Advising Without the Element of Advice: Exploring the Application of Educational Theater for Adult Audiences in Iran through Deconstruction

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ABSTRACT

Educational theater has been widely used internationally to teach various topics to young students in schools through performance and theater. This study raises a question about this medium: what would be the dos and don'ts of utilizing educational theater in Iran for an adult audience instead of young students? Drawing on the ideas of influential thinkers and philosophers such as Augusto Boal, Jacques Derrida, and Walter Benjamin, this research employs deconstruction to analyze conventional concepts of education and thought processes. By doing so, it seeks to propose a new perspective on the subject and outline the dos and don'ts for implementing such theater in Iran. This study aims to explore the potential of educational theater for adult audiences.

Keywords: Educational theater, deconstruction, Derrida, Iran, adult audience

Introduction

Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, the function of art, especially the art of theater, has been a topic of discussion regarding its role in its respective era. Plato envisioned art as having a committed and social role, suitable for his utopia ideals, whereas Aristotle advocated for artistic freedom, emphasizing catharsis and the therapeutic potential of theater. Although this discussion continued throughout history, it reemerged with renewed intensity in the 20th century through the educational and committed theater of Bertolt Brecht and the practical, legislative theater of Augusto Boal. According to Brecht, theater, adapting to the demands of its time, embraced didactic themes. He writes in "About Theater":

> "The scene began to learn. Oil, inflation, war, social struggles, family, religion, wheat exchange, meat market, all topics were shown. The singers shed light on topics that remain unfamiliar to the viewer... The theater had become a subject for the attention of philosophers, of course, philosophers who, in addition to explaining the world, also wanted to change it."[1]

Modern theater, therefore, is intrinsically tied to themes that demand research and education. Brecht further notes: Modern theater, therefore, is intrinsically tied to themes that demand research and education. Brecht further notes:

> "For different strata of society, learning plays very different roles. Some people cannot imagine the situation getting better... but some people have not yet had their turn, who are unhappy with the situation and are very interested in getting information that will be useful in their lives."[2]

This perspective resonates with Augusto Boal and the pedagogical theater movement that emerged in the United States and Europe after the 1960s. In Germany, Hans Wolfgang Nichol was a prominent figure who used theater as a platform for teaching and learning among young people. Similarly, in Britain, the "Training in Theater" program introduced teacher-performers who brought theater to schools and educational centers, exposing children and young people to challenging problems and encouraging them to seek solutions.

Educational theater, therefore, can be defined as a functional, purposeful, or committed theater characterized by its educational themes, an active and engaged audience, and the presence of teachers/performers.

How can this type of theater be realized in our current social, economic, and political situation? How will it interact with =the successes and ruptures of our time? If we perceive the present as a continuum of the past, we must acknowledge that, despite the rapid growth of industry and modernity, we remain deeply rooted in our traditions and national identity. For instance, consider the transition from feudalism to capitalism and republican systems. Although feudalism in Iran differed somewhat from its European counterparts, folkloric tales passed down from parents and grandparents often recount the conditions of peasants and masters. These stories have inspired numerous local narratives, such as Gol Mohammad Kalmishi's uprising in Khorasan, depicted in Mahmoud Dolatabadi's novel *Kelidar*, and the tale of Rana in northern Iran, whose failed love amidst the tyranny of the masters class inspired regional songs.

This social structure was not merely an economic system based on serfdom; it embodied a worldview that permeated all aspects of life. Peasants depended on the land and the unpredictable forces of nature for survival. At harvest time, they submitted to their masters' commands, mirroring the coercive dynamics of their environment. This hierarchical system extended into family life, where patriarchy dictated interactions, ultimately to governance, culminating in the Shah's autocracy. Now consider the present time. Do some of our family behaviors still reflect tyranny and coercion? Are societal traditions and norms systematically imposed on us from an early age? Did the White Revolution of 1963 truly eliminate this specific form of feudalism?

These questions arise naturally when contemplating the role of educational theater in our society. Addressing them forms the core purpose of this study.

Theoretical Considerations

Jacques Derrida's ideas—often referred to as deconstruction or deconstructing—initially had a revolutionary impact on literary criticism and philosophy. In one of his early works on Edmund Husserl, *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), much of his views and theories on deconstruction are articulated. His ideas primarily address implications, desirability, concept, and meaning.

Derrida demonstrates that metaphysical, epistemological, moral, and logical systems are structured around conceptual oppositions, such as transcendental/experimental, internal/extrinsic, original/derivative, good/evil, and general/specific. In each of these dichotomies, one element is valued or principled, while the other is negated and marginalized. He explains:

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[1]   Bertolt Brecht, *Darbare-ye Teatr,* trans. Faramarz Behzad (Tehran: Kharazmi, 2020), 136.

[2]   Brecht, *Darbare-ye Teatr*, 137.

"The superior term belongs to the presence and the logos; the inferior serves to define its status and mark a fall. The oppositions between intelligible and sensible, soul and body seem to have lasted throughout the history of Western philosophy, bequeathing their burden to modern linguistics: the opposition between meaning and word; the opposition between writing and speech takes its place within this pattern."[3]

Derrida contends that prioritizing one element over its opposite is ultimately indefensible. The privileged term derives its meaning specifically through its opposition to the other. In other words, it lacks existential necessity in itself. The dominant term is defined by what it suppresses or negates, and it relies on its counterpart for meaning and sustenance. Thus, the preferred term cannot achieve pure identity or conceptual integrity. Through his exploration of deconstruction, Derrida introduces the concept of the *trace* or *effect* by analyzing notions such as plurality, abundance, approximation, similarity, and the idea of full presence. These ideas, which have permeated intellectual thought for centuries, form the basis of his critique. Derrida's reflections on the nature of signs draw from various important influences, including Freudian psychoanalysis, Heidegger's analysis of existence, and Rousseau's and Saussure's critique of writing.

Derrida was influenced by other philosophers, including Sartre. Nevertheless, he chose to pursue his studies from a personal perspective.

Derrida was determined to establish his intellectual foundation, doing so in contrast to the traditional practices of his time by focusing on Husserl's philosophy of science. Husserl, an eccentric yet revolutionary thinker, produced a series of elegant, proportionate, and complex works starting in 1900. He argued that philosophy had lost its direction since the mid-19th century, disturbed by a range of dull, fragmented, derivative models of scientific inquiry that failed to justify their perceptual processes. According to Husserl, the task was to rejuvenate philosophy, reawaken it to its original mission, and provide a unified and comprehensive foundation for thought. This ambitious endeavor was phenomenology, from the Greek word "phenomena," meaning "things as they appear to the senses." Husserl defined the initial aim of phenomenology as the detailed explanation of how the world of experience, preceding individual psychology, becomes intelligible through what he termed transcendental consciousness. This concept sought to philosophically examine the conditions that make experience possible.[4]

Considering Husserl's influence on Derrida, it becomes clearer why Derrida focused on marginal cases and the necessity of doing so. By criticizing the prioritization of speech over writing, Derrida invites us to reevaluate the central logos of philosophy and literature, referring to this shift as moving beyond the logocentric era. From Derrida's perspective, the clarity traditionally considered the hallmark of philosophy's purpose was no longer paramount.

In the "era of the sign," which continues to this day, Derrida argued that the philosophical aspiration of "perfect clarity" must confront the challenges of the present, especially, the quest for unambiguous meaning. To paraphrase Derrida, this involves overcoming difficulties by addressing the dispersal of meanings (the notion of countless paths of interpretation) and reducing them to a manageable framework of distinct meanings. Traditional philosophers might contend that the issue lies not in a word or a sign, whether written or spoken, but in the meaning—the logos—which we grasp instantaneously when we hear and understand a word. They assert that meaning, at its core, must be singular and unified. However, Derrida challenges this view, for him, the task of philosophy is no longer to achieve maximum conceptual clarity in articulating meaning within this unified framework. Instead, it involves learning to navigate the overlooked aspects of daily experience, the implicit processes of day-to-day thought.[5]

This perspective is precisely what this research aims to achieve: shifting the approach to analyzing structures not only in theoretical texts but also in everyday life. Derrida's philosophy transcends structuralism and is therefore regarded as a post-structuralist framework. Structuralism originally emerged as a method of linguistics analysis proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure, later expanding into fields such as literature, philosophy, and sociology. Saussure distinguishes three levels of linguistic activity: langage (absolute language), langue (language), and parole (speech). Langage represents the broadest conception of language, encompassing all human capacities for speech—both physical and mental. Its vast and indefinable nature renders it unsuitable for systematic study. In contrast, Langue is a structured system, referring to what is typically meant when discussing a specific language, such as English or French. This linguistic system enables the production of comprehensible communication. Lastly, parole refers to individual utterances. Thus, Langage constitutes the possibility for speech, Langue embodies the linguistic system, and parole comprises specific instances of speech. Saussure posits that the primary focus of language study should be the linguistic system itself, which he argues is arbitrary because it arises as a social construct. While the potential for statements in any language is limitless, these expressions are grounded in a finite set of words and grammatical structures, which function as interconnected components of a unified system.

Another important contribution of Saussure's linguistics is his innovative approach to language analysis. Before his work, linguistic studies emphasized the historical formation of words, tracing their origins and derivatives—a diachronic approach. Saussure introduced a synchronic perspective, focusing on the present structure of language and

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[3]   Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (The United States of America: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xix.

[4]   Leslie Hill, *Moghademe-ye Cambridge Bar Jacques Derrida*, trans. Masoumeh Shahgardi (Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications, 2021), 22.

[5]   Simon Golending, *Daramadi Bar Jacques Derrida*, trans. Mehdi Parsa (Tehran: Shund Publications, 2019), 63.

the conventional frameworks shaping its use. This paradigm shift redirected attention from historical evolution to the contemporary system of language.

Derrida's philosophy begins at this point, emphasizing the arbitrariness of structures, particularly as they pertain to antagonists and marginalized elements. This raises an important question: what is the connection between these theoretical issues and the problems encountered in everyday life? Language is a fundamental aspect of human existence and thought itself is mediated through language. Thinking governs a large part of human actions; without it, social institutions, governments, and ideological, social, and economic structures could not exist. Therefore, understanding the process of thought—or, as Derrida suggests, deconstructing it—requires attention to the structure of language, speech, and writing. This analytical method, alongside the synchronic perspective of structuralism, extends to other fields of thought, including politics and sociology.

The next philosopher considered in this study is Walter Benjamin. Initially recognized as a literary critic and essayist, the philosophical dimensions of his writings only became evident over time. It is not an exaggeration to claim that Benjamin, in a prophetic sense, foresaw many of the challenges characteristic of the postmodern era. Benjamin's intellectual contributions are diverse and complex; however, this research focuses on his approach to history. By examining German history, especially through his analysis of German mournful dramas during the Baroque period, Benjamin identifies gaps in dominant discourses and explores the potential to subvert systemic mechanisms in addressing historical ruptures.

As mentioned earlier with the diachronic and synchronic approaches, Benjamin proposes a synthesis of these methodologies in historical analysis. This integrated approach reveals inconsistencies within symbolic systems, uncovering their foundations in irregularity and irrationality. Such an analysis proves invaluable for addressing the themes discussed in this research.

Literature Review

In the field of applied theater and educational theater, valuable articles have been published, and useful books have been translated. Since this field is still relatively new to Persian-speaking audiences, most of these articles and books aim to introduce this branch of theater and address its possibilities and potential. The following articles are excerpts from the above-mentioned body of work:

The article "Educational Theater (Pedagogic): A Comparative Study" by Dr. Majid Sarsangi and Dr. Rahmat Amini introduces educational theater, compares it to conventional and intellectual theater and highlights its importance and useful role in the education of children and adolescents. The researchers emphasize the need for proper infrastructure and greater attention to theater's role in education, advocating for Iran's theater to pursue generalization within the educational framework. This article is instrumental in introducing this type of theater and exploring its potential, making it a pioneering study in this field. However, although this article is highly useful, it does not discuss the generalization of this type of theater in the adult domain, which the present study intends to explore.

The article "The Effectiveness of Educational Theater Training on Responsibility and Moral Growth in Elementary Students" by Roya Zare, Somayeh Tavakoli, and Ozra Ghaffari employs educational theater as an intervention in education. By experimenting on a statistical community of fifth- and sixth-grade students of Ardabil primary schools, the study demonstrates the significant effect of this intervention on fostering responsibility and moral development in students. The results of this research are particularly important for counselors and psychologists. This article showcases one of the numerous potentials of educational theater and effectively demonstrates its impact in a practical context.

The article "Analysis of the Mechanism of Applied Theater in Education (Case Study: Language Teaching by TPR Method)" by Delaram Farhanak, Ghazal Eskandarnejad, and Hamed Asgharzadeh introduces and explains the principles and regulations of educational theater. It examines its application in teaching foreign languages using a special method called TPR (Total Physical Response). In this approach, theater transforms the traditional classroom, with the teacher assuming the role of a facilitator while learners strengthen their language skills through performance. According to the author, the importance of this study lies in showcasing another potential of this type of theater outside its traditional scope, which is expanding its applicability to all age groups, as foreign language learning is relevant for diverse demographics. The researchers also underscore the importance of educational theater in teaching various scientific disciplines.

The article "Drama in Education and Self-Directed Learning for Adults" by Carmel O'Sullivan and Athina A. Karavoltsou, explores a form of educational drama known as Drama in Education, specifically designed for adults. Based on a research study that empowered adults to take control of their learning journey, this article examines how drama facilitates self-directed learning. It also delves into the dynamics of power relations within the learning environment, which aligns with the themes this present study seeks to address.

The Article "Popular Theater: A Useful Process for Adult Educators" by Reid A. Bates, highlights the use of popular theater in adult education and its effectiveness in teaching community problem-solving. This article is noteworthy as it demonstrates how theater can educate adults on social issues.

All the articles mentioned above are relevant to the themes of this study but remain insufficient in addressing the full scope of the topic. Therefore, this article aims to offer a new perspective on the subject.

Educational Theater for Adults

In response to the first question of this research, the necessity of using educational theater for adults arises from the fact that adults sometimes need to learn new skills to address various life issues. Additionally, another crucial aspect is fostering new thoughts in people's minds, which has a long-standing role in art. Theater, as a rich and profound art form, holds great potential for creating new methods of thinking. Siegfried Melchinger elaborates:

> *"Where the theater represents people as agents, it can either exhibit the action as a result—the action in which the motives are visible—or the process within which the action takes place. Man as an agent is free to choose among various possibilities; he thinks of these possibilities unmistakably... In this thought process, the spectator also participates and contemplates. The question: 'What would you do if you were him?' sets these actions apart from pure psychological perspectives."*[6]

This underscores the necessity of applied theater traditions, where education becomes both practical and thought-provoking for the audience. Furthermore, considering that theater in Iran is still often regarded as an entertaining luxury, the use of educational theater with its unique aesthetics could significantly reduce the public's distance from this art form. Accepting the urgency of this matter, we can now explore the conditions further.

As introduced earlier about Walter Benjamin, his perspective on history and historical gaps resonates here. A similar gap is evident in contemporary Iranian history, requiring reflection on the past to build the future:

> *"Only he who can view his past as an abortion sprung from compulsion and need can use it to full advantage in the present. For what one has lived is at best comparable to a beautiful statue which has had all its limbs knocked off in transit, and now yields nothing but the precious block out of which the image of one's future must be hewn."*[7]

Iran lacked a centralized, stable, and sovereign government until Reza Shah rose to power. Contrary to the common association of monarchy with totalitarian tyranny, the monarchy can paradoxically function as merely a formal superstructure for tyranny. In "Modern Iran History," Abrahamian explains this regarding the Qajar monarchy:

> "The reign of this dynasty in the center was exercised by ministers, courtiers, mirzas, mustufis, and nobles with titles such as Saltanah, al-Dawlah, and al-Mamalek. However, other parts of the country were ruled by local lords, khans, merchants, and mujtahids, each wielding localized power sources. Despite half a century of imperfect attempts to establish state institutions, what remained after the end of Nasser al-Din Shah's long reign in 1896/1275 was a skeleton central state comprised of just nine small institutions—bureaucracies without bureaucracy."[8]

This fragmented form of authority, divided into smaller pockets of petty power, contributed to the formation of raw, unsophisticated social classes. Relationships within and between these classes were rooted in irrational traditions. Notably, there exists a reciprocal relationship between the government structure at the top and societal structures at the bottom. Abrahamian's "Iran Between Two Revolutions" examines these class dynamics and their contractions:

> *"Although 19th-century Iran had hidden, objective socioeconomic classes, the dominant form of group bonding delayed the formation of open, subjective, and social-political classes. Moreover, powers were unequally distributed, and most individuals were confined from cradle to grave to one class. Court theorists posited that God created these social differences and entrusted the Shah with maintaining this order and assigning specific attire, enforcing loyalty to the aristocracy, and creating hierarchies of dignity. Class divisions often manifested as ostentatious displays of social status that even Queen Victoria's tourists, like Murrie, found astonishing. 'The explanation of etiquette in Iran is endless and found in trivial details,' he observed. These customs, deeply entrenched and accepted from youth, wielded such influence on the social hierarchy that no individual, not even an average person, could escape their particular social residence or disrespect the respect demanded by these norms."*[9]

These social class customs often led to conflicts between classes. However, these contradictions never evolved into political or directed consciousness. In essence, while a gap existed, it was not filled with anything constructive due to the absence of a coherent political attitude. People were deeply entrenched in traditional economic mechanisms and their corresponding worldviews, which Abramian points out were regarded as sacred. This reverence for social roles left no space for critical thinking. Although social groups shared similar ways of life, their cohesion did not foster liberation from the symbolic order:

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6 Siegfried Melchinger, *Tarikh-e Teatr-e Siasi (Volume Two)*, trans. Saeed Farhoudi (Tehran: Soroush: Publications of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, 2018), 227.

7 Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Kingsley Shorter (Great Britain, lowe and Brydone Printers Limited, 1979), 50.

8 Ervand Abrahamian, *Tarikh-e Iran-e Modern* (Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 2020), 29.

9 Abrahamian, *Iran Beyn-e Do Enghelab*, 44.

"Group bonds—especially those based on tribal ancestry, religious cults, local organizations, and familial affections—strengthened vertical (hierarchical) groups and weakened horizontal classes (hierarchical influences), thus preventing hidden economic interests and desires from turning into overt political forces." During the early modern period, many people shared similar lifestyles, held identical positions in the mode of production, and had comparable relationships with administrative institutions, forming potential socioeconomic classes. However, their ethnic and group ties, coupled with local obstacles and lack of transnational interests, prevented them from developing into socio-political classes.[10]

Thus, we observed how, for a significant period in Iran's history, the kind of gap Benjamin described persisted but remained unaddressed. This gap can also be seen in the aftermath of World War I. Despite Iran declaring neutrality, powerful states coveted the country. A vacuum existed within the power structure, and tribal and local revolts played into German aims. In the south, the British, and in the north, the Russians, effectively took control, further diminishing the Qajar government's influence. The situation was exacerbated by famine, drought, and disease, which claimed thousands of lives. Following World War I, as the Middle East transformed the influence of global powers, the Iranian government found itself powerless. While ostensibly neutral, Iran became a pawn in the geopolitical strategies of Britain and the newly formed Soviet Union. The Soviet Union sought to strengthen its forces in the region, while Britain aimed to counter Soviet Union influence, prevent the spread of communism, and maintain control over the Middle East. This environment saw the formation of the Socialist Party in Gilan. The fragmentation of power in Iran created a new gap—one that even the British could not fully control:

"At the end of the war, Britain and British India had small forces at four Ayaran points. In the northeast and northwest, there were small military corps under General Malson and General Dunstroil, whose adventures we narrated in Russia (Rev. 38). On the Gulf coast, there were several English outposts with Indian soldiers. In the south of the country, during the war years, a native force called the 'Musketeers of the South of Iran' (Police of the South) was formed, commanded by British officers. However, revolts and nomadic rebellion against British domination, even before the end of the war, had reduced this force to almost zero."[11]

Considering these documented events and analyzing them through the diachronic and synchronic perspectives of history, it becomes evident that such gaps are likely repeat reoccur. These gaps provide fertile ground for deconstructing societal structures and education. Therefore, one of the necessary—though not sufficient—conditions for using educational theater for adult audiences lies in creating an appropriate historical, social, political, economic, and cultural context. Before moving on to the conditions, let us delve deeper into the concept of educational theater itself.

Applied theater, of which educational theater is a branch, refers to a form of theater that primarily falls under unconventional practices. As its name implies, it is theater that must have a practical application, often geared toward educational purposes. This type of theater addresses a variety of social issues, including political and social concerns, as well as the education of marginalized communities. Essentially, it brings the art of theater to everyday settings, reaching people who may not be accustomed to attending theater or cannot afford it. Consequently, this theater eschews traditional conventions such as ticketed entry, assigned sitting, curtains, and proscenium stages, instead moving into the street, alleys, schools, prisons, refugee camps, hospitals, and other public spaces.

In Iran, this type of theater is closely associated with Augusto Boal and his concept of "The Theater of the Oppressed." However, it is worth mentioning that its socio-political orientation is just one aspect of its broad applications. For instance, a notable example with educational roots is the Theater in Education (TiE), a program established in the UK during the 1960s. In this program, teachers-performers introduced theater into schools and educational centers to familiarize children and young people with challenging issues and encourage them to seek solutions. Thus, whether addressing political topics or other concerns, the primary objective of the type of theater is to promote critical thinking.

A key concept relevant to educational theater is pedagogy. Understanding this term can help clarify the purpose of applied theater. Derived from the Greek words *paidós* (child) and *agógos* (lead), pedagogy originally referred to educating children or young people. Over time, its meaning evolved, leading to debates about its precise definition. Nonetheless, what is significant about applied theater is that it adopts a pedagogical approach emphasizing the teaching of practical knowledge. While this interpretation may not include the entirety of applied t theater, it is fair to say that part of its purpose involves educating audiences on specific topics, highlighting issues, defamiliarizing them, and seeking practical solutions.

The effectiveness of applied theater is closely tied to educational methods. Augusto Boal, influenced by his mentor Paulo Frieré, delineated education into two contrasting approaches: passive and active. Passive education, the traditional method prevalent in most parts of the world, positions the learner as a passive recipient of information with little

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[10] Abrahamian, *Iran Beyn-e Do Enghelab*, 46.

[11] David Faramkin, *Solhi Ke Hame-ye Solhha Ra Bar Bad Dad (Foroopashi Emperatoori Osmani Va Sheklgiri Khavar-e Miane-e Moaser,* trans. Hasan Afshar (Tehran: Mahi Publications, 2022), 442.

opportunity for critical engagement. Conversely, active education emphasizes active participation, enabling individuals to be influenced by influence within the learning process.

Paulo Frieré argues that activating true education involves more than simply transferring knowledge from teacher to students, as though unloading a truckload or safeguarding wealth in a vault. A teacher possesses a certain amount of knowledge, shares it with the student, and simultaneously gains new knowledge from the student. This exchanges knowledge that students bring their own experiences and understanding to the learning process. The necessity of learning from the student highlights the individualized nature of how students acquire knowledge. Since students are diverse, their learning processes also differ. Education, in this sense, becomes an act of activation—rooted in democracy and dialogue. As an Argentine teacher from Cordua observed, "I taught a villager how to write the word 'plow,' and he taught me how to use it."[12]

A crucial question then arises: why is education, especially active education, important? The answer lies in the degree of knowledge and wisdom embedded in every society. As the elders say, "Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it." By acquiring knowledge and cultivating critical thinking, individuals learn from past trials and errors a create a better future. This principle underpins Boal's assertion that knowledge is intrinsically tied to power. Knowledge enhances the ability to act, and when concentrated in the possession of a few, it consolidates power while disenfranchising the majority.

Knowledge and health are often considered forms of power. Consequently, economic elites may seek to obscure knowledge and undermine health, as it is easier to dominate populations that are uneducated and unwell. Barry Goldwater, a reactionary United States senator, famously stated that poverty is essential to capitalism because it allows for leverage over wages and working conditions; workers, fearing unemployment, comply out of necessity. Historical patterns reflect similar trends: as early as 3000 BCE in Egypt, knowledge was accessible only to the powerful. Education primarily consisted of learning to carve stones or build pyramids. In India, education has historically been reserved for Brahmins and select members of the Kshatriya warrior class, while peasants, peasants, Vaishia merchants, craftsmen, and particularly the Dalits (the "impure" or outcast) were systematically excluded.[13]

The process of interaction and dialogue is fundamental to active education, a concept Boal emphasizes fervently. Healthy dialogue forms the bedrock of democracy, a principle that has inspired human aspiration throughout history but remains elusive. Dialogue is crucial to counter demagoguery or coercion. As Boal articulated, "The theater of the oppressed is the cause of dialogue. By activation, it does not merely incapacitate but actively seeks engagement." This theater challenges its audience and demands honest responses,[14] mirroring the expectation of honesty in active education. The shared commitment to honesty underscores the transformative power of education.

Through Paulo Freire's pedagogy, learning transcends reading and writing. It fosters an understanding and respect for others' differences. Freire's philosophy affirms that both teachers and students are co-learners and co-educators: "My kind looks like me, but I am not them, Yet, I resemble them, as they resemble me. We learn through dialogue: both teachers and students educate one another because we are all simultaneously students and teachers. I exist because they exist. To write on a blank page, we need a black pen. To write on a blackboard, we must use chalk of a different color. My being is interdependent with theirs.[15]

This represents a different kind of teaching experience. The concept of education, established over centuries and deeply intertwined with other aspects of life, essentially involves negating the marginal elements Derrida discusses. We must consider what education might look like if it were approached differently today. The prevailing concept of education has, in many cases, alienated people from institutions that attempt to teach within a structured framework. The alienation is precisely what undermines the form of democracy embedded in the education of free-spirited and altruistic individuals, as Boal describes. Adults, having been free from the constraints of the formal educational system and attaining relative independence, often resist further education to preserve their autonomy. They tend to perceive reforms, including those related to education, as mere advice. In Iranian culture, advice has historically carried connotations of coercion, self-righteousness, and self-aggrandizement, which contribute to this resistance.

The title of this study intentionally incorporates the word "advice." This choice reflects the author's intent to demonstrate how even a single term can undergo deconstruction to reveal embedded concepts resulting from the negation of others. By applying this analytical method to fundamental concepts such as education, democracy, and altruism, new perspectives on these topics can emerge. This approach underpins the author's proposal for utilizing educational theater targeted at adult audiences. Initially, this type of theater equips audiences with critical thinking skills grounded in deconstruction, fostering dialogue and analytical reasoning. Subsequently, various applications of educational theater can be used to enhance decision-making, dialogue and compromise, constructive criticism, adaptability, and more.

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[12]   Augusto Boal, *Teatr-e Ghanoongozar (Estefade Az Honar-e Ejra Baraye Siasatvarzi)*,trans. Ali Zafar Ghahramaninjad (Tehran: Beidgol Publications, 2010), 56.

[13]   Boal, *Teatr-e Ghanoongozar (Estefade Az Honar-e Ejra Baraye Siasatvarzi)*, 88.

[14]   Boal, Teatr-e Ghanoongozar (Estefade Az Honar-e Ejra Baraye Siasatvarzi), 57.

[15]   Boal, *Teatr-e Ghanoongozar (Estefade Az Honar-e Ejra Baraye Siasatvarzi)*, 214.

Thus far, this discussion has emphasized historical gaps, the importance of educational theater, and the application of deconstruction. This raises key questions: Can the author's proposed method be effectively implemented in the present context? If not, how might it become feasible? A recurring concern in this research is the concept of setting. What type of theater setting is suitable for this approach? Does the current setting have the capacity to change into an appropriate setting? What characteristics should define an ideal setting for this purpose?

Let's continue the discussion by answering the last question. The appropriate setting should include several characteristics. First, the historical and social situation must necessitate the use of theater. This means that during a specific historical period, society and its people must be ready to embrace something innovative while preserving their traditional ways and methods, ultimately internalizing the new approach. However, any action that influences society is intricately tied to culture, requiring careful attention. This interplay introduces the complexity of cultural transition.

Aida Basiri, in her book *Cultural Continuity and Fragmentation in Iranian Theater*, emphasizes that culture must be communicative. She asserts: "For any communicative action, the existence of oneself and one other is inevitable. This self and the other are two different cultural systems—complex and heterogeneous signage systems, not monolithic and definitive generalities."[16] According to Basiri, one's self-perception is intertwined with the perception of the other. In essence, individuals recognize themselves through the lens of how others perceive them.

In other words, we perceive ourselves in another person's image. This is true not only concerning broad geographical boundaries like the border between a country and its different cultures but also with our daily interactions. That is, concerning education, we are faced with the same kind of communication because the learner sees the instructor as another. Interestingly, this "other" concept is also divided into synchronous and diachronic categories: "The other contemporaneous, as we have explained, perceives another culture as monstrous and always manifests itself in a war against it, but this war never destroys this other but rather represents the dependence of its definition on the definition of the other."[17] Basiri goes on to quote Farzan Sojoodi, explaining the other and the self as a "confrontation/identification relationship" in which traditions appear in a hypertextual way in their ideal form. The self attracts the other. Although presented as self, "the other is a historical ideal": "Here we see that the imperfect self is constantly dependent on the other, this time against the other, a historical ideal disguised, but in reality, the other is an ideal of the self which would be meaningless without it. Consequently, the other is simultaneously seen in two ways."[18]

Therefore, it is observed that to create a suitable setting based on historical and social factors, we need a historical perspective so that we can then take a synchronic and diachronic approach to measure and understand ourselves through an "other." The existence of such a setting is one of the necessary conditions for the use of educational theater for adult audiences. However, given the changes, the cultural prodigy in Iran has not yet been fully established, and perhaps Iran is currently in another historical gap. This is very promising because, as James R. Martel points out, it is from Benjamin's perspective that the gaps provide an opportunity to create alternatives. In his book, Divine Violence: Walter Benjamin and the Eschatology of Sovereignty, Martel uses Kafka's story as an example. The story is about the desire to build the Tower of Babel in order to reach heaven and possibly see God. Following Benjamin, he sees such desires as a form of idolatry and believes that today's rulers are also a form of idolatry. The Tower of Babel, this great and idealistic idol, will never be perfected and will continue to be built. During this time, people build urban towers around buildings and create socio-political systems:

> We see here that when the tower builders were fantasizing about their city, the people of the city craved divine violence to overthrow the pagan building. This dream or sign that their participation in Fantasmogouria could potentially save them. It allows them to not be entirely determined by the desire to reach heaven, allowing them to feel their actions, at least potentially, neither independent nor wholly under the fantasies that essentially make them work.[19]

The presence of a gap can make it possible to obtain the correct setting. However, it requires collective will to reach the right setting through deconstruction. To achieve this goal, educational theater can simultaneously be active in creating appropriate settings. One of the tasks of this type of theater, at least until the creation of a fully appropriate setting, is to create a setting and simultaneously step in and work in it. The facilitator/teacher can help them create an appropriate context by teaching them a synchronic/diachronic perspective and the ability to identify and exploit historical gaps.

The second condition, after creating an appropriate setting, is that the facilitators/teachers should be ready for

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[16] Aida Basiri, *Peyvastegi Va Gosastegi-ye Farhangi Dar Teatr-e Iran* (Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications, 2019), 121.

[17] Basiri, *Peyvastegi Va Gosastegi-ye Farhangi Dar Teatr-e Iran*, 186.

[18] Basiri, *Peyvastegi Va Gosastegi-ye Farhangi Dar Teatr-e Iran*, 186.

[19] James R. Martel *Khoshoonat-e Elahi* (Walter Benjamin Va Farjamshenasi Hakemiat), trans.Siavash Talaeizadeh (Tehran: Shabkhez Publications, 2020), 186.

training. The training discussed in this research is not equivalent to normal instruction, as mentioned earlier. The facilitator/teacher must have insight and ingenuity to perceive things differently, and teach their audience this other way of seeing. Boal in *The Legislative Theater* makes Archimedes and Freire an example of how they saw and discovered something obvious to them that no one had noticed before. The facilitator/teacher should be equipped with a critical vision and a thinking technique based on analysis, historical knowledge, and dramatic skills. He must seek to expose the secret of thinking systems that are ingrained in the minds with historical backgrounds. The characteristic of disclosure is a characteristic that Boal essentially expresses in his definition of educational theater:

> While advertising theater always dealt with the most pressing topics, educational theater, which was also experienced in popular cultural centers as well as in professional groups such as the Sao Paulo Arena, focused on the more general dilemmas. The purpose of this type of theater was to prepare people for a special event, such as a vote, strike, or demonstration, with practical and theoretical training. This type of theater embraces a theme called Justice. We knew that the ruling classes were always seeking to apply their moral values to their subordinates. So they try to convince everyone that justice is a universal thing while concealing the fact that they have entrusted the task of prescribing and executing this justice to them. The justice system, which, in their opinion, should be the only justice system there is.[20]

The facilitator/teacher should also adopt behavioral techniques in which the audience does not feel that they are not acting on their own, or that they are in a lower position. The facilitator/teacher must also be successful in creating a democratic and dialogue-centric environment practically because dialogue as discussed earlier can easily become a persuasion contest. Therefore, it will be a huge burden on the facilitator/teacher. He will become a key member of this type of theater at the community level.

The third condition is that this type of theater should refrain from joining the education system and remain independent. This is because, as mentioned, the education system as an institution is also based on specific thinking assumptions and the negation of other assumptions. Iranian educational theater should be fundamentally opposed to any presuppositions and should be taught to deconstruct them. As a result, it must also exist without any preconception goals or ideologies. This type of theater must be a gap in itself to succeed in showing this gap. Another condition that arises following the previous condition is that this type of theater should use up-to-date and somehow avant-garde dramatic methods for its educational purposes. Applied theater is also an unconventional theater, but this uncommonness is somehow more exaggerated to be used for educational purposes. For instance, this type of theater can use the experiences of other artistic mediums or other applied theater categories and branches for its purposes. Democracy, among its usefulness in general, is useful for education, for the formation of educational theater, and its relation to other branches and majors of art. Democracy can help share ideas and opinions not only among experts but also among participants, and this could lead to an atmosphere of shared thoughts that work toward the same end.

The final condition is that the educational theater for its success and persistence must have a dynamic form, both in its superstructure and infrastructure. This type of theater must constantly be learning, deconstructing, improving, and building itself repeatedly. Trial and error are inevitable stages of learning. Boal and Freire also highlight active education, educational theater must teach and also learn.

Mentioning a practical example that complies with the standards mentioned in this research in Iran can be a challenging, if not impossible task. However, examples somewhat close to this have been found among the performances of theater for repressed individuals for prisoners, which have taken place in Iran. One prominent facilitator in the execution of theater in correctional centers and prisons is Fouad Ebrahimiyan. In his master's thesis entitled "Social Aspects of Theater for Suppressed Individuals in Iran," he reports on his efforts, with one example mentioned, which will effectively illustrate the elements mentioned in this research. In these examples, the author explains how he and his colleagues integrated the concept of education for adults into their practical work[21]:

The experience of performing artistic work with prison beneficiaries dates back to 2006. After completing my bachelor's degree, I was invited to collaborate with the Provincial Prison Administration in Hamadan. After about two decades of various artistic experiences with prison beneficiaries in several provinces and cities, one of the most impactful of them can undoubtedly be counted as the theater for repressed individuals.

During performing theater for repressed individuals among prisoners and with the presence of consultants, officials, guests, etc., we have witnessed many times that prisoners could critique the officials' views without self-censorship, present suggestions for improvement, and the prison authorities welcomed this issue. This significantly strengthens pre-action thinking, precisely targeting the missing link for those who have repeatedly returned to prison after regaining their freedom.

The execution method of theater for repressed individuals with prison beneficiaries was conducted in two ways. The

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20 Boal, *Teatr-e Ghanoongozar (Estefade Az Honar-e Ejra Baraye Siasatvarzi)*, 353.
21 Fouad Ebrahimian, "Nemood Ha-ye Ejtemaee-ye Teatr-e Sarkoobshodegan Dar Iran" (Master's Thesis, Payame Noor University, 2023).

first method involved training five beneficiaries in a model theater with specific themes, all prepared for their challenges, crises, and tribulations. After preparation, the model theater was performed with the desired participation among the prisoners.

The second method involved the presence of a joker without an executive group, and the model theater was performed by the community in question.

-2-2-1-3-4 Writing Experiment: Performance of Oppressed in Prison with Violent Offenders - Coincidence

In coordination with the Cultural and Educational Administration of Hamedan Central Prison, inmates convicted of violent crimes gathered in the meeting hall. At my request, rather than taking the stage, the actors and jokers arranged themselves in a large circle, creating a fieldwork-style performance within the circle of spectators. Two prison consultants and psychologists were present to observe the performance, and cameras were set up to film the session simultaneously. As the joker of the show, I entered the circle, which included about 70 individuals, and began the performance. I started by explaining the concept of the Theater of the Oppressed and asked everyone to stand up to begin the play. I chose a group game with a strong fantasy element to encourage full participation and engagement. I then asked each participant to recall the first word or sentence that came to mind regarding their crime. Almost all expressed regret, with only a very few exceptions. One young individual, however, did not express regret and even felt pride in his actions, believing he could be a suitable subject for future performances. Some participants chose to describe the memory of the day they committed their crime, and they were allowed to recount the details of those memories. Although the crimes shared similarities, they were sometimes surprised by the different methods each had used.

Continuing, I stated the following: "Sometimes we make decisions in life that influence us for many years. We might choose to elevate our lives to bring them down. The ability to make the right decision in critical moments or control ourselves during times of crisis can drastically change our lives. Conversely, a wrong decision made thoughtlessly can disrupt everything." I explained that one such situation, reconstructed from reality by their peers, would be presented for them to carefully observe. The play was performed, and the audience watched attentively. Afterward, I summarized the "Pattern Theater" method for the actors and asked them to reflect on where the story went wrong, ultimately leading to murder. After some consideration, they began offering their thoughts. I invited one of them to step into the circle and specify exactly where they thought changes should be made. Though initially hesitant, with encouragement from the audience and fellow actors, they eventually joined the performance.

In the first show, several participants shared their perspectives by entering the circle and acting out their suggestions. After each participation, the rest of the group was asked for feedback on the individual's contribution, and all opinions were subject to critique.

The audience was excited by the opportunity to actively engage in the performance, and their response was overwhelmingly positive. This session lasted for over 3 hours, exploring various aspects of anger and control, and effectively transforming these emotions into the performance. Before the start, we held a brief concern session with the group to gather their feedback on the format, but as their participation unfolded, those concerns dissipated.

-3-2-1-3-4 Observations Accepted by the group - Coincidence

- Quick Contact with the police: It was commonly believed that contacting the police could alleviate psychological burdens on both parties involved.

- Proper Interaction with the Opponent and Patience: The group believed that when faced with aggression, individuals should encourage the opponent to remain calm and avoid escalating the confrontation. In case of excessive dispute, contacting the police promptly was recommended to signal that the individual was seeking to de-escalate the situation.

- Practice of Maintaining Calmness: This approach emphasizes the importance of maintaining calmness even in the most challenging circumstances. Techniques such as counting numbers or sending prayers were suggested as methods to practice calmness.

- Encouraging Calmness in others: Some participants believed that instead of provoking friends or companions, they should encourage them to remain calm. Most participants agreed that most conflicts escalate due to the reactions of bystanders. They emphasized that if friends, companions, or even supervisors act quickly and effectively, crises can be prevented.

- Criticism of Passersby Indifference: Some participants criticized the indifference of passersby, suggesting that if they had encouraged both sides to calm down at the outset, conflicts would have been resolved more swiftly.

- Handling Strong Disputes: In situations where the opponent strongly insists on arguing, the group recommended

not only contacting the police but also playing a role in de-escalating the situation. For instance, one could randomly dial a number and inform an imaginary person of the incident. Additionally, subtly suggesting that the opponent is expecting friends to arrive soon, friends who are aware of the incident, can often lead the opponent to calm down, knowing they are not alone and that others are on their way.

Conclusion

This study explored the application of educational theater to adult audiences in Iranian society from a historical-social perspective, using deconstruction as a lens. By introducing Jacques Derrida's view and elements of Walter Benjamin's ideas as theoretical frameworks, and by examining a specific period of Iranian history, the study addressed two research questions: First, what element underscores the necessity of such a theater in Iranian society? Second, how and under what conditions can this type of theater be realized in Iran?

To explain its necessity, the author explained the appropriate form of education in educational theater through the perspectives of Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire, identifying a historical gap and outlining four essential conditions for the realization of this type of theater in Iran. These conditions are as follows:

- The historical and social context should inherently demand the use of this type of theater.
- Facilitators/teachers should be adequately trained and prepared.
- This form of theater should remain independent and avoid integration into the formal education system.
- It should employ contemporary and avant-garde dramatic methods for educational purposes.
- For educational theater to succeed and persist, it must maintain a dynamic structure, both in its superstructure and infrastructure.

Additionally, the researcher provided a practical example of theater performed in a prison setting, which closely aligns with the concept introduced in this study.

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