

## **Anticipation Conference 2019**

### **Paper Proposal**

**Authors:** Pedro De Senna, Middlesex University London

Epaminondas Christofilopoulos, UNESCO Chair on Futures Research / Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas

Irianna Lianaki-Dedouli, UNESCO Chair on Futures Research / Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas

**Title: Theatre Arts and Futures Literacy: anticipating an approximation**

### **Abstract**

In this paper, we draw a series of parallels between the disciplines of Theatre Arts and Futures Literacy. We posit that many aspects of theatre practice are concerned with becoming aware of and examining one's anticipatory assumptions in (often, but not necessarily) fictional situations. Rehearsal techniques, devising tactics, improvisation, and applied theatre methods; all contain elements of both 'Anticipation for the Future' and 'Anticipation for Emergence' (Miller, 2018) and may open interesting avenues in terms of a productive interdisciplinary dialogue between theatre and Futures studies. We speculate, in particular, about the potential compatibility of specific theatre and performance practices with the design principles and objectives of Futures Literacy Labs. To that effect, we will offer a case study on the design and implementation of a Futures Literacy Lab that took place in Greece in July 2019 involving asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors. Tools from the theatrical arsenal of Brazilian practitioner and theorist Augusto Boal (Image Theatre, Forum Theatre) were adapted and deployed, in an attempt to foster responses from participants that were not only future-oriented, but also aware that they were so – in other words: fomenting futures literacy. As such, Futures Literacy may become a key point of impact Theatre Arts may have on Futures Studies.

### **Discussion**

In this paper, we draw a series of parallels between the disciplines of Theatre Arts and Futures Literacy. We posit that many aspects of theatre practice are concerned with becoming aware of and examining one's anticipatory assumptions in (often, but not necessarily) fictional situations. Rehearsal techniques, devising tactics, improvisation, and applied theatre methods; all contain elements of both so called 'Anticipation for the Future' and 'Anticipation for Emergence' (Miller, 2018) and may open interesting avenues in terms of a productive interdisciplinary dialogue between Theatre and Futures studies. We briefly outline some of the 'anticipatory' aspects of these theatre practices, and focus our attention on the potential use of applied theatre methods in relation to futures literacy.

Over the last decades, a growing number of foresight practitioners and researchers focus on the potential of futures work for social change, transformation and emancipation (Inayatullah, 2013), (Kahane, 2012), (Slaughter, 1996), (Miller, 2018), (Milojevic, 2002).

From as early as mid-nineties, Slaughter wonders, “how can future possibilities be made real enough to stimulate present-day responses?” (Slaughter, 1996). A decade later Candy argued that, the so-called ‘experiential gulf’ between abstract notions on possible futures and everyday experience impedes futures thinking from entering the mainstream culture (Candy, 2010). At the same time Theatre Arts as a discipline has a heritage of social engagement and has been theorized and practiced as a means to challenge underlying assumptions about the world (Brecht’s ‘Epic Theatre’) and even change the future of participants (Boal’s ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’).

Over the last decade, there has been much experimentation in futures work with the use of several media and arts ranging from storytelling and role-playing to gamification and design. An indicative and well-documented example of this effort is Candy’s work on experiential futures. Experiential futures allows for the use of different media and arts, without focusing or prioritizing a particular one as long as a high-quality engagement can be achieved (Candy & Dunagan, 2016).

Although performance has been used in the context of futures work such as the experiential futures, and many futures games such as the Sarkar Game or the Scenario Exploration System entail role-playing dimensions, their interconnections have not been examined sufficiently at theoretical level or documented at a practical level. A preliminary mapping of the various parallels between futures studies and drama has been offered by Sabina Head. Head suggests, among other things, that drama can offer ‘rich, layered, concrete visions of the future through performance” (Head, 2010).

In this paper, we speculate about the potential application of theatre and performance methodologies to Futures Literacy Labs as one tool for developing Futures Literacy (Miller, 2015) acknowledging that some ‘translation’ may be necessary across the vocabularies of each discipline, so that overlapping and diverging epistemological fields may be more clearly demarcated. Futures Literacy Labs are carefully designed workshops (customized to time and place specificities) where collective intelligence knowledge creation processes and learning by doing approaches are deployed to enable participants to reveal, reframe and rethink their anticipatory assumptions, to become futures literate (Damhof, 2018).

In particular, we would like to examine whether theatre and performance practices as the ones mentioned above are well suited with the design principles and objectives of Futures Literacy Labs , focusing on their potential:

- i) for enhancing the revealing of anticipatory assumptions,
- ii) for fostering a collective process of rigorous reframing by challenging underlying assumptions and co-creating alternative future scenarios based on new sets of assumptions and;
- iii) for fostering introspection and reflection in order to generate new questions and rethink the future of a selected topic of concern.

To that effect, we offer a case study on the design and implementation of a Futures Literacy Lab, involving asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors that took place in the island of Lesbos, Greece in July, 2019. In this workshop, tools from the theatrical arsenal of Brazilian practitioner and theorist Augusto Boal (Image Theatre, Forum Theatre) were adapted and deployed, in an attempt to not only foster future oriented responses from participants but also to be sure that participants were knowingly responding about the future -in other words: fomenting futures literacy. As such, Futures Literacy may become a key point of impact Theatre Arts may have on Futures Studies

Applied theatre practices often deal with communities and individuals in a transformational manner, which is, by definition, future-oriented. Boal's notion of theatre as a 'rehearsal for revolution' and for life itself, turns the act of theatre-making into a political act (Boal, 1995), that of taking control of one's own future. With their focus on communities outside traditional 'theatre' settings, applied theatre practices offer a framework for our approach in bridging the two disciplines. In this respect, the work undertaken with asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors serves as a first case study for this potential interdisciplinary collaboration: tools derived from the arsenal of the Theatre of the Oppressed were adapted and put to use, with the aim of de-naturalising the participants' everyday somatic behaviours and releasing creativity. Through Image Theatre techniques, anticipatory assumptions were not only revealed but also embodied and made 'real' (i); Forum Theatre techniques were used to challenge and reframe assumptions revealed in the first phase (ii); and Rainbow of Desire approaches were used as a means of fostering reflection (iii).

This paper will discuss some of the challenges, pitfalls and successes of this process - including theatre's ability to help overcome linguistic barriers among diverse groups - and point towards future avenues for joint exploration.

## References

- Boal, A. (1979). *Theater of the oppressed*. London: Pluto Press.
- Boal, A. (1995). *The rainbow of desire: The Boal method of theatre and therapy*. London: Routledge.
- Brecht, B., & Willett, J. (1978). *Brecht on theatre: the development of an aesthetic*. London: Hill and Wang.
- Candy, S. (2010). *The Futures of Everyday Life*. University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- Candy, S. & Dunagan, J. (2017). Designing an experiential scenario: The People Who Vanished. *Futures*, 86, 136-153.
- Damhof, L. (2018). *Futures Literacy Centres: The Challenges of Teaching Futures Literacy*. Unpublished manuscript, UNESCO Futures Literacy Programme, Paris.
- Head, S. (2010). *Forward Theatre: Futures Studies in Drama* (Unpublished mphil thesis). University of Queensland, Australia.

Inayatullah, S. (2013). Future studies: Theories and methods. In F. G. Junquera (Ed.), *There's a future: Visions for a better world* (pp. 36–66). Madrid: BBVA.

Kahane, A. (2012). *Transformative scenario planning: Working together to change the future*. Oakland, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Miller, R. (2015). Learning the future, and complexity. An essay on the emergence of futures literacy. *European Journal of Education*, 50(4), 513–523.

Miller, R. (2018). Sensing and Making-Sense of Futures Literacy: Towards a Futures Literacy Framework (FLF). In R. Miller (Ed.), *Transforming the Future: Anticipation in The 21st Century* (pp.15-47 ). London: Routledge.

Milojevic, I. (2002) *Futures of Education: Feminist and post-Western critiques and visions*. Ph.D.thesis, School of Education, University of Queensland.

Slaughter, R. A. (1996). Futures Studies: From Individual to Social Capacity. *Futures*, 28 (1), 751-762. 10.1016/0016-3287(96)00009-2.

Slaughter, R. A. (Ed.). (1996). *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies*. Hawthorn: DDM Media Group.