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Witnessing Torture: Staged Violence, Spectatorship and the Theatre of Political Imprisonment

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the  
Requirements for Departmental Honors in Theatre

Bridgewater State University

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In a recent interview, renowned fight director B.H. Barry said of his work, and of the nature of violence, "I'm not frightened of violence. It's a way of expressing something that you can't do with words" (Kennedy). Staged violence has been common in performance from its origins, often necessitated by a text, and has evolved into its own discipline of theatre practice with regulations and credentialing processes to ensure the safety of actors and audiences. As such, we have come to know staged violence as a practical problem to be solved, a cog in the machine of a production process. But it is the moments in which violence *is* the narrative, where histories or lived experiences of violence are restaged before the audience as a means of exposition or catharsis, which still emerge as the most challenging for artists and audiences. Moreover, though performance for social and political change is far from a novel concept, we continue to see more graphic instances of staged violence isolated from their narrative purpose and dismissed as gratuitous, or existing for the sole purpose of "shock" - a tactic which, however effective, audiences have become averted to. The experience of spectatorship often contains an element of safety, a degree of separation which protects the audience from the action and upholds the theatre's status as a place of "escape." Apoliticism, and the desire not to be confronted with "real" issues in the theatre, persevere among popular audiences, but it is these willfully ignorant audiences that political theatre often seeks to affect action from. When examining the theatre of political imprisonment and state torture, an ongoing global issue, an important question is raised - how might the recreation of real violence before our audiences active in them a more heightened awareness and inclination to act on this issue?

In *The Semiotics of Performance*, a foundational text in the study of spectatorship, Marco De Marinis presents the dichotomy of "open" and "closed" performance. De Marinis explains "open" performance as performances which "allow the audience a variable margin of freedom

deciding up to what point they can control the cooperation,” where “closed” performances are performances which “predict a specific addressee” and require a certain prior knowledge, identity or other “competence” to be comprehended. He illustrates “closed” performances with the example of an ignorant audience member reacting poorly to a risqué performance, or an atheist enjoying a religious demonstration as “pure spectacle,” where “open” performances are malleable in both engagement and interpretation (De Marinis 168-169). While the nature of performance as “open” or “closed,” by these definitions, largely has to do with the expected demographics or competencies of the audience, “open” performances could also be read as performances which invite direct engagement and are responsive and fluid to said engagement, where “closed” performances have a decided, unchangeable outcome and singular desired affect.

The process of staging violence, by De Marinis’ definition, may be, by nature, closed performance - it is unchanging in the face of any audience response and is seldom ever intended to be malleable, largely born from concerns regarding the safety of performers and audiences. As is demonstrated in De Marinis’ figure of the religious audience member, there is a degree of separation between a performance and its spectators which keeps either party from infringing on the other’s experience of the work, but not one which impedes the potential for audience members to be emotionally affected. While one might argue the evidently “fake” nature of staged violence as a hindrance to its ability to affect an emotional response from its spectators - including those spectators who pride themselves in being unaffected by representations of violence - De Marinis’ theories tell us that even an act of “pretend” violence holds the potential to evoke very real emotion from its spectators.

Among the first theatre practitioners to write on the nature of violence and its relationship to audiences, Antonin Artaud identified popular theatre's failure to affect audiences as an overwhelming emphasis on "psychological theatre". The psychological theatre, Artaud asserts, maintains a non-threatening separation between art and audience, which "[transforms] the public into Peeping Toms" - a kind of closed performance, perhaps - and which has "unaccustomed us to that immediate and violent action which the theatre should possess" (Artaud 84-85). Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty sought to challenge popular theatre's emphasis on the psychological by "attacking the spectator's sensibility" (Artaud 87), creating theatre which seeks to access and reinvigorate the natural human response to theatre, assaulting the senses of an audience to "embody and intensify the underlying brutalities of life" (Jamieson 21-22). The Theatre of Cruelty, though centering "cruelty" in its name and approach, is not especially concerned with literal acts of violence. Nathan Gorelick's *Life in Excess*, an analysis of Artaud's writings, finds that his definition of cruelty more accurately refers to "the unrelenting agitation of a life that has become unnecessary, lazy, or removed from a compelling force" (Gorelick 33). The act of violence in Theatre of Cruelty is a psychological one, an assault on the mind and senses which awakens in the spectator a more primal human experience of theatre by which they are "engulfed and physically affected," though no physical violence is exacted.

Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, however, holds interesting considerations for the staging of violence. In both its artistic and practical purposes, staged violence seeks to communicate to an audience the emotional experience and impact of an act of violence despite being, to both performer and audience, evidently and deliberately "staged." If Theatre of Cruelty, without exacting literal violence on its audience, is able to affect in the spectator unbridled and overwhelming emotion, and access an experience of spectatorship which is not concerned with

or impeded by the notion of realism in its impact, then perhaps the same can be said of the staging of violence. Also central to the impact of Theatre of Cruelty is an acknowledgement of the audience as culpable, both on part of the audience and artists. The titular “cruelty” is not one which affects discomfort for the sake of doing so or for pure shock value, but instead toward making a spectator aware of their own culpability in the systems a performance seeks to challenge or dismantle - theatrical or otherwise.

In *The Politics of Cruelty: An Essay on the Literature of Political Imprisonment*, Kate Millett identifies further the impact of literary depictions of violence on its audiences through the lens of state torture. Grounded in the French notion of *témoignage*, or “literature of witness” - art created from lived experience to inform its audience - Millett asserts that the “witnesses” in these texts “describe the experience of torture, frequently having undergone it themselves. With the immediacy and detail of literature, they make clear to us what life is like in a culture which practices torture, both the individual and collective effect of its reintroduction on social and political existence” (Millett 15). Millett critiques, but accepts, apoliticism and the human instinct to protect oneself that manifests in the separation of this literature from its audience, asserting that “Despair is submission to the threat of unendurable torment, if not our own, then another’s. But it is, after all, another’s fate and not our own. Whom would we not betray to escape torture?” (Millett 308). If the written work, in its conventional form, is able to describe and inform, but not always affect responsibility or action even in its harshest depictions of torture, then perhaps the staging of said depictions might perforate those barriers, finally making the issue “real” to its spectators.

Writing on the spectator’s experience of staged violence, Ketu Katrak introduces the concept of “active witnessing” - an experience of witnessing performance which “argue that

spectators' affective responses to performed violence in live theatre include hope and imagining social change" (Katrak 31). Drawing upon Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance* and the notion of seeking or finding hope in the theatre as an audience member, Katrak suggests that, though the spectator as witness bears culpability in instances of staged violence, this culpability is not an artist's objective, but a step toward a more meaningful and hopeful engagement. Citing the instances of brutalization and sexual violence in Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* and Navarasa Dance Theatre Company's *Encounter*, Katrak's "active witnessing" sees audiences leave with hope for change after witnessing acts of violence employed to address a social issue, and an act of staged violence as a tactic for placing spectators in conversation with said issues.

When placed in conversation with Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and De Marinis' notion of "open" performance, Katrak's active witnessing indicates staged violence - and the resulting culpability on part of the spectator - as a step toward change and effective tactic for engaging the spectator in the larger objective or purpose of a performance, and the issue that necessitates that purpose. Though an act of staged violence isolated from its context within a performance may be a closed act, witnessing violence and experiencing "cruelty" as a spectator may better serve the goal of an open performance. Staged violence, therefore, should not be seen as a purely technical element or production challenge constituted by the demands of a playwright, but an artistic tactic to encourage a more engaged and affected experience of spectatorship, and a culpability which can be transformed into action or activate an audience toward an objective. Moreover, this culpability which is so often affected by the experience of witnessing staged violence may be the tactic which shocks those literary audiences described by Millett, who remain separate from the depictions of torture they read, into understanding and action. The applied tactic of staged

violence, therefore, can encourage a more active witnessing and deeper sense of culpability among audiences in the theatre of political imprisonment.

The following analyses of three plays dealing with state imprisonment and torture - Augusto Boal's *Torquemada*, Radha Bharadwaj's *Closet Land*, and Griselda Gambaro's *Information for Foreigners* - interrogate how the prescribed use of staged violence in these works encourage audience culpability and active witnessing. Contextualized within traditions of theatre of cruelty and the literature of witness, the potential for each work to affect the "hope and [imagining] of social change" described by Katrak, and to place responsibility on the spectator in the violence they bear witness to, will be examined. Each play's means of addressing and being in relationship to its audience will be placed in conversation with its use of violence, exploring the relationship between "conventional" tactics of audience address in open performance and staged violence, and how the two might reinforce one another. These readings are not especially concerned with directorial interpretation or the potential for theatre artists to add violence to a play, but with the violence necessitated by the playwright, and how the articulation of this necessity through staging the violence furthers the expository, social and political functions of the theatre of political imprisonment.

As is noted by Katrak, theatre artists often employ staged representations of real-life instances of violence toward political goals of awareness, protest, or incentivizing an audience toward political action. Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* practices apply performance tactics specifically to address issues of injustice and oppression and work toward solutions, with audiences as active participants. *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal's book outlining the practices of the same name, offers also a series of critical and analytical frameworks for theatre practice, particularly for engagement with the spectator and the social role of theatre and performance.



While outlining his initial experiments with Theatre of the Oppressed methodologies, he identifies the final stage and goal as “Theatre as Discourse.” Boal asserts that spectacle is indicative of privilege, and those with less privilege are more concerned with process and message: “The bourgeoisie already knows what the world is like, *their* world, and is able to present images of this finished, complete world. The bourgeoisie presents the spectacle. On the other hand, the proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know yet what their world will be like; consequently their theater will be the rehearsal, not the finished spectacle.” (Boal 142). Though Boal’s methodologies are often applied in participatory performances rather than “traditional” narrative plays, these principles appear in his playwriting as well, and the described function of theatre as discourse provides interesting considerations for examining the theatre of political imprisonment. Those who have been silenced, othered and tortured by a more privileged oppressor - the state - are not concerned with simply *showing* their experience of oppression, nor with imagining a world where said experience never occurred. The staging of stories of state torture could be the “rehearsal” in question, a presentation of the system which must change, and the staging of violence it necessitates, and subsequent complacency of the audience, are invitations to imagine solutions.

Moreover, Boal writes of his conclusions on spectatorship that “spectator is a bad word.” He asserts that the word “spectator” frames the audience member as “less than a man, and it is necessary to humanize him, to restore him to his capacity of action in all its fullness,” elaborating that the goal of all of his methodologies is “the liberation of the spectator, on whom the theatre has imposed finished visions of the world” - the visions in question being the aforementioned spectacle presented by the oppressor (Boal 155). Boal does not literally mean that “spectator” should be removed from our vocabularies, but that the word carries with it the notion that a

performance has a fixed and universal function, and that the audience is not also responsible in the process of actualizing the futures imagined by a piece of theatre. This also proves relevant in the examination of the theatre of political imprisonment; as stated by Katrak, the use of recreations of real violence is an invitation to imagine futures and take action, not an act of shaming an audience for a responsibility they cannot reverse.

Perhaps most relevant in Boal's body of work to the topic of staging violence, however, is not the forms created in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, but his 1971 play *Torquemada*, depicting his own experiences with political imprisonment and state torture - and mirroring the same principles articulated in his applied theatre practices. Written while Boal was a political prisoner in Brazil, the play's fragmented scenes depict instances of state-sanctioned violence, including the arrests, imprisonment, interrogation and gruesome torture of political activists at the hand of government officials, drawing upon Boal's own experience. Described by Severino João Albuquerque as "the verbal and nonverbal languages of violence," (Albuquerque 452) the play presents those characters responsible for enacting violence without names, instead described using physical characteristics or stereotypes (i.e. "Beard" or "Athlete"), and frequent scenes of brutal violence, or the solitary lives of prisoners, without any language. Prisoners are depicted walking silently and aimlessly around their cells, waiting, as are those enacting the torture, seemingly waiting for their next instruction and victim. This jarring use of silence can be interpreted as a tactic for affecting audience discomfort - the suspense of waiting for the inevitable displays of violence retains engagement more than a constant display of brutality.

*Torquemada* is quite literal in its critique of the government and of state torture, and in its depictions of the consequences of speaking out against the oppressor. A detainee in the play is depicted shouting to the prison guards:

*I said that you are all sons of bitches, that you work for the bloody dictatorship, that you are worse than the imperialists.* (Boal 128)

Following this, he is dragged off the stage, never to be seen again, with his execution implied by the “silencio de muerte” (dead silence) which Boal follows this with. The use of silence and offstage violence is a tactful one, one which manipulates the audience’s anticipation of violence and withholds the display of it when the spectator has become accustomed. Here, Boal employs his aforementioned theories about the spectator as an active participant in imagining futures, not unlike Katrak’s active witnessing; Boal withholds the spectacle he previously chastised - which, in this case, is the literal display of violence, perhaps a statement on the bourgeoisie’s aptitude toward violence and torture - and brings the imagination of the spectator in conversation with the play.

In *Torquemada*, instilling culpability in the spectator is of priority to Boal. As a product of ongoing political violence, Boal’s play was directly in conversation with his circumstances, and presented to affect discourse. Katrak’s notion of staged violence as a tactic for imagining positive social change and the principles of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, which are ever-present in *Torquemada*, are similar - both concepts acknowledge an ongoing social issue, and see staged violence as a tactic to demonstrate said issue, but ultimately, the purpose of the violence is to transfer responsibility onto the now-informed spectator. Boal’s use of cruelty is selective, and his methodology closely resembles De Marinis’ open performance. *Torquemada* exemplifies well his notion of “theatre as discourse,” seeking to expose the horrors of state torture, but never providing a solution, instead encouraging action on part of his audience.

Radha Bharadwaj’s *Closet Land*, a stage adaptation of her film of the same title, provides an interesting site for exploration of the spectator’s experience of staged violence. Situated in

traditions and tactics of Theatre of Cruelty, the play - which follows a children's book author being violently interrogated for alleged propaganda in her work - contains detailed depictions of intense physical and psychological torture. *Closet Land*, in its frank use of violence, is unrelenting - the aforementioned author (referred to only as Woman) is seen being beat, blindfolded, tied in stress positions, and having toenails ripped out, among other acts.

Bharadwaj's most complex and confrontational techniques, however, are in *Closet Land*'s most psychologically violent moments - and are, perhaps, also the most in line with Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty in their ability to assault an audience's senses. The play's detailed stage directions outlining the violence are always keenly aware of, and in relationship to, the spectator. The "fourth wall" of the set - which Bharadwaj largely refers to with language indicative of a proscenium stage, but nonetheless represents the barrier between performance and audience - is a recurring motif, with the woman regularly engaging with the unseen wall as though it is her exit:

*The woman gets up and walks toward the "fourth" wall. He follows her with his eyes. She faces the audience, looking at the theatre as if peering through the dark into nothingness. (Bharadwaj 4)*

This is continued in the play's final scene, where Bharadwaj prescribes that the actors should not exit through an onstage exit, but directly into the theatre:

*Places reversed, they look at each other. Then he gets up. With inexpert, fumbling hands, he handcuffs and blindfolds her. He leads her towards the "fourth" wall, then beyond, towards the proscenium of the stage. (Bharadwaj 53)*

The play, by intention, is acutely aware of its nature as performance, and the element of audience complacency is introduced largely through the spectator's role as witness in the Man - the Woman's interrogator - committing acts of psychological violence. Throughout the play, the

Man dons a number of identities through which he communicates to the Woman, as if there are several other interrogators and prisoners in the room, all while the Woman is blindfolded, or with the Man outside of the room communicating through a speaker. Perhaps the most frightening and direct moment in *Closet Land*, in relationship with the audience, begins the second act. The Woman, now stripped to her underwear and in “caked make-up” and “childish pigtailed,” is humiliated by the Man through a speaker, shouting obscene and objectifying names at her, making crude sexual comments, and shaming her for sexual trauma from her childhood. During this, Bharadwaj’s stage directions describe that she is chased with a spotlight, and, in “nerve-wracking” silence, becomes aware of and acknowledges the audience, bowing her head in shame to the spectators. At this point in the play, the Woman remains unaware that the same Man who has been interrogating her is the voice she hears and which has exposed her to the audience.

Moreover, in another moment, while the Woman is blindfolded, the Man places a clove of garlic in his mouth and adjusts his voice to mimic the “man with the voice like a choked gutter,” an assailant described earlier in the play who sexually assaulted her and left scratch marks on her body when she was first taken from her home. While the Woman believes this facade, not yet aware that the Man interrogating her, who she has grown to trust, is the same man speaking to her, the audience becomes acutely aware that the “choked gutter” voice mentioned earlier is simply one of the Man’s personas used to torture the Woman - and as such, becomes especially complicit. While the Woman, often blindfolded, spends much of the play unaware of this tactic, the audience is always aware, left to watch the psychological deterioration of an innocent political prisoner.

The acts of psychological violence enacted on the Woman in *Closet Land* are also acts of psychological violence on its spectator. Where one can, in theory, be desensitized to or detached

from the gruesome physical violence Bharadwaj employs to “show” - in the most literal sense - the experience of state torture, it is the psychic damage inflicted upon the Woman which emerges as the most frightening and truthful depiction. This is, perhaps, also truest to Artaud and Millett’s definitions of cruelty - it is the sensory and psychological assault on the character and audience which exposes the horrors of state torture, not the simple witnessing of physical violence. *Closet Land*’s violence, in this way, also commits an act of violence on the audience through a deliberate “closing” of the performance - they are to bear witness, unable to assist or mold the outcome they know to be inevitable. The notion of “shocking into action” may be most relevant in *Closet Land*; in making the audience a kind of perverse spectator, a witness which knows the outcome better than its victim yet is unable to intervene, there is a kind of psychic damage also inflicted on the audience, a guilt that physical violence alone may not be able to instill. This kind of spectatorship, which is laced with guilt by design, is a particularly intimate kind of active witnessing. The hope, in *Closet Land*, comes in the assumption that an audience which has become complicit in the act, without any kind of resolution, might leave activated to change, to shake their complacency through action.

Griselda Gambaro’s 1972 play *Information for Foreigners* utilizes perhaps the most direct means of engaging its spectators, removing the separation between art and audience through directly immersing a walking audience in its action. The immersive, site-specific play addresses the disappearance and torture of political dissidents in Argentina which, as Margeurite Feitlowitz notes in her preface to the play, often went unnoticed or ignored by both Argentine and international audiences - hence, the play’s title (Feitlowitz 6). Led by an unnamed guide, audiences are walked through various rooms, each of which contain brief scenes depicting such events as the violent arrest of a troupe of dissident actors mid-performance, gruesome human

experiments on prisoners, and various instances of brutal physical torture not unlike those depicted in *Torquemada* and *Closet Land*. W.B. Worthen says of the play that it "forces its audience to engage the subtle inter-involvement between theater and the theater of state terrorism," (Worthen 1362), and its tactics for achieving said engagement are distinct from Boal and Bharadwaj's plays.

The tactic of audience immersion proves an interesting site for examination of audience complacency and active witnessing, as does Gambaro's use of a guide whose reliability and intent is deliberately left unclear. Spectators guided through the play's many rooms are instructed to "stay together and remain silent," as they bear witness to the violent acts in each room. Selena Burns says of the play that Gambaro "asks theatregoers to engage with is the idea that state sponsored torture is a performance for which the Argentine citizens are the complicit audience" (Burns 40), and that *Information for Foreigners* exists to illuminate the inherent theatricality of political violence. Moreover, Diana Taylor notes of Gambaro's play that "theatre is an unstable vehicle for expression, as capable of obscuring problems as it is of clarifying them, as instrumental in mythifying victimization as in working to end it," and that the central question for *Information for Foreigners*' audiences is whether they are able to "stop watching and end it" (Taylor 168). Similarly to *Closet Land*, but distinctly higher in its stakes, *Information for Foreigners* is aware of its audience and accesses their desire to intervene. There is no physical separation, as exists in the two aforementioned plays, between the acts of violence and their audience - perhaps also affecting uncertainty around the safety of the performance for its spectators, removing the barrier which might have allowed a closed experience of spectatorship in viewing *Torquemada* or *Closet Land*. This contains echoes of both Millett's sentiment about the apolitical audience and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty; instilling fear and uncertainty in the

audience, making them question their own safety from the torture they bear witness to, is its own act of psychic violence and assault on the senses which accesses the desire described by Millet to prioritize oneself, the willingness to betray or leave behind another human to save oneself from violence and torture. It is the simultaneous possibility and inability to intervene, and the immersion within fictional violence that makes the spectator question their own role, that makes this a truly violent play.

Boal's notion of the spectator is especially relevant here; in its experimental form, *Information for Foreigners* is not a play which provides solutions, nor is it one which is concerned with "traditional" narrative structure, but it is one which wholly involves, challenges, and invites active intellectual and personal engagement from each of its spectators. Gambaro's experimentation with form is not only a vehicle for critique of state torture and imprisonment, but of the performative nature of politics and the complacency of the citizen - who, in this instance, is represented by the traveling audience. Interesting also is Gambaro's acknowledgement of this audience as "foreigners," recognizing them as relatively uninformed and unaffected, and existing outside of the issue at hand, but nonetheless challenging their ignorance. *Information for Foreigners* identifies its audience as a global one, asserting that it is not only the affected Argentina which must be concerned with the events the play addresses, but that the responsibility lies on the world citizen not to turn a blind eye. Moreover, the more general critique of state torture and the common person's tendency to ignore is not a relic of one country's past, but a gruesome reality internationally which Gambaro seeks to confront her audiences with. Where one might assume that the play addresses a singular issue and functions as exposition to said issue for the titular foreigners, Gambaro's play, whether contextualized in its timeliness and cultural relevance in Argentina or otherwise, confronts apoliticism and



ignorance candidly in a way which is not concerned with cultural specificity. It leaves its audience no choice but to become active witnesses, but does not ask them any further to imagine their role. *Information for Foreigners* is accusatory and deeply involves its spectators, making them aware of their complacency in violence not just in their immediate communities and nations, but as world citizens, distinguishing it from its peers as a play whose psychological and sensory assault on the audience is nearly as brutal as the staged violence they bear witness to.

These three plays provide worthwhile considerations for expanding our definition of “staged violence.” Though each play employs physical violence and more forthright depictions of torture, it is the psychological violence present in political imprisonment and state torture which is most frightening, and most impactful on the experience of the spectator. While an act of staged physical violence cannot safely involve the spectator in the literal sense, witnessing psychological violence, especially in conjunction with said physical violence, affects complacency in the spectator in a distinct way. As is evidenced in all three plays, a playwright may just as easily prescribe and, in a sense, choreograph, moments of psychological violence and torture in a starkly similar way to their descriptions of physical violence. Though the contemporary function of fight direction might not be made necessary by these moments, they should not be dismissed as something entirely separate - perhaps our definition of “staged violence” could expand to include these moments, which also create a shared experience of violence between actor and spectator.

Moreover, this distinction between forms of violence and their impact on spectatorship proves interesting also for the notion of “open” and “closed” performance. Where it still holds true that the process of staging *physical* violence must be closed, the performance within which it is contextualized, and the use of psychological violence, may open the experience for the

spectator. All three plays utilize elements of open performance, which each work in tandem with their tactical use of psychological violence; *Torquemada* utilizes deliberate silence and implied offstage torture to force its audience to imagine outcomes, *Closet Land* asks its actors to directly acknowledge the spectator in their most vulnerable and harrowing moments, and *Information for Foreigners* directly immerses its audience in all acts of violence, physical or psychological, through its site-specific and participatory structure. It is also possible - as is demonstrated especially in *Torquemada*'s use of silence and *Closet Land*'s use of the "proscenium" - for a performance of violence to open itself selectively and intermittently as an act of psychological violence against its audience. Audience members in both these plays are not asked to engage openly, but forced to, with imagination and uncertainty weaponized against them to reinforce their role as complacent in the violence occurring before them. This function of psychological violence is also, perhaps, more truthful to Artaud's definition of "cruelty," which demonstrates itself to be more concerned with an assault on the mind and sensibility, and an "awakening" of the audience to their role in the performance, than a presentational or purely informative demonstration. Just as Theatre of Cruelty does not require the exacting of physical violence on its spectator to achieve the desired affect, we might expand our definition of "staged violence" to include the staging of encounters which are not exclusively physical.

As indicated by Katrak, while staged violence is a useful tactic for engaging the spectator and assaulting their senses, it is an activator, not a means to an end. Each of these three plays encourages an active witnessing by utilizing violence, both physical and psychological, that is supplemented and amplified by their unique tactics for engaging the spectator. The theatre of political imprisonment, as Boal indicates in his redefinition of the spectator, is one which always seeks to make active witnesses of its spectators, which is not concerned with "showing," but with

involving its audience in a process of questioning. In this way, the staging of violent accounts of torture and imprisonment has shown potential to solve the issue raised by Millett of apolitical and disengaged literary audiences, who are far less likely to be able to disengage when presented with the powerful and confrontational tactics employed by Boal, Bharadwaj and Gambaro. While not a quantifiable experience by any means, these three plays have proven worthy opponents for said audiences. At a glance, the sense of hope that is integral to Katrak's "active witnessing" may seem absent or unidentifiable in these works. However, Boal's identification of the spectator as an active participant in a dialogue whose conclusion is not yet defined locates this hope for us: in the now-informed, intimately involved consciousness of the spectator, who will, rather than the apolitical, self-serving disengagement Millett feared with the literature of political imprisonment, be affected toward action.

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