

2017 Tinker Field Research Final Report

Catarina de Morais Gama

As a 2nd year doctoral student in Luso-Brazilian literature, I traveled to Rio de Janeiro in the summer of 2017 to conduct qualitative pre-dissertation research at the Augusto Boal Institute and to collaborate with scholars who specialize in the relationship between Performance and Politics. During my six-week stay, I was able to collect relevant data for my research through three main axes that ended up guiding the academic work.

The City

Arriving from Lisbon (Portugal), my hometown, where the cultural euphoria and the tourism boost seem to temporarily “alleviate” the wounds of the crisis, I found Rio de Janeiro as a chaotic, militarized, frenetic, and fearful urban space. In the Southern neighborhoods (*Zona Sul*), most conversations contemplate the sociopolitical turmoil of the country (and the increasing loss of democratic rights) and the fear of violence (including the violence perpetrated by the police). Moreover (and ironically), almost every day I met somebody that was applying for Portuguese citizenship to move to Portugal. I was amazed since I have always witnessed the appeal of Rio for Portuguese people – not Lisboa for *cariocas*.

The cultural scene of the city is somewhat asphyxiated by the political, economic, and social turbulence. For example, I encountered cultural events full of people, including celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Brazilian artistic movement *Tropicália*, and yet I faced stupefaction when I was told that the National Archive of Brazil is at risk of closing. Nevertheless, the Brazilian military dictatorship (and particularly the 1964 coup d'état) is often in the center of the discussion, namely in the academic spaces and cultural performances that are challenging and resisting the turmoil. I read these discussions not only as a way to work with the memory of the repressive regime but also as a critical lens of looking at the current moment as analogous to the dictatorship's. This analogy necessarily takes me to the Augusto Boal Institute and to the dictatorial times to which his work tried to resist.

Boal's House

When I first contacted the Augusto Boal Institute (with the intention of accessing Boal's archive), I expected to work at some kind of facility that hosted the 10,000 documents that refer to the playwright's work. In Rio, I realized that there were several unsuccessful attempts with universities and institutions to house Boal's archive and as a result of this it is currently located at Boal's house. Though this fact is certainly a symptom of Brazil's lack of investment in maintaining the memory of its major cultural figures, my personal experience at Boal's house has allowed me to have first-hand contact with the playwright's family. Along with a small team of researchers, every member of the family (including Boal's widow – Cecília Boal – and their two sons – Fabian and Julian) is committed to the work of the institute. Nevertheless, it was the devotion and energy of Cecília what impressed me the most. Besides the cataloging efforts of the archive, Cecília is always looking for projects that promote not only Boal's memory (through exhibits, public talks, interviews, participation in theater events) but also Latin American Theater more broadly. With Cecília, I have also had the opportunity to see several plays by local and national theater companies, which enriched my experience in Rio, namely in what concerns the current theater scene in Rio.

My work at the Institute included cataloging newspapers from the 1950's to the 2000's. I accessed documents about Boal's reception in Brazil and other countries, which helped me to reflect on the importance of Boal's exile for his work (exile as resistance is portrayed in Boal's play "Murro em Ponta de Faca"). The cataloging efforts also contributed to my understanding of Boal's work in Latin America, and of the multiple meanings and limits of the term "resistance."

Casa Rio

For six weeks, I was a resident researcher at Casa Rio, "a residence and workspace for artists, creatives and cultural professionals in central Rio de Janeiro, owned by Secretaria de Estado de Cultura do Rio de Janeiro/FUNARJ and managed on a nonprofit basis by Brazilian NGO People's Palace Projects do Brasil," (<http://www.casario.rj.gov.br/en/home/>). While I was there, I had the opportunity to connect with some artists from Brazil and other countries. This included connecting with the director of Casa Rio,

Paul Heritage, whose research contemplates the relationship between theater and social change and who has worked with Augusto Boal. Since Casa Rio hosts several events every week, such as plays, cabaret-concerts, exhibits, and meetings with local cultural producers, I was very fortunate to have talked to people who have also given me perspective of the current sociopolitical and cultural moment.

Geographies of Cultural Production

In Rio de Janeiro I could notice a class divide in the cultural scene. On the one hand, the cultural scene of the middle and upper middle class appears to lack any semblance of resistance, most likely due to their vested class interests in the current economic and political model. On the other hand, in Casa Rio I realized that what the People's Palace Projects do Brasil is trying to do (through projects in Maré, one of the biggest *favelas* of Rio) is develop cultural and social projects collectively with residents of Maré in order to break down barriers between favelas and the surrounding neighborhoods (as well as *Zona Sul*). Therefore, if in the twentieth century, Boal staged resistance through his plays and the creation of the Theater of the Oppressed, nowadays we should be looking for what the "periferias" are producing. We cannot understand the relationship between performance and resistance in privileged spaces of Rio such as *Zona Sul*, thus we must look elsewhere to find those who have continuously fought against oppression and how they are staging resistance.

In summation, some questions remain: Does resistance mean occupying spaces of privilege? How do we interpret the upper middle class immigrating to Lisbon, the former colonial metropolis? Is this phenomena merely relocating privilege from Rio to Lisbon and does this complicate postcolonial relationships of the past in the form of bourgeois Brazilian gentrification of Lisbon? How do these processes affect cultural production in both countries? These are some of the questions I hope to further explore and potentially answer in future research.