Theater as a civic practice
Charlie Santos, Philosophy

The Problem
Within a cultural moment where the ideologies of social and political movements echo across college campuses, young theater artists are compelled to reconcile their identities as artists with their identities as social and political beings. This reconciliation, however, poses a formidable task, as the intersection between political and artistic spheres can often pose aesthetic and ethical hazards to those who carelessly navigate these spaces.

The Goal
This project aims to map out many of the ethical and aesthetic hazards of this landscape, as well as point toward, through scholarship and creative practice, potential paths toward achieving a deeper harmony between our artistic and political lives.

Conclusions
I conclude, with little surprise, that there is no simple path to simultaneously satisfy the ethical and aesthetic demands that affect many young artists. Effectively navigating the synthesis of these spheres demands a deep understanding of social and political engagement, as well as a solid background in experimental theater and aesthetics.

Without this understanding, the 'well intentioned' activist consistently risks appropriating a political moment for personal artistic recognition. Likewise, one can easily fall into traps of a reductive politicized artistry that reduce theater to a mere tool of political and social ideologies.

"On the other hand, there looms a solipsistic artistry, wherein the artist can trap herself in the echo chambers of her own culture and milieu.

"Furthermore, when aesthetic values conflict with moralizing ideologies, the artist risks prioritizing her aesthetics at the expense of the politically and socially vulnerable.

Despite these risks, however, I feel confident in concluding this study reaffirms the value of theater as a potential catalyst for connection, communication, creativity, and creation. When skillfully crafted, these values can bring invigoration, innovation, and health into our civic lives.

Methods

Academic Study
Bertolt Brecht-- Epic Theater as a tool for civic disruption and education
- Founded an artistry that inverted the notion of cathartic release as means of preserving civic order

Augusto Boal-- Theatre of the Oppressed as “rehearsal for the revolution”
- Positioned the spectator as an actor in narratives of oppression, complicit in these narratives as well as capable of redefining them

August Wilson v. Robert Brustein Debate-- Theater as a politicized institution versus theater as a non-ideological practice
- Issues of ‘Color Blind Casting’ spark debate that pits the political implications of theater against its imperative to transcend reductive political frameworks

Experiential Practice
Theater as Civic Practice-- Trinity Rep. class exploring community activism through creative direct action
- Tracing the movement of bodies through space

Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference-- Engaging with active PTOP community
- Workshops in Forum Theatre led by Julian Boal, as well as engagement with the forefront of PTOP practice and scholarship

Pig Iron/Dell’Arte-- Programs at premier US schools in Devised Theater
- Networking with innovators in experimental theater, dedicated to revitalizing theater's ability to transcend traditional milieu

The Sea Pageant-- Helping organize and perform in Strange Attractor Theatre Company’s 100 person choral performance on First Beach in Newport during the solar eclipse
- Engaging diverse communities in communal redefinition of spaces and relationships

Creation
Original Forum Theatre-- Implementation of theory and experience into creation and performance of original work
- Devising an original piece of forum theater with the help of classmates Lorraine Guerra, Jaimy Escobedo, Catia Ramos, and Daría Montaquila, and performing at both URI and the KCTCF Fringe Festival

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