and how the organization can support the good work that is already going on there.

Various members have worked on other details in an effort to add clarity to projects, initiatives, and policies that have been in place, but needed polishing.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the annual conference in Minneapolis in May.

With the best wishes for the fine work you do,

Toby Emert  
PTO President, 2008-09

## From the USA: Conference '09 Update

We in the TC know that since the people are coming, we got to get things set! We have been hard at work for well over a year, brainstorming, strategizing, and putting all the details into place.

### Programming

**Dr. Deborah Barndt**, popular educator, photographer, and professor in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University in Toronto, will be giving a keynote on a whole host of topics vital to our work, including: indigenous knowledges, key features of Popular Education practice, strategies for transforming our institutions of higher education, food, integrating arts into Popular Education, and bridging the gap between academia and community organizing. **Barndt's lecture takes place on Friday, May 22, 12:45-2 pm**, and will prepare those interested for her "Advanced Topics in Popular Education: Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Social Movements" workshop the next day. This three-hour **workshop will be held on Saturday, May 23, 9 am – 12:15 pm**.

### Legislative Theatre

Minneapolis Ninth Ward Council Member Gary Schiff's Office has booked the City Hall Council Chambers for a tentative special session, on **Wednesday, May 20, 3-5 pm**, to participate in the *Minneapolis Legislative Theatre Experiment*, in which we hope to enact legislation out of Forum Theatre pieces created by workshop participants. We are hopeful that all 13 city council members will participate. A group of about 40 Minneapolis residents met recently at Minneapolis Community and Technical College to identify many issues that are central to their lives here. Plan on attending this unique process!

### Accommodations

Accommodations include a number of low- and medium-cost housing options. **Dorm rooms** are available onsite at Augsburg College for \$35/night with options to share a room for an even lower cost. **Pre-conference hotel rooms** are available through the Holiday Inn at \$119/night with options for up to 4 people to share a room for the same price (about \$35 per person w/ tax). **Conference hotel accommodations are** available at the Radisson--about a mile away from the conference site with many transportation options. Rooms at the Radisson are \$119/night for up to 4 people. While dorm rooms are cheap and on-site we strongly encourage conference booking rooms at the Radisson. Why?

1) **Sustaining PTO:** In order to guarantee hotel availability we have to book rooms months in advance, guessing at how many we'll need. If we don't fill 80% of these contracted rooms we must pay the Radisson a significant sum for their loss of income. If you are one of those members who prefer hotels, don't mind roommates, and/or can get reimbursed for the hotel's cost, please help us by booking at the Radisson!

2) **Convenience and cost:** Up to 4 people can share a room at the Radisson, making the costs the same as dorm rooms (about \$35 per night with tax). For the same price as a dorm room you get a bathroom in the room rather than down the hall and a nice comfy Queen-sized bed. Also food and bar on site. Roommates can find each other at the PTO discussion board:  
<http://ptoforum.paradigmcmi.com/>.

3) **Transportation:** Though the hotel is not on-site like the dorms, it's easy and convenient to travel to Augsburg. It's about a 30-minute walk (which is nice in the May sunshine and a way to get some exercise during the conference). The hotel has limited free shuttle service.

See you in Mini,  
*The PTO Twin Cities Conference '09 Working Group*

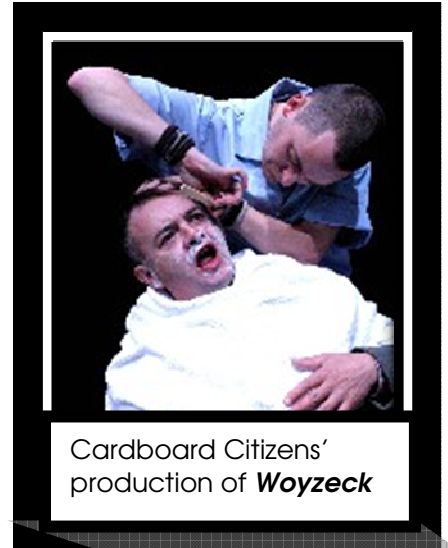
## From ENGLAND: Taking it to the Streets

by Richard J. Piatt

**“This is an evening in two parts: the first part is a play about an experiment, the second is an experiment about a play.”**

- *The Joker* in the Cardboard Citizens production of *Woyzeck*

Cardboard Citizens, the UK’s only professional homeless persons’ theatre company and one of Europe’s leading centers for Forum Theatre, has been using Boalian practice for over 17 years in its quest to utilize the art of theatre as a weapon in combating the social injustices faced by members of the homeless community. Originally founded in 1991 as a project of London Bubble theatre, its mission is to work “with people who have experience of, or who are at risk of, becoming homeless,” and it “marries the creation of high quality, innovative and interactive theatre with social objectives.” They use Forum Theatre and performing arts “to give homeless people a voice - enabling them to reach and recognize their potential.”



“Theatre can be a catalyst for change,” says artistic director Adrian Jackson, “both in the lives of individuals and the society which they are part of.” Every acting company is made up entirely of homeless and ex-homeless persons who are trained not only in the art of theatre making, but are equipped with the skills necessary to help “spect-actors” move forward in their lives. The core full time staff also employs ex-homeless people whenever possible. Workshops and productions in hostels, community centers and public spaces lead to interaction with the homeless community and facilitate the possibility of continued interaction between company members and new “spect-actors” from the community. “We work at the frontline of homelessness, with people where they are, and then we take them on a journey with us,” says Jackson. This journey, according to Associate Artist Terry O’Leary, one of the company’s leading Jokers, is one where “the audience confronts complex issues and come up with workable solutions. They find their way to a better outcome, and this sharing of strategies produces an empowering feeling.” It is not unusual for the company to find audience members at a crisis point. O’Leary, who leads work with socially excluded young people, believes that through the practice of forum, many are able to engage in a dialogue which helps them to cross barriers they did not think possible.

In addition to their direct work with the homeless, Cardboard Citizens also offers professional training in Forum Theatre and Rainbow of Desire techniques, and mounts full productions of classic works using interactive theatrical techniques embracing testimony and fiction, most recently the critically acclaimed productions of *Woyzeck* and *Timon of Athens*, the second of which was produced as part of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Complete Works Festival. Cardboard Citizens also produced Shakespeare’s *Pericles* with RSC.



***“Tis not enough to help the feeble up, but to support ‘em after....”*** *Timon of Athens*, William Shakespeare.

For more information on Cardboard Citizens or to learn about upcoming training and events, visit their website at [www.cardboardcitizens.org](http://www.cardboardcitizens.org).

***Going, Going, Gone....***  
A Cardboard Citizens original forum production.