

# Notes on Free your Mind, Rainbow of Desires Training

## 04 – 10.12.2011, Estonia

As in all recollections it sounds more cohesive and slick than how it unfolded in reality. Memory is selective at the worst of times more so than at the best – but in all felt that the training was a success – no one died!

<b>Theme:</b> <b>Introductions</b>	
<b>Date:</b> 04.12.11 <b>AM:</b>	<p><b>Preamble:</b> Suggested that we approach the week in the spirit of Epicurus – with pleasure – but according to his definition of pleasure <i>‘a fearless philosophical conversation between friends.’</i> The knowledge loved and learned about together, through Rainbow of Desires, being a result of brave investigations into our oppression through conditioning. Not so much the external sources of oppression (which is the realm of Forum Theatre) but their interception ‘in the act’ through physical restriction and mental events.</p> <p><b>Journey to Now:</b> with rainbow colour paper, felt and wool. An opportunity to ‘settle’ in the group – arriving by going back to the beginning and mapping the journey in an abstract form from our birth to the present moment. Sitting in a circle and then working from where we sit towards the middle point of the circle (marked by a candle) sculpting with the materials the terrain we have crossed to arrive at this point. As Leonard Cohen says – <i>‘Success is surviving’</i> and the resulting explosion of colour and shapes from this exercise is a kind of celebration of that whilst also a recognition of the suffering that life also entails. This exercise starts to ‘aestheticise’ the space – where matter (objects in space) start to speak to us through all the senses as having a meaning beyond their mere materiality. This is the most powerful aspect of theatre as an art form – to poeticise experience. The Aesthetics of the Oppressed, as I understand it, is about enabling us to do that in our name and not as mere willing receptacles of cultural coercion. So also implicit in this creative process is a rebellion against how to <i>‘do it right’</i>, or <i>‘I’m not an artist really’</i>. These notions are replaced with <i>‘It’s my life, and I’m the world expert in this, and only I know how to depict this’</i>.</p> <p>The second part of the exercise, when the group rotates around the ‘mandala’ of life paths and witnesses those of others, is preparation for the kind of sharing that will occur in the week. We can intuit what these abstract forms represent, in some cases better than others, but they are representations – <i>‘the map is not the territory’</i>. People also recognize that there are commonalities between maps – we are subject to the same forces.</p>
<b>PM:</b>	<p><b>Introducing Forum Theatre:</b> Since several in the group had no prior experience of Theatre of the oppressed it became necessary to veer away from the programme and try and give a short introduction to Image theatre and Forum theatre before proceeding to Rainbow of Desires. I tried, in this process, and not very successfully I believe, to make it interesting for people who have a long experience of working with Forum theatre, by introducing a novel way of devising Forum Theatre and one which would relate to the</p>

theme of time started with Journey to Now.

So I got this idea from a funny birthday card I once saw where there is an Einstein like scientist pointing with his stick at a board with a line drawn on it. Along the line, which is marked 'time' are two marks. One titled '*Your Birthday*' and the other further along in the direction of the arrow of time, where the scientist points, is marked '*today.*' And the simple line inside is '*Sorry!*'

I invited the large group to form into smaller 'age groups' and asked them to make two group images - an image of the future they fear and the future they most desire. In each group I ensure that there were experienced people who could instruct the novices. Then I drew a line that represents time but which splits in the middle, the bottom fork going towards the undesired future and the top fork going towards the desired. I then asked the groups to create the image of 'the crux' or what Alessandro helpfully pointed out was the point of the China Crisis –where opportunity and danger collide. This is the point where the timeline divides (the fork in the road) And then I asked the groups to make an image of 'now' in order to expose the seeds of the situation which could go both ways.

These series of images are then shown to the other groups and the spect-actors say what it is they see. Personally, I find these stages of any workshop, where images are analyzed, quite laborious and I would much rather move into the intervention stage. But of course, there are fundamental principles of TO which need to be shared in the 'learning opportunities' this stage provides. Such as the difference between 'objective' and 'subjective' observation. At least in this way the images have a progression – a story to tell.

That it is tiresome is perhaps something to do with our conditioning towards convergent rather than divergent thinking. We want certainties and struggle with the possibility that all answers are true and false – like quantum states.

The next stage is that each group then turns the scenes into forum theatre – where the outcome is the future most feared and then there are interventions from the spect-actors aim to move the outcome towards the desired or what they would desire it to be.

I think, in trying to introduce and try out a different way of developing Forum Theatre with the practitioners, and avoid going through the basics e.g. repeating the epiphanies of Boal; I neglected to do the 'basic' aspects of TO to the uninitiated and this lapse came and bit me on the arse later on in the week. In retrospect, what I should have done is separate the group into novices and experts and dabblers and worked with the basics with the novices and asked the other two groups to create forum theatre to demonstrate the technique to the novices. This is what I have done before and my hubris led me, as is often the case, to try something different!

**Evening:**

**Overall aim:**

## The Prospective Techniques

Date: 05.12.11

Again, discarding the programme, I decided to use the day to take a shortcut. The techniques I have developed to identify our oppressions – which is a kind of triangulation of three different approaches that involve body, mind and vocation, are ones that I feel now compelled to do at the beginning of any TO workshop. My temptation in compiling the original programme was to ‘go by the book’ and present a kind of standardised version of a Rainbow of desires training. I always set out to do this, because it is important, I believe to train people in these amazing techniques that Boal created without too much contamination from my own viewpoint on the matter. Of course, it is a hopeless case! But by setting out this way at least the training has some semblance to a Rainbow of Desires workshop and not some free flowing cosmic exploration that it might turn into if I was left to my own devices entirely.

So triangulation involves first of all asking for what we really want – then articulating this by creating the image of the person we want to be (alongside who we least want to be and who we actually are.) Then to work with an element of Arnie Mindell’s body process work to identify with a partner how blocks in the way we move through space tell of internalized cops. Next is the discovery, through doing the ‘image of the hour’ exercise we find persistent thoughts we have through an average day which we have mistaken for facts. It is thoughts that we think are facts that drive our actions. Or maybe I should put that in another way. Those thoughts ARE facts because we have already started to act BEFORE we have the thought – the thought only comes afterwards to justify the idea we have control when usually we act unconsciously. This is because most conditioning, and our most pernicious oppressions are not readily available to conscious analysis.

The next stage is to aestheticise the space by creating a ‘new world’ from what exists in the room already and finding where you most want to be, where you least want to be and where you belong. Then rehearsing the route through the landscape from where you least want to be through where you belong to where you most want to be. And where you most want to be can change as you go.

Finally, all three – mind (thoughts), body (internal physical blocks) and vocation (the movement towards the expression of our full capacity) come together. The group find their partner and must make their way through this ‘new world’ (*‘Slouching towards Bethlehem to be born’* comes to mind), transforming also from the image of who they least want to be towards who they most want to be via who they really are; all this while their partner manifests the blocks physically and while whispering in their ear the thoughts that think they are facts.

Something I failed to do here which would have helped later on, was to bring the group together to ask them to find examples in their life where what they have just enacted most clearly manifests – in which relationships, what scenes? This might have helped people access sooner examples that they could bring to the Rainbow of Desires techniques. Why didn’t I do that?

	<p>Sometimes there is just a voice that says 'let it be', especially when you feel that the group or a lot of people in it just need to digest what has happened and shifting the process into something else would not be the best use of what just happened. Sometimes there is just the mind being blown away by what it is feeling and seeing – in the facilitator as well! Unfortunately, the possibility of the later happening and which means that you are not inured to what the group feels is also the sensitivity that is speaking to you, and telling you what to do. Also, the question is whether the connection needed to be made or would happen naturally.</p>
<b>Evening:</b>	
<b>Overall aim:</b> <b>Introspective Techniques 1</b>	
<b>Date: 06.12.11</b> <b>AM:</b>	<p>'Image and Counter Image' and 'Rashmon' were the two techniques I prioritized for the day. Both prospective techniques – so a day behind at this point. Would have liked to show Kaleidoscopic Image as well at this point, since it gives everyone a function and can be very powerful without being too invasive.</p> <p><b>Image and Counter Image:</b> the protagonist volunteers a story to someone she selects from the audience and with both their eyes closed she tells a story of oppression. With this helper as 'co-pilot' and the protagonist as pilot, they each create images of the situation and have three (or more) wishes to get their ideal. Then are forced to test the their ideal against what is possible in these circumstances when the antagonists resist the change and they must use what power to have to do what they can.</p>
<b>PM:</b>	<p><b>Rashmon:</b> This was the first of a few times where I felt like getting stories to work with from the audience was like drawing teeth. Eventually the story that was explored was probably not ideal for this technique, where up to five different people in the story create images of how the others appear to their character and the play is then re-improvised with the characters holding these images. It might be the case that there was an expectation of the same intensity and personal connection everyone was making with their oppression the day before and now they were having to force a sympathy for scenarios which were a bit more distant from their own. In gory metaphor, tasting your own blood in your mouth can spoil the appetite for the feast of raw meat being served.</p>
<b>Evening:</b>	
<b>Overall aim:</b> <b>Sightseeing</b>	
<b>Date: 07.12.11</b> <b>AM:</b>	<p>Started the day with '<b>Screen Image</b>' where four one-to-one relationships, one in each corner, is explored. Teams of 5 or more go through several stages, staging and witnessing an improvisation of the failing relationship, and images are created of the 'screen/shield/filter' that comes between the protagonist and antagonist which makes it almost impossible to meet and to relate successfully. There are a series of reimprovisations with people offering 'advice' by showing the protagonist an image that might succeed to undo the</p>

	<p>antagonists' image.</p> <p>Wanting to give as many people as possible the experience, and not so easy to coordinate and instruct the four corners at the same time. Again, probably not 100% successful because of varying abilities within the group in understanding my explanations and understanding the principles of TO. My mental report card here saying – ‘could do better.’</p>
<p><b>PM:</b></p>	<p><b>Circuits of Rituals and Masks:</b> Again, a near miss with this exercise, where the protagonist shows three or four rituals which she/he encounters on a daily basis, which forces her to wear a mask. The spect-actors watch the different improvisations and then shape the protagonist in the mask they witness her wearing.</p> <p>I remember the first time seeing Boal do this that he seemed to rush the whole process very quickly, as if we were running out of time. He probably experienced what occurred on this occasion, where the spect-actors just couldn't decide on the mask. It took a long time just to get to the stage where the protagonist rotates the masks around the rituals to see what happens - wearing the 'wrong' mask. And this can take a very long time. So general feeling of exhaustion at the end, rather than elation. Which was a concern for me at this stage. Like a porn film without the money shot (to use another unsavoury metaphor) sensed people getting impatient to see these techniques work. Nothing going badly wrong, and protagonists getting something out of it in most cases, but not quite gelling yet.</p>
<p><b>Evening:</b></p>	
<p><b>Overall aim:</b> <b>Introspective Techniques 2</b></p>	
<p><b>Date: 08.12.11</b> <b>AM:</b></p>	<p>Coming back to the process I felt that patience in the group was running low to get to the essence of Rainbow of Desires. To feel that they somehow understood what it was all about, and this can take just one or two exercises that are perfect illustrations of its sometimes mystical workings. Luckily we managed to do this today.</p> <p>A powerful story that engaged most people. We used <b>Rainbow of Desires</b> to explore the situation and was an intense and rewarding process. With the protagonist seeming to transform in front of our eyes.</p> <p>Protagonist creates images of his/her desires in the situation and arranges a constellation. Images are informed whether they are desired desires (aligned with the protagonist's will) or undesired desires (present and acknowledged but not useful to the situation).</p> <p>Various processes are engaged to articulate and constellate the desires, and lead back to the natural improvisation now with those desires organized in 'battle formation' working for the protagonist. In this case it crossed the critical mass threshold to release that 'aha' moment in the 'audience' and I felt we'd turned a corner.</p>

PM:	
Evening:	
<b>Overall aim:</b> <b>Introspective Techniques 3</b>	
<b>Date: 09.12.11</b> <b>AM:</b>	<p>Returned today with two of the most intense practices – <b>Cop in the Head:</b> where the protagonist must externalize all those invisible agents within that are stopping them from achieving their desire, name them (since they are real people – parents, teachers, friends, husbands, wives) whose oppressive aspects have been internalized. Protagonist the reminds them of an incident in the past that is related to that which gives them the power of the cop in the protagonists head. By naming it, they are already starting to weaken the cop – which prefers to hide in dark corners.</p>
<b>PM:</b>	<p>A level of emotional exhaustion in the group that needed to be addressed if there was to be enough energy to get to the end of the day. So did 7 loving touches and seemed to work. Amazing how being given permission to touch each other up can wake up a group!</p> <p><b>Analytical Image</b> flowed after this and though one of the most complex practices. With a group that is functioning well, you can find a rhythm and momentum that moves of its own volition to push through the blocks. This is a kind of ‘group mind’ or ‘transpersonal intelligence’ that is the elemental force which is needed to transmute our leaden stories of struggle, suffering and confusion into empowering embodied insight. I was relieved to see that the group had succeeded to find this transmuting intelligence and in so doing recognize the value of Boal’s legacy. How much I facilitate and how much I difficultate this happening in a workshop I’ve given up asking – I’m just grateful when it happens,, which it usually does in the end.</p>
<b>Evening:</b>	<p>Something that emerged during the evening forward planning meeting was that there had not been enough explanation of how these internal oppressions were ‘symptoms’ of social conditioning – the structural violence of our society being a kind of invisible background radiation to the very intimate and personal oppressions shared in the week. In TO speak – not enough Analogical Induction. I hold my hand up – first of all, to not explaining thoroughly the subtext of TO in the beginning to those who were not experienced in Forum Theatre. I also hold my hands up to not indulging in analogical induction towards social causes. That is because in my experience, when I see that happening it tends to become a vehicle for devolving responsibility to make a change inwardly – <i>‘I’m like this because of society. It’s not my fault. Society needs to change then I will be OK. Meanwhile I will continue to be proud to belong to those who are oppressed by society...and by our shared inability to have sane and healthy relations with ourselves and others because of what society has done to us’</i></p> <p>There is, I believe, another Analogical Induction that is a movement not towards the political cause which it can label, as if it is diagnosing a sickness – <i>‘ah...this is the oppression of sexism.’</i> It is a movement towards a general truth about this particular suffering – the root of the suffering not its branches.</p>

	<p>And I would argue those roots are within us and are propagated through society from within us. Basically, I think what Boal calls reverse osmosis is a world view that needs equal weight to top down osmosis. Society makes us or we make society – both are right but I know which world view is the one that leads to liberation.</p>
<b>Overall aim:</b> <b>Trying it Out</b>	
<b>Date:</b> 10.12.11	<p>With goodwill and energy, there were plenty of volunteers to try facilitating and suggested that they do so in teams of two. Also was very happy for the flexibility of the super hosts, allowing us to go into the next morning to enable all those who wanted to try their hand at facilitating an exercise.</p> <p>As is inevitable, some ‘tryers out’ were better prepared than others, and some teams worked very well together even though thrown together the day before. In all, it is a testament to the skill and understanding in the group that most protagonists were inspired, empowered and informed by volunteering their stories in these last days, and that those whose ‘process’ was a little mangled had the good grace to recognize the value in volunteering the personal story – even if to realize that they survived the ordeal.</p>
<b>AM:</b>	
<b>PM:</b>	
<b>Evening:</b>	<p>Fancy dress was good fun and felt somehow right – to play at being someone else for a change rather than being relentlessly up close and personal with oneself.</p>
<b>Overall aim:</b> <b>Evaluation</b>	
<b>Date:</b> 11.12.11	<p>The whole week felt at times womb-like and at other times tomb-like. With 3 hours of daylight and constant drizzle the sauna was much needed. I felt that the group had a wide range of different capacities and different ways of dealing with the intensity, which was interesting and challenging to navigate through.</p> <p>I was very ‘proud’ with my Welsh group – from every part of Britain and Northern Ireland. Pro</p>
<b>AM:</b>	
<b>PM:</b>	
<b>Evening:</b>	