TEACHING AND LEARNING

Breaking the fourth wall in political studies: exploring politics through interactive theatre

Anar K. Ahmadov[1]

Abstract　This article presents an interactive theatre tool that aims to facilitate a nuanced, holistic exploration of different topics in political science. Its approach builds on insights drawn from the work of four playwrights who provide fascinating, in-depth examinations of social and political topics: Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, Bertolt Brecht, and Augusto Boal. Two features that distinguish the method I present here from other techniques are student ownership and interaction with the audience. At a time when political science is increasingly criticised for becoming overspecialised, irrelevant, and unstimulating, this paper offers a promising and flexible tool that can help synthesise ideas from thriving but often ingrown areas of political science research, contextualise them, and examine their practical relevance.

Keywords　Experiential learning · Interactive theatre · Political economy

Introduction

While often prosaic in substance, politics hardly lacks drama. Since ancient Greece, many theatrical plays have inventively explored ideas that today occupy political scientists. Many practitioners of politics too have found in fiction and drama a nuanced means for reflecting on social and political organisation, from Thomas More's *Utopia* to Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Mandrake* to Benjamin Disraeli's voluminous work of fiction. Yet, the power of theatre to ignite imagination, contextualise political ideas, and explore the relevance of theories to major real-world issues has not been sufficiently harnessed in political science.

✉ Anar K. Ahmadov
a.k.o.ahmadov@luc.leidenuniv.nl

[1] Leiden University College, Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs, Leiden University, Anna van Buerenplein 301, 2595 DG The Hague, The Netherlands

In this paper, I present an interactive theatre tool that I have designed and used in my teaching. It aims to facilitate a nuanced, holistic exploration of topics in political science. As part of their course requirements, students undertake a group assignment, which consists of writing and enacting a short but full-fledged play that analyses and contextualises major political science ideas, concepts, or theories. The enactment takes place in a large auditorium and is open to the public. However, the students do not only write and enact the piece, but also allow for substantial interaction with the audience. The latter become "spect-actors" who, together with the cast, can alter the course of the play and transform its "reality" rather than passively watch it as spectators (Boal 2005). Together the cast and the audience engage in a collaborative reflection, exploration, and problem-solving.

Political science has come under attack for becoming irrelevant, overspecialised, and unstimulating (Cohen 2009; Mead 2010; Nye 2009; Wood 2014). These challenges undermine beliefs in the discipline's relevance and perhaps far from their originators' intent, risk causing considerable discouragement among scholars and students of politics. This paper aims to contribute to the reflections on the relevance of political studies that propose ways of translating this discipline's insights and social value to various audiences (Flinders 2013a, b; Head 2017; Lynch 2016; Rohlfing 2017; Stoker et al. 2015; Stoker 2010, 2012). My hope is to offer a promising and flexible pedagogical tool that can help synthesise ideas from thriving but often ingrown areas of political science research, contextualise them, and examine their practical relevance.

The next section provides a brief survey of the voluminous literature on active and experiential learning. Next, I offer the rationale for an interactive theatre in political science and follow by describing two features of my approach that make it distinct from traditional simulations and role-plays: student ownership and interaction with the audience. I follow with a detailed description on how to implement this method. Finally, I conclude with notes on impact and lessons learned.

Active and experiential learning

Rooted in John Dewey's scepticism over the merits of transmitting mere facts for the purposes of education (Dewey 1897), active and experiential learning methods have become important pedagogical tools that considerably enrich classroom experience and significantly enhance student learning across social sciences. Building on Kolb's pioneering work (Kolb 1976, 1984), simulations and role-plays have been adopted to increase the effectiveness of teaching political science topics through creative, engaging, and structured interaction. Students become immersed into reconstructing and indirectly experiencing complex political phenomena through playing actors involved in the simulated processes. These often lead to deriving nuanced insights into political processes and institutions, improving analytical abilities, and training public speaking skills (Smith and Boyer 1996; Brock and Cameron 1999).

By now a thriving field of knowledge, the literature on active and experiential learning offers creative simulations and role-plays for various topics, nuanced reflections on the effectiveness of such tools (Asal and Kratoville 2013; Baranowski and Weir 2015;

McCarthy and Anderson 2000; Shellman and Turan 2006; Raymond 2010; Raymond and Usherwood 2013), and practical ways of enhancing their pedagogical value (Asal and Blake 2006; Asal and Kratoville 2013; Baranowski and Weir 2010, 2015; Duchatelet et al. 2017; Gastinger 2017; Giovanello et al. 2013; Kröger 2018; Obendorf and Randerson 2013; Raymond and Usherwood 2013; Raymond 2010).

Insights on experiential learning in political studies can be drawn through at least four types of work. The first is dedicated to developing and discussing various techniques, such as Model United Nations, European Union simulations, or mock trials (Asal and Blake 2006; Ahmadov 2011; Ambrosio 2006; Gastinger 2017; Kröger 2018; Obendorf and Randerson 2013; Raiser et al. 2015; Rivera and Simons 2008). It emphasises distinguishing specific types from the outset, such as process-oriented from content-oriented methods or complex simulations from simple ones, and provides guidance on when and how each can be employed.

The second stream of work that focuses on issues of effectiveness offers diverging results but also ways forward. While some studies, including experimental work, find that the students in classes that used active learning techniques performed better on subsequent evaluations, became more interested in political science, and retained memorable experience compared to their peers who were in classes with traditional teaching styles (McCarthy and Anderson 2000: 279; Shellman and Turan 2006), others arrive at less sanguine and more cautious results (Krain and Lantis 2006; Raymond 2010). Baranowski and Weir (2015) offer ways to enhance the evidence base that can allow better assessment of simulations' pedagogical value. Ishiyama (2013) suggests moving beyond simulations and towards employing other relatively simple active learning techniques, such as problem-based learning and team-based learning.

The third line of work underlines the importance of accurately gauging student perceptions (Giovanello et al. 2013) and striking a "balance between students" perceptions on what happened and existing theory as to why it happened" (Asal and Kratoville 2013: 132). Finally, the work on the assessment stresses the importance of evaluation in the first place (Obendorf and Randerson 2013), of clarifying the learning objectives from early on (Raiser et al. 2015), and of distinguishing between methods in terms of whether they are tailored to lead to positive changes in substantive knowledge, skills, and/or affective characteristics (Raymond and Usherwood 2013) or between cognitive, affective, and regulative learning outcomes (Duchatelet et al. 2017).

Politics and theatre

Recently, theatre has emerged as an imaginative and effective tool for teaching and learning in social sciences.[1] Its use as a pedagogical device has increased across disciplines, including sociology (Fried 2016), political theory (Moravian College 2010), and management (Boggs et al. 2007). In fact, for centuries thinkers have

---

[1] Innovative use of fiction in teaching political science topics has a long tradition. One recent example is provided by Dreyer (2016) who looks at the value of using *The Hunger Games* trilogy in teaching international relations.

identified significant connections between politics and theatre, practitioners of both have interwoven them for their purposes, and some have used one to understand the other (Chou et al. 2016; Gay and Goodman 2002; Kelleher 2009; Merelman 1969; Morgan 2013a).

An interactive form of the theatre is also being increasingly used in social sciences, for example, in teaching a variety of management topics, including decision-making, whistle-blowing, and environmental awareness (Boggs et al. 2007). The power of interactive theatre as a pedagogical device lies in its ability to stimulate imagination, enable presenting multiple perspectives with immediacy, and enhance thinking about solutions to problems while keeping close to real-world settings. When approached with care, it can avoid a "straitjacketing" that may be otherwise imposed by a more restrictive "scholastic" approach (Mead 2010) because, to be convincing, the plot and the characters need to be embedded in naturalistic settings and respond to the interaction with the audience inventively yet realistically.

While akin to other experiential learning methods employed in political science, theatre in general and interactive theatre in particular have five features that can make them more attractive for the purposes of holistic critical analysis, contextualisation of political science knowledge, and communication of ideas to broader audiences.[2] First, unlike the techniques that tend to be scholastic in that they separate "political sphere" from the life beyond it but which it is inherently linked to, theatre allows exploring political phenomena more organically, without adopting potentially artificial boundaries. Second, while average simulations tend to focus on a specific event, theatrical tools can provide an opportunity to encompass a larger time span and in that sense be more historical. Third, a theatrical play can enhance weaving together insights from various parts of learning. Fourth, unlike the simulations where the action takes places once, an interactive theatre can provide a more fertile ground for exploring counterfactuals and critical junctures—two of the fundamental and consequential topics in political science. Finally, since theatre involves an audience and interactive theatre involves interacting with its audience, they push the authors and the cast to distil, formulate, and communicate their ideas in ways, forms, and language that are closer to naturalistic, "real-life" settings.

However, theatre in general and interactive theatre in particular remain underused—or perhaps underreported—in political science teaching and learning, despite their considerable promise. Two recent works are partial exceptions and this paper aims to build on them, while also offering features that are different from their approach. Morgan (2013b) describes a class and a performance workshop she has designed in which students enacted an eminent piece of political theatre—Bertolt Brecht's *The Measures Taken*. While not offering an interactive approach, this study provides a thoughtful take on how theatre in general and Brechtian theatre in particular can significantly enhance political science learning.

Dacombe and Marrow (2017) offer a novel simulation exercise inspired by immersive theatre performed by a professional company Coney. The difference between immersive and interactive theatre is that in the former the audience's

---

[2] I thank an anonymous EPS referee for calling my attention to this question.

interference almost never affects the story or performers, although the spectators can move through the settings and observe (Gillinson 2013). Led by Dacombe and Marrow, their class took part in preview performances of an immersive play "Early Days of a Better Nation", acting as regional governments of a fictional post-civil war country. Subsequently, the narrative structure of this play was built upon to design and conduct a classroom simulation.

An interactive theatre for political science

In designing this tool, my approach builds on insights drawn from the work of four playwrights who provide fascinating, in-depth examinations of social and political topics: Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, Bertolt Brecht, and Augusto Boal. Several plays by Ibsen, such as *Pillars of Society, A Doll's House,* and *An Enemy of the People*, are exemplary in excavating contradictions in some of the most powerful streams that underpin social institutions and political values. From Shaw's work, I draw its approach to the audience. Shaw pioneered "intelligent theatre", where, instead of being passive viewers, the audience is required and made to think (Crawford 1993). From Brecht's approach, I borrow one of its key features: "distancing effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*). This is achieved through techniques of reminding the audience members of the artificiality of the performance so as to elicit their conscious critical observation rather than emotional entanglement. Finally, I draw on Boal's forum theatre tool (Boal 2005), in which spectators of a performance become "spect-actors", as described below.

Student ownership

Unlike traditional simulations and role-plays, here students have full ownership of the play: from conceiving the idea to researching, writing, producing, and, finally, enacting the piece. Student ownership of writing is conducive for their learning as it is more challenging than enacting a simulation or role-play designed by others.[3] The task of writing a theatrical play that contextualises theoretical knowledge—that is, shows the workings of abstract theories, ideas, and concepts in the lives of "real" people in "real-life" settings—requires considerable mobilisation of students' knowledge, research abilities, analytical skills, and critical thinking.

   Student ownership of performance is also more conducive for their learning than when trained actors do the performance and when students are involved only partially. First, this forces students to develop a deeper insight into events and actors portrayed. Second, if one of the aims of the tool is to make the spectators conscious and critical observers, then, following Brecht's "distancing

---

[3] This observation concurs with those of Hamenstädt (2018) who argues that student design of their own experimental research projects can significantly enhance the effectiveness of teaching experimental methods in Political Science.

effect", the enactment by students is more likely to achieve this precisely because they are not professional actors. Third, such an approach puts trust in students' potential for creativity. Trusting this potential helps to unfold it through team creativity and leads to better learning (Barczak et al. 2010). Fourth, if potentially questionable scenes are a concern, these can be modified at the writing stage to make them more well-rounded and mature. The instructor can also suggest edits early on. Since the students write the play as a group, their varying perspectives are likely to balance one another and peer-to-peer feedback is likely to enhance their learning (Blair et al. 2013). Finally, hiring professional actors can be costly and is probably beyond the means of an average political science instructor.

Involving the audience

This theatre also engages the audience. The latter become part of the play and can, together with the group, alter the course of the play and transform its "reality". The mechanics is as follows. First, the group enacts the play uninterrupted and allows the audience to follow it in its entirety. Then, it replays the piece, this time allowing audience members to act like "spect-actors". Any member of the audience—students, faculty, or community members—can stop the performance by clapping or another sign, replace an actor, and try to modify the course of the resumed play in the direction he or she sees as more just or desirable. The actors need to respond to such a challenge without "breaking character"—that is, without leaving their role. This interactive mode may be seen as providing a "counterfactual": while the students perform the play once non-stop, the second time the "spect-actors" can join in at a decision node or what they may see as a "critical juncture" (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007).

Such an interaction has distinct advantages both for the students and for the audience members. For the students, the need to improvise and respond naturally, i.e. from within their character's perspective, to the challenge introduced by audience members is likely to enhance their understanding of the subject matter. It pushes them to be prepared to "think on their feet". Otherwise, it may be too easy to simply enact the script, although it is not easy to write one in the first place. In the Shavian fashion, the audience is required to think as well. However, here it is also impelled to act: to intervene to change the course of the play—or accept whatever "injustice" or "suboptimal outcome" takes place on the stage.

Implementation

I assign writing and enacting a play as a group project. Students get around six weeks to develop a play. I divide the class into groups and task each with producing a short but full-fledged theatrical play within a specified theme. We alter the sizes of

Fig. 1 Sample Student Poster
by Jori Korpershoek
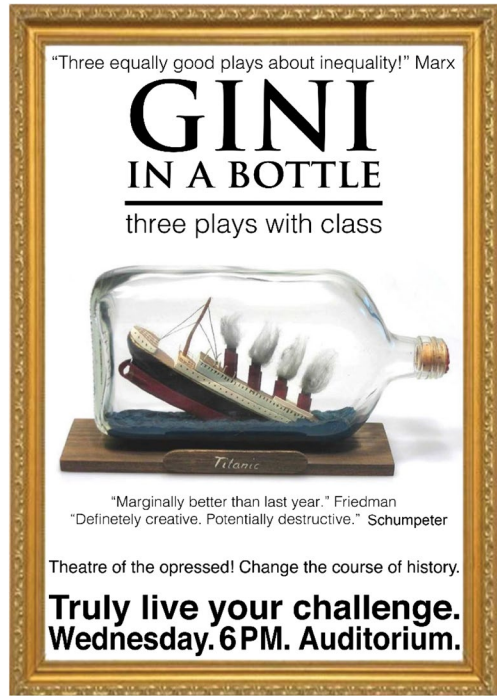
the groups and the length of the plays depending on the class needs and resources. For example, a class of twenty can be divided into three groups of six-seven students so that each group produces a play of 20 min in length. Time limits force students to make their play as coherent and efficient as possible. My experience concurs with observations from previous research (Ishiyama 2013; Michaelsen et al. 2002) in that having long-term instructor-assigned groups of around seven students from diverse backgrounds and skills has shown to be optimal for the feasibility, effectiveness, and the overall success of the project.

Choosing a topic

The course in which I employ interactive theatre is a senior seminar on political economy. I have integrated the assignment into the course to help achieve the learning objectives of collaborative holistic critical analysis, contextualisation, and communication of major concepts, theories, and ideas in political economy. As suggested in previous sections, interactive theatre is especially suited for these purposes. Clarity regarding these learning goals of the exercise has proven conducive for its success and its assessment (Raiser et al. 2015).

In preparation for writing and enacting their play, students are first given detailed instructions, elaborated below. The class gets to choose one overarching theme, such

as rising economic inequality (Fig. 1) or contemporary challenges to liberal democracy. Each group gets to choose the topic for its play that falls within this theme. The play should be driven by a specific problem and apply concepts, ideas, and theories discussed in our readings and classes to explore it. Tackling challenging, open-ended, and ill-defined practical problems enhances the effectiveness of learning (Boud and Feletti 1997; Ishiyama 2013). I recommend students to start with a puzzle that interests them, consider current events as the basis for developing the play, and use their own research as a source of inspiration and material (Glazier 2011).

I remind the students that the play does not have to involve "big things" (e.g. revolution) and "great people" (e.g. major political figures). Instead, they can embed relatively ordinary action and ordinary people in a political–economic context and have them make choices amid their social, economic, institutional, and cultural constraints.[4] The play can be a social commentary, but it should be analytical rather than merely descriptive. It should be realistic, but students can use surrealist elements to make a point. They should try to avoid cliched characters. Finally, I encourage but do not require a play to involve satire and comedy.

Research and preparation

Once they have chosen their topic, students conduct thorough research that should use a variety of relevant empirical evidence to help develop a well-rounded play. Key aspects that are drawn from this research exercise and subsequently incorporated in the development of the play are six elements of Aristotelian drama: plot, characters, theme, language, rhythms, and spectacle (Hatcher 2000). They are encouraged to use actual case studies and can draw on newspaper stories. Whenever applicable and feasible, they should interview individuals whose input can be useful for developing the plot and the characters. I require democratic authorship—every group member contributes equally to research and to writing the play. (This is subsequently evaluated through peer assessment.)

In structuring their play, students are advised to be frugal with the number of scenes and acts to keep the play manageable and keep the audience's attention. Not everything should be said or shown for the audience to understand what is happening. Transitions between scenes or acts can be communicated through incorporating events in dialogues or through employing a narrator. The stage and its management should also be economical and bear in mind the features and limitations of the venue where the play will be staged.

The script should contain prologues and epilogues, such as the ones found in some of Bernard Shaw's works: the author's outline of what the play is about. This part of the script serves to prompt students to show how they embed the play in the debates around the concepts, theories, and ideas of the course that they are exploring through the play. This preparatory activity aims to enhance the pedagogical value of

---

[4] Mintz, Redd, and Vedlitz (2006) suggest that when students play the 'public' rather than elites, their representation of simulated events and their propositions may be closer to the real world.

the overall exercise through creating a baseline to which the group can return during the debriefing process.[5]

Once the script is ready, students submit it to the instructor. Then "table work" starts: students read-through, discuss and analyse the script to clarify and develop meanings, structures, motivations, and emotions involved. This enables students to understand different characters and their positions, help polish each other's performance, and build the ensemble. At the subsequent rehearsal stage, I have asked a colleague and students with background in drama, including students who previously took the course, to drop by the rehearsal and help with their advice.

Enactment

The enactment takes place in a large auditorium and is open to the public. The performers can interact with the audience in two ways. First, to incorporate potential interaction in their plays, students can draw on techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed. They can choose to allow an audience member to replace an actor or even to step in as a relevant character who the spectator deems as unduly omitted from the script. They need to be prepared to handle either scenario with realism that is dictated by the play's specific context. The authors need to clearly communicate their rules to the audience between the first and second performance. I encourage students to think in advance about significant moments in the play where a potential spect-actor might wish to join. Thinking in terms of counterfactuals might prove useful: what if a character would (not) choose this action? I remind the authors that an audience member can have a different view about which moment is significant. Therefore, they can choose to be open for the audience's interpretation or indicate beforehand where they see a critical moment. They should limit the number of such "forking paths" to enable a deeper look and avoid overstretching, given the limited time.

Second, the students can involve the audience through other methods as well, such as treating them as a mob or an electorate. In "2BIG2FAIL: Titanic in the 21st Century",[6] the audience was treated as third-class passengers ("lower decks"). This was symbolic of ordinary citizens involved in the housing bubble that led to the sub-prime mortgage crisis. In "Witch Better Have My Money", the audience formed the mob on the square where a witch-hunt was taking place.

---

[5] As Druliolle (2017) argues, requiring students to write a briefing memo at the preparation stage can increase the pedagogical potential of simulations by setting the stage for the debriefing and making it more productive. Note that such strategy is not advisable in cases where sharing the purpose of the simulation can prime students to behave in specific ways, thus undermining the learning objectives (Asal and Blake 2006).

[6] The title alludes to Thomas Piketty's 'Capital in the Twenty-First Century'.

Debriefing

The enactment is followed by a debriefing. Drawing on previous work (Asal and Blake 2006; Lederman 1992), I use it to reflect on the exercise's features, analyse its key elements, and put it in the context of the course readings and learning objectives. Having more than one play makes for a more interesting debriefing session by allowing to compare the course and results of the different plays (Asal and Blake 2006).

I divide the debriefing into two phases and serve as a facilitator in both. The first phase involves both the casts (i.e. the groups of performers) and the audience. It is conducted as a question and answers session immediately after the performances by all groups. The casts and the audience have a chance to reflect on their experience by discussing the background of the plays, key themes they intended to explore, decisions regarding the plots, principal characters, choices of junctures where audience could intervene, and the casts' reactions to these interventions. The second debriefing phase involves only the instructor and the students, and it takes place in the following class session a few days later. A time break allows experience to sink in. Here, we reflect on the same questions while focusing on the goals of the assignment and its impact on students, and relating the students' experience to the ideas, concepts, and theories the plays aimed to explore.

Assessment

I assess a group's performance along two rubrics: the script and enactment. Each rubric contains several specific criteria. I assess the script in terms of how much it showed good understanding of theories involved as well as its originality, research effort, persuasiveness, structure, and clarity. The enactment is evaluated in terms of how convincing the characters were on stage, how well-prepared and organised the group was, how well it reacted to the improvisation challenges, and how well it captured and maintained the audience. Each group then gets a group grade. Subsequently, to derive a student's final grade, I weigh her or his group grade by the average "grade" this student gets from her or his group members through peer assessment.

Peer-to-peer feedback and peer assessment can significantly improve learning (Blair et al. 2013; Ishiyama 2013). I incorporate peer assessment drawing on Isaacs (2002). This allows each group member to rate the contribution of each of her or his peers to the collective output. The course Blackboard website contains a peer assessment file—a Microsoft Excel book with several identical sheets (one per peer assessed). Each student should fill out and submit this file to the instructor. Each sheet in this file contains a peer assessment form that identifies a student making the assessment and her/his peer assessed. Each student is asked to rate a peer's contribution on ten aspects related to the group project using a scale from 0 ("did not contribute") to 4 ("made an excellent contribution"). The ten aspects include such rubrics as attendance of group meetings, constructive communication, intellectual contribution to the completion of the task, and doing their share of the work. The

assessment on the ten rubrics is automatically averaged. This is a peer's "grade" from another group member. Then, these "grades" for a particular student from all her/his group members are averaged. This is the average peer "grade" that is used as a weight in subsequent calculation of the final grade of the student. This practice first requires some time investment but is easy to implement in subsequent iterations. Importantly, its major benefit is that it works prospectively by encouraging collaboration: when students know that their peers will assess their work, they have incentives both to maximise the group's grade and to contribute well to the group effort.

Instructor's role

As seen from the above discussion, while the instructor is ultimately an ally as well as a judge, she acts as "part facilitator, advisor, devil's advocate, and task master" (Ringel 2004: 461) depending on the stage of the exercise and students' needs. While background in drama is not required for undertaking these tasks and good understanding of developing and conducting simulations could suffice, political scientists delving into theatre for the first time may find it helpful to consult two sets of writing, from which I have drawn practical tips as well as inspiration.[7]

The first set comprises concise, effective guides on the art and craft of playwriting (Hatcher 2000), on directing (Mitchell and Hytner 2009) and on writing and producing short plays (Garrison 2008). Drawing on insights from renowned theatre practitioners, these texts provide practical advice on key challenges facing playwrights, such as turning an idea into a play and developing an effective structure. They offer a step-by-step guide from crafting an intriguing beginning to plotting a scene, developing dialogue, identifying what happens between scenes or acts, preparing improvisations, and delivering a satisfying ending. They also offer advice on avoiding key pitfalls, including on assigning actors to roles, building relationships within the team, and organising rehearsals. Finally, they contain sample layout templates for plays. The second set includes fascinating political plays of the dramatists on whose approach I have drawn, particularly Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, Shaw's *Major Barbara,* and Brecht's *Life of Galileo*. As these works are publicly available on Project Gutenberg website and YouTube, one or more of these plays may be assigned as recommended reading to students who could use these as a source of ideas for developing their own pieces.

Impact and lessons

While some students may perceive the task of writing and enacting their own play daunting, many come to enjoy it from early on. Some discover dormant talents, and many show strong commitment. Some find it an enriching and valuable way to

---

[7] I thank an anonymous EPS referee for bringing up this issue.

"procrastinate" from traditional assignments. Once the task is completed, the student reception is overwhelmingly positive. In subsequent course evaluations, many have stated that the assignment pushed them considerably to contextualise their learning of an otherwise rather abstract material. There was a slight increase of around one partial grade (B to B+) in grades for the subsequent, final written assignment between the class where only theatre was employed and that where the interactive theatre was used.[8] The overall class evaluation score after the implementation of the interactive drama also showed a slight but consistent improvement of around 0.2 points on a 5.0 scale. Many students who take this generally quite demanding course as an elective indicate that this exercise is among the key reasons they choose it.

The play is also popular among other students, colleagues, and guests from community, filling the auditorium of 200 seats. The play is advertised through often imaginative and witty posters and booklets created by the students.

Three difficulties that come with this exercise need to be considered in advance to make sure they do not undermine its success. First, when I conducted it for the first time, some students complained that the exercise took a lot of time to prepare. In subsequent iterations, I have aimed to allocate sufficient time for preparation, help students have realistic expectations about what they can do, and allot a fair percentage to the assignment in the overall course grade that is proportional to its load. Second, instructors need to be alert that writing and enacting the play does not put different weights on different students. This requires solving collective action problems within groups to maximise the quality of the final product and ensure fairness. Such measures as peer assessment can help tackle this. Third, students may underestimate the amount of props, costumes, or equipment that a given script might require. To tackle this problem, I have solicited modest material assistance, have reminded students to avoid costume drama, and have drawn on the advice of my colleagues and students with experience in theatre.

Overall, the interactive theatre tool can significantly enhance political science learning through providing a distinctively conducive experience for mastering, critical analysis, and contextualisation of political science ideas, theories, and controversies. It fosters collaborative creativity, mobilises research abilities, and improves rhetoric skills. Finally, its added advantage to the instructor is that on average it requires less instructor time and resources compared to developing and conducting traditional simulations and role-plays.

---

[8] Ideally, we need a baseline, such as the students' GPAs before taking this class. This baseline can be used to find out whether the change in subsequent assignment grades might be due to the exercise or to a potential self-selection of students into different classes. Unfortunately, such GPA data are not available due to privacy regulations of the host institution.

Appendix

Instructions to students

Below are some notes and suggestions to help you write and enact your play. These are to complement the information in the syllabus, the assessment files, timeline, and the suggested reading list online.

General:

1. As per the syllabus, the key learning objectives of this exercise are: collaborative critical analysis, contextualisation, and communication of major concepts, theories, and ideas in political economy.
2. Your play should focus on the theme and the particular topic you've chosen within that theme.
3. Your play does not have to necessarily involve big things (revolution) and big people (political leaders). Instead you might want to embed relatively ordinary action and people in a political–economic situation, when they are surrounded by structures, institutions, etc., and have to make choices amid them.
4. You should use the topics, concepts, ideas, and theories discussed in your readings and/or our classes. You are welcome to go beyond them whenever needed.
5. Decide on the topic(s) very clearly at the outset—what is this play about? what subject it tries to explore? You should start with a puzzle and/or research question.
6. Your play can comment on social issues whenever applicable.
7. You do not have to take an ideological line, but your play can be action-oriented and/or consciousness-raising.
8. Most importantly, your play should be analytical rather than merely descriptive. (Dialogues can be one way to communicate the analysis.)
9. Your play should be realistic, but you can use surrealist elements to make a point. Try to avoid cliched characters.
10. Elements of satire and comedy are very welcome. Your whole play can be a comedy.

Research:

1. Conduct thorough research that uses a variety of relevant empirical evidence to help develop a well-rounded play.
2. Key aspects that are drawn from this research exercise and subsequently incorporated in the development of your play are six elements of Aristotelian drama: plot, characters, theme, language, rhythms, and spectacle.
3. You are encouraged to use actual case studies and can draw on newspaper stories.
4. Whenever applicable and feasible, you should interview individuals whose input can be useful for developing the plot and the characters.

The structure of the play:

1. The fewer scenes, the better as this can help keep the audience's attention.
2. When changing scenes/acts, make sure you communicate to the audience the connection between the scenes/acts (through subtitles, narrator, etc.).
3. You can give slogan-like titles to scenes. This can be one of the techniques (which you should use) of reminding the audience members of the artificiality of the performance so as to elicit their conscious critical observation rather than emotional entanglement.
4. The script should contain a prologue and/or epilogue, such as the ones found in some of Bernard Shaw's works: the author's outline of what the play is about. Here, you should show how you embed the play in the debates around the concepts, theories, and ideas of the topic that you are exploring through the play. We will return to this during the debriefing process after the enactment.

Involving the audience:

1. One of the key elements of your drama project should be the interaction with the audience.
2. For this purpose, you can adopt some techniques from the Theatre of the Oppressed (where "spectators" are encouraged to be "spect-actors").
3. One way of involving the audience is through allowing any audience member to jump on the stage at either any or any significant moment in the play, join the cast, and attempt to change the course of the play.

   1. You can do it by simply allowing any audience member to join action as an extra cast OR to replace a character when they see fit, after having stopped the play at any point by clapping their hands. Once the spect-actor is on stage, you start from the nearest point (such as a previous sentence) and the spect-actor continues after having assuming the role of the replaced actor.
   2. You and the audience members can think of a counterfactual: what if something would (not) take place?
   3. A significant moment can be, e.g. when a major decision is being made by the protagonist or another character. Of course, the audience can have different views on what is "major/significant", but you can write the play in such a way as to make it clear where those key bifurcations are (e.g. think of "to be or not to be" of the notoriously indecisive Danish royalty (Prince Hamlet) or "exit, voice, or loyalty" of Albert Hirschman).
   4. Limit the number of those significant moments—this can both give you a depth of analysis and limit the number of times you have to replay a specific episode.

4. Remember that you need to be intimately familiar with your character and the play to be able to realistically follow once the pre-written flow is interrupted in this way by a "spect-actor".
5. In addition, you can involve the audience through songs and other methods (e.g. treating the whole audience as a mob or an electorate, which sometimes is the same thing).

Preparation:

1. Democratic authorship—every group member contributes to writing the play.
2. "Table work" (read-through) is the first thing after you've written the play. Discuss and analyse the text so as to nail things down: meanings, emotions, structures, motivation. Help each other to understand your characters, their situations, other characters. Help each other polish your performance. Table work builds the ensemble.
3. One student can play multiple characters as in Monty Python films. (You might use this technique intentionally to underline the artificiality of what's going on the stage.)

Logistics:

1. The stage and its management should be economical (bear in mind the limitations of the auditorium where the enactment will take place).
2. This is also important because you'll be having more than one play, each potentially involving a different set.
3. You should aim at the allotted time, particularly given the interaction with the audience.
4. You perform the play once uninterrupted, and the second time you allow audience members to join. You can allow multiple join-in moments.

Assessment form

Script (65% of the group grade)

Characteristic: Criteria	Weight (%)	Grade*
Content knowledge Mastery of the material on major concepts, theories, and ideas on the chosen topic	15	
Originality Originality/imaginativeness in creating new insights related to the chosen topic or in relating major concepts, theories, and ideas on this topic in new ways	15	
Depth of research and evidence Detail and comprehensiveness of relevant evidence	15	
Contextualisation The level of embeddedness of the analysed concepts, theories, and ideas in a naturalistic setting, plot, and characters that are appropriate, plausible, and non-idealised	20	
Dialogue Consistency and authenticity of the dialogue in revealing the characters' values, ideas, interests, and conflict in the political–economic topic raised	10	
Analysis of alternatives The level of depth, clarity, and immediacy in presenting multiple perspectives on the problem raised and its solutions	10	
Structure Logical, fluid development of the play, with clear beginning, transitions, middle, and end	10	
Grammar/syntax/punctuation The level of avoidance of errors in spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation	5	

Enactment (35% of the group grade)

Characteristic: Criteria	Weight (%)	Grade*
Understanding The level of understanding of their political–economic setting, plot, and characters demonstrated by the cast's performance throughout the play's enactment	20	
Reaction How realistically the cast handled the improvisation/critical juncture challenges raised by audience interaction through retaining the play's specific context	20	
Improvisation How inventively the cast handled the improvisation challenges raised by audience interaction	15	
Audience How well the cast captured and maintained the audience and communicated ideas to them	15	
Concentration How well the cast-maintained characters throughout the enactment	10	
Cooperation How well the cast cooperated throughout the play's enactment	15	
Design How appropriate and convincing were the scenery, costumes, and props	5	

*The grading is done on a 4.0 scale where 0 = fail and 4 = excellent

Peer assessment instructions

The peer assessment form allows each group member to rate the contribution of each of her/his peers in the same group. Please download, fill out, and return the peer assessment form to the instructor by e-mail after you submit the group paper. The deadline for submitting peer assessment forms is XX/XX on XX/XX/XX. If you submit your peer assessment form later, your voice won't be heard in calculating individual grades (see below).

The excel file with the peer assessment form consists of several sheets—one for each group member except yourself. Fill out your name (peer making the assessment) and names for each of your group members (student being assessed), look at the rating scale (0–4), and then input numbers from 0 to 4 for each of the statements below. Excel will automatically calculate the average in the bottom cell—please don't touch it.

To get your individual grade on the paper, the group's overall grade will be weighted by the average "grade" you get from your peers. For example, if the grade given by me to the group is 3 (B), and your average peer assessment grade is 3 (which is 75% of the maximum grade of 4), then $3 \times 0.75 = 2.25$ (C+)—this is your individual grade for the group project. Essentially, you get the full group grade if you have been an excellent team player. You have two incentives: to maximise your group's grade and to contribute well to the group effort. Imagine, your group grade is 4 (A), and your peer assessment grade is 4; then you individually get 4 (A). I reserve a right to invalidate any peer assessment form that displays a significant discrepancy in assessing one or more members of the group very differently from others' assessment of the same member(s). In other words, this is not a chance to start a feud. Just be objective.

Peer Assessment Form*

Student being assessed:

Peer making the assessment:

For each aspect, rate your group member's performance on the group project on a scale from 0 to 4 using the following guide:	4 = did this very well; 3 = did this well; 2 = did this adequately; 1 = did this poorly 0 = did not do this at all

Aspect	Rating
Participated in most of the group meetings	
Kept in contact with group members	
Constructively contributed to group discussions	
Was cooperative in group activities	
Asked useful questions	
Helped other group members when needed	
Completed all tasks set by the group	
Contributed intellectually to the completion of the task	
Commented in a timely manner on the draft paper	
Contributed significantly with ideas and words to the paper	
Contributed significantly with ideas and actions to rehearsals	
Based on your ratings, this student's contribution overall on this group task is:	

*Adapted from Isaacs (2002)

Timeline

Week 1	Groups decide on their topic; start researching for their play
Week 2	Research for the plays
Week 3	Finalising research and start writing the script
Week 4	Writing the script
Week 5	Read-throughs; first rehearsal; polishing the script
Week 6	Finalising the script; technical rehearsal; advertisement
Week 7	Dress rehearsal; enactment!

References

Ahmadov, A. 2011. When Great Minds Don't Think Alike: Using Mock Trials in Teaching Political Thought. *PS. Political Science & Politics* 44(3): 625–628.

Ambrosio, T. 2006. Trying Saddam Hussein: Teaching International Law through an Undergraduate Mock Trial. *International Studies Perspectives* 7(2): 159–171.

Asal, V., and E.L. Blake. 2006. Creating Simulations for Political Science Education. *Journal of Political Science Education* 2(1): 1–18.

Asal, V., and J. Kratoville. 2013. Constructing International Relations Simulations: Examining the Pedagogy of IR Simulations Through a Constructivist Learning Theory Lens. *Journal of Political Science Education* 9(2): 132–143.

Baranowski, M., and K. Weir. 2010. Power and Politics in the Classroom: The Effect of Student Roles in Simulations. *Journal of Political Science Education* 6(3): 217–226.

Baranowski, M.K., and K.A. Weir. 2015. Political simulations: What we know, what we think we know, and what we still need to know. *Journal of Political Science Education* 11(4): 391–403.

Barczak, G., F. Lassk, and J. Mulki. 2010. Antecedents of Team Creativity: An Examination of Team Emotional Intelligence, Team Trust and Collaborative Culture. *Creativity and Innovation Management* 19(4): 332–345.

Blair, A., S. Curtis, and S. Mcginty. 2013. Is Peer Feedback an Effective Approach for Creating Dialogue in Politics? *European Political Science* 12(1): 102–115.

Boal, A. 2005. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. London: Routledge.

Boggs, J.G., A.E. Mickel, and B.C. Holtom. 2007. Experiential Learning through Interactive Drama: An Alternative to Student Role Plays. *Journal of Management Education* 31(6): 832–858.

Boud, D., and G. Feletti. 1997. *The Challenge of Problem-Based Learning*. London: Psychology Press.

Brock, K.L., and B.J. Cameron. 1999. Enlivening Political Science Courses with Kolb's Learning Preference Model. *PS. Political Science and Politics* 32(2): 251–256.

Capoccia, G., and R.D. Kelemen. 2007. The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism. *World Politics* 59(3): 341–369.

Chou, M., R. Bleiker, and N. Premaratna. 2016. Elections as Theater. *PS. Political Science & Politics* 49(1): 43–47.

Cohen, P. 2009. *Field Study: Just How Relevant is Political Science?*. The New York: The New York Times.

Crawford, F.D. 1993. Shaw's British Inheritors. In *Shaw and Other Playwrights*, ed. John Anthony Bertolini, 103–111. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Dacombe, R., and E.A. Morrow. 2017. Developing Immersive Simulations: The Potential of Theater in Teaching and Learning in Political Studies. *PS. Political Science & Politics* 50(1): 209–213.

Dewey, J. 1897. My Pedagogic Creed. *The School Journal LIV* 3: 77–80.

Dreyer, D.R. 2016. War, Peace, and Justice in Panem: International Relations and the Hunger Games Trilogy. *European Political Science* 15(2): 251–265.

Druliolle, V. 2017. There Is No Debriefing Without Prior Briefing: Writing a Briefing Memo as a Preparatory Activity to Make the Most of the Pedagogical Potential of Simulations. *Journal of Political Science Education* 13(3): 355–363.

Duchatelet, D., P. Bursens, V. Donche, D. Gijbels, and P. Spooren. 2017. Student Diversity in a Cross-Continental EU-Simulation Exploring Variation in Affective Learning Outcomes among Political Science Students. *European Political Science*. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-017-0116-9.

Flinders, M. 2013a. The Tyranny of Relevance and the Art of Translation. *Political Studies Review* 11(2): 149–167.

Flinders, M. 2013b. The Politics of Engaged Scholarship: Impact, Relevance and Imagination. *Policy & Politics* 41(4): 621–642.

Fried, M. (2016) 'Bringing Theatre into the Sociology Classroom.' The Society Pages. https://thesocietypages.org/feminist/2016/02/02/bringing-theatre-into-the-sociology-classroom/, Accessed 20 January 2018.

Garrison, G. 2008. *A More Perfect Ten: Writing and Producing the Ten-Minute Play*. Newburyport, MA: Focus.

Gastinger, M. 2017. Play It Again, Sam! Teaching Transferable Skills through Multiple Repetitions of 'Simple' Simulations (with Research Benefits). *European Political Science* 16(2): 233–245.

de Gay, J., and L. Goodman. 2002. *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*. London: Routledge.

Gillinson, M. 2013. *Interactive Theatre: Five Rules of Play from an Audience Perspective*. London: The Guardian.

Giovanello, S.P., Jason A. Kirk, and Mileah K. Kromer. 2013. Student Perceptions of a Role-Playing Simulation in an Introductory International Relations Course. *Journal of Political Science Education* 9(2): 197–208.

Glazier, R.A. 2011. Running Simulations without Ruining Your Life: Simple Ways to Incorporate Active Learning into Your Teaching. *Journal of Political Science Education* 7(4): 375–393.

Hamenstädt, U. 2018. Teaching Experimental Political Science: Reloaded. *European Political Science* 17(3): 486–493.

Hatcher, J. 2000. *The Art and Craft of Playwriting*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books.

Head, Brian W. 2017. Assessing the Value of Political Science in the Era of Relevance and Impact. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 52(4): 599–614.

Isaacs, G. 2002. *Assessing Group Tasks*. Queensland, Australia: Teaching and Educational Development Institute.

Ishiyama, John. 2013. Frequently Used Active Learning Techniques and Their Impact: A Critical Review of Existing Journal Literature in the United States. *European Political Science* 12(1): 116–126.

Kelleher, J. 2009. *Theatre and Politics*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kolb, D.A. 1984. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. London: Pearson Education Limited.

Kolb, D.A. 1976. Management and the Learning Process. *California Management Review* 18(3): 21–31.

Krain, M., and J.S. Lantis. 2006. Building Knowledge? Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Global Problems Summit Simulation. *International Studies Perspectives* 7(4): 395–407.

Kröger, S. 2018. Realising the Potential of EU Simulations—Practical Guidance for Beginners. *European Political Science* 17(1): 161–175.

Lederman, L. 1992. Debriefing: Toward a Systematic Assessment of Theory and Practice. *Simulation & Gaming* 23(2): 145–160.

Lynch, M. (2016) 'After the Political Science Relevance Revolution.' *Washington Post*, March 23. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/23/after-the-political-science-relevance-revolution/. Accessed 19 January 2018.

McCarthy, J.P., and L. Anderson. 2000. Active Learning Techniques Versus Traditional Teaching Styles: Two Experiments from History and Political Science. *Innovative Higher Education* 24(4): 279–294.

Mead, L.M. 2010. Scholasticism in Political Science. *Perspectives on Politics* 8(2): 453–464.

Merelman, R.M. 1969. The Dramaturgy of Politics. *The Sociological Quarterly* 10(2): 216–241.

Michaelsen, L.K., A.B. Knight, and L.D. Fink. 2002. *Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Mintz, A., S.B. Redd, and A. Vedlitz. 2006. Can We Generalize from Student Experiments to the Real World in Political Science, Military Affairs, and International Relations? *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50(5): 757–776.

Mitchell, K., and N. Hytner. 2009. *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Routledge.

College, Moravian. 2010. *Performing Political Theory*. Bethlehem: Moravian College Magazine.

Morgan, M. 2013a. *Politics and Theatre in Twentieth-Century Europe: Imagination and Resistance*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morgan, M. (2013b) 'Learning Politics Through Theatre: What the Performance Workshop Can Offer Political Science Pedagogy'. 2013 APSA Teaching and Learning Conference Paper, January 25, 2013, Long Beach, CA. SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2207082.

Nye Jr., Joseph S. 2009. *Scholars on the Sidelines*. Washington, D.C.: The Washington Post.

Obendorf, S., and C. Randerson. 2013. Evaluating the Model United Nations: Diplomatic Simulation as Assessed Undergraduate Coursework. *European Political Science* 12(3): 350–364.

Raiser, S., A. Schneider, and S. Warkalla. 2015. Simulating Europe: Choosing the Right Learning Objectives for Simulation Games. *European Political Science* 14(3): 228–240.

Raymond, C. 2010. Do Role-Playing Simulations Generate Measurable and Meaningful Outcomes? A Simulation's Effect on Exam Scores and Teaching Evaluations. *International Studies Perspectives* 11(1): 51–60.

Raymond, C., and S. Usherwood. 2013. Assessment in Simulations. *Journal of Political Science Education* 9(2): 157–167.

Ringel, L.S. 2004. Designing a Moot Court: What to Do, What Not to Do, and Suggestions for How to Do It. *PS. Political Science & Politics* 37(3): 459–465.

Rivera, S.W., and J.T. Simons. 2008. Engaging Students through Extended Simulations. *Journal of Political Science Education* 4(3): 298–316.

Rohlfing, I. (2017) The Relevance of Political Science: Some Thoughts on the Recent Critique. *Politics, Science, Political Science* (blog). https://ingorohlfing.wordpress.com/2017/03/01/the-relevance-of-political-science-some-thoughts-on-the-recent-critique/. Accessed 20 January 2018.

Shellman, S.M., and K. Turan. 2006. Do Simulations Enhance Student Learning? An Empirical Evaluation of an IR Simulation. *Journal of Political Science Education* 2(1): 19–32.

Smith, E.T., and M.A. Boyer. 1996. Designing In-Class Simulations. *PS. Political Science and Politics* 29(4): 690–694.

Stoker, G. 2012. In Defence of Political Science. *The Political Quarterly* 83(4): 677–684.

Stoker, G. 2010. Blockages on the Road to Relevance: Why Has Political Science Failed to Deliver? *European Political Science* 9(1): S72–S84.

Stoker, G., B.G. Peters, and J. Pierre. 2015. *The Relevance of Political Science*. London: Macmillan International Higher Education.

Wood, M. 2014. Bridging the Relevance Gap in Political Science. *Politics* 34(3): 275–286.

Anar K. Ahmadov   (Ph.D., London School of Economics) is Assistant Professor of Political Economy at Leiden University. Prior to this, he has held research and teaching positions at Princeton University, Oxford University, the LSE, and Khazar University, and worked as a consultant, analyst, and executive in international development. His current research explores political and economic inequality, natural resource governance, and migrant political behaviour.