



Popular Power/Poder Popular: The 25th Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed (PTO) Conference

**Pre-conference workshop with Julian Boal: May 26-28, 2020
Conference: May 28-31, 2020**

**Chicago, Illinois, USA
Host Site: Loyola University Chicago**

About PTO:

Pedagogy & Theatre of the Oppressed (PTO) is an international organization that supports people whose work challenges oppressive systems by promoting critical thinking and social justice through liberatory theatre and popular education. Our approaches stem from the theories and practices of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. We foster collaborative connections to share, develop, promote, and document liberatory theatre, popular education, and other revolutionary actions. Our annual conference seeks to provide an accessible, inclusive, and educational space. We actively seek both introductory sessions for those new to Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed practices, as well as advanced sessions for long-time practitioners.

Deadline for Proposals: December 20, 2019

<https://forms.gle/bN9Si1ee4yHL4YRs6>

Organizers, workers, students, teachers, activists, artists, scholars! YOU are invited to submit a proposal to share your practices and knowledge at the 25th international conference of PTO: Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed! This is a gathering for learning, sharing, and exchange between people who want to struggle together for a better world for all. If you want to be a part of that struggle, this conference is for you, even if you do not yet know anything about Pedagogy of the Oppressed or Theatre of the Oppressed. Below we explain more about how you can submit a proposal for the conference. However, if you are not sure how to communicate some part of your idea or how to submit a conference proposal, you can just email us at pto2020chicago@gmail.com with a question or idea, and we can collaborate with you to

develop that idea. In addition, you can learn more about Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Theatre of the Oppressed at www.ptoweb.org.

This year's focus

This year's conference will emphasize *popular struggle* and *popular power*. By popular, we mean actions that are:

- Powered by people who are often excluded from conferences like this one.
- Focused on genuine equality and justice.
- Organized to dismantle systems that benefit some people at the expense of others.
- Waged against elitism, condescension, class division, capitalism, racism, White supremacy, settler colonialism, imperialism, nationalism and borders, fascism, austerity, privatization, patriarchy, heterosexism, gender norms, ageism, ableism, educational inequality, slavery, imprisonment, environmental destruction, and other forms of violence.
- Taken collectively, built through movements or alliances (often hard, complicated, partial alliances) across barriers that have been built to keep people from fighting together.
- Performed by, as Paulo Freire described, “people engaged in the fight for their own liberation.”
- Reflective of Augusto Boal’s notion that, “[t]o be popular” is to “always tackle issues from the people’s perspective, that is, the perspective of permanent transformation, of anti-alienation, of struggle against exploitation.”

We believe that it is especially important to think about popular power now, given the global intensification of fascist control: authoritarianism, nationalism, violent suppression, etc. Those forms of oppression make us also want to consider differences between *popular* and *populism*. Populists claim to be popular: they promise to represent “ordinary” people against the elite, but usually they do the opposite. As Freire reminds us, “Since the populist leader simply manipulates, instead of fighting for authentic popular organization, this type of leader serves the revolution little, if at all.” For example, in Brazil--where both Freire and Boal were born--the current destructive regime came to power partially by *seeming* to many people as though they were anti-system, by *seeming* “popular.” How can we build *true* popular power and popular organization, locally and globally?

We also ask: How do we sustain popular power over time--in the face of exhaustion and the pains of defeats? We hope to explore the possibilities of (and the need for) joy and happiness inside struggle. Oppressive systems lie to us, suggesting that joy and happiness are only privileges of the elite few, not the rights of all. We reject this idea, and we know that many movements in the past and present give us concrete reasons to hope. For that reason, we welcome consideration of how past movement wins and losses (and everything in between) can shape the present and future. Chicago has long been a city known for popular struggle, popular education, and popular art. International Workers' Day began in Chicago, and a tradition of worker organizing remains very strong here. As just one example among many, the Chicago Workers' Collaborative--represented on the PTO board--will celebrate 20 years in 2020. That same year, PTO will mark its 25th conference (and 26th year as an organization). In recognition of that milestone, this conference also invites reflection on histories of arts and education for liberation, of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, of Theatre of the Oppressed, of PTO as an organization, etc.

Additional questions that might help you develop your ideas

As you think about making your proposal, you could use some of these questions below to guide you. You do not need to have *answers* to these questions. They are just intended to give you an idea of some of the many questions that we hope to explore together.

- How do you try to build popular power through popular education, liberatory arts, and/or Theatre of the Oppressed or Pedagogy of the Oppressed?
- What are some ways that you work for genuine equity and justice? How can we do so together?
- How can histories of popular struggle help us understand our tasks today?
- How do you find joy in struggles and constructing them with others? How do you find the strength to keep fighting?
- How do we create space to celebrate victories and learn from defeats?
- How can we break barriers that oppressive systems build between groups?
- How do you advance the struggle of people over profit?
- How can arts and education help us organize for healthy, safe work?
- How can larger movements for people's power connect to the specific, concrete, everyday struggles by workers against wage theft, sexual harassment, discrimination, and other forms of abuse?
- How can we combat the systems that take particular advantage of those with especially vulnerable legal status: refugees, migrants, undocumented people, current and former prisoners, etc.?
- How can people fight the normalization of "the gig economy" and the turn to temporary work in most fields?

- How does popular power fight populism?
- How have the uses of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, popular education, Theatre of the Oppressed, and other modes of social justice changed over the last several decades?
- How has PTO changed as an organization? How should it continue to change?

A note on language

We release this Call for Proposals in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. We have the capacity to read and respond to proposals in those languages and for presenters to offer sessions in all three of them. We also plan to mark clearly in the program the language(s) of delivery for each conference session. We regret that PTO does not currently have the capacity, however, to guarantee language interpretation and translation for conference attendees onsite during the conference itself. Our lower-cost conference fees are designed for economic accessibility, but that also means that our budget typically cannot allow for full translation and interpretation. We will work very hard to facilitate as much interpretation as we can. Though the majority of program sessions have happened in English in the past, we will also try to de-center English whenever it is possible to do so.

Session lengths and session format options

- Single Session:** 90 minutes
- Double Session:** Two back-to-back 90-minute sessions totaling three hours
- Workshops: The Techniques:** Interactive workshops that focus on exploring, explaining, and experiencing techniques of PO/TO or liberatory practices. Workshops may also present adaptations, expansions, and permutations of the work developed for various situations, circumstances, and populations.
- Workshops: The Applications:** Interactive workshops that explore the multitude of ways PO/TO or liberatory practices can be (and is) used for social justice, transformation, and liberatory work. Workshops and case studies may also highlight convergences other liberatory artistic and educational techniques.
- Performances:** Interactive performances that promote and problematize transformation, liberation, social justice, and/or political engagement. The conference should not be seen merely as a showcase, but rather as an opportunity to engage in interactive exploration of the performance itself, the topics about which it was created, or both.

- Youth-Led Session:** Any session by, for, and about youth-led initiatives. We broadly define “youth-led” as projects and sessions with significant leadership from young people up to age 24, although we recognize meaningful support from elder collaborators may also be integral to the success of such projects and conference sessions. Financial support opportunities are available through scholarships and volunteer opportunities.
- Roundtable Discussions:** Discussions or debates between activists, artists, organizers, and/or popular educators. Sessions may also ask attendees to participate in dialogue around specific concepts, techniques, or case studies related to PO/TO or liberatory practices work. These are proposals to host a conversation with others about a topic of interest, rather than a fully formed presentation of your own ideas or conclusions.
- Panel:** Pre-formed group of 3-4 presentations addressing a specific area of PO/TO or liberatory work. All presenters must have agreed to participate and be part of the proposal. Sessions should also include dialogue or other interaction with attendees.
- Paper Presentation:** Summary of research or issue in PO/TO or liberatory practices work and theory, delivered from notes. Papers should NOT be read, but rather presented. Each presentation should last approximately 10-12 minutes, excluding discussion. We will cluster papers in groups of 3-4, under a proposed theme, with time for dialogue. Not eligible for a double session.
- Anti-Oppression Workshops:** Specific interactive workshops in various aspects of anti-oppression work, including language/terminology, specific communities and populations, challenges and ethics, and working methodologies rooted in liberatory education and/or TO techniques.
- Well-Being and Community Care:** These sessions may address such topics as health and well-being for activists, embodied healing for practitioners, and other practices of self and community care for folks directly engaged in movement-based or other social justice work.

The deadline for proposals is December 20, 2019. To submit your proposal:

<https://forms.gle/bN9Si1ee4yHL4YRs6>