

I'm glad to present You a short interview (and an insight in [Free Our Mind project!](#)) with Iwan Brioc (on the right). Questions asked by NGO Forum Theatre member Nikolai Kunitsõn (on the left)



Can You tell us in Your own words the background of ROD?

One of the wonderful things about TO (Theatre of the Oppressed) is how the main developments in this field came about as a response to new circumstances, rather than from invention for the sake of invention which is often the case in the arts. It is like a Swiss army knife that grows an extra tool whenever it encounters another problem to fix. And TO continues to evolve even after the passing of its genius inventor, Augusto Boal.

Nevertheless, Boal still has the best stories, and these epiphanies show the poetic reasoning behind each of the branches in the tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed. The branch of Rainbow of Desires sprouted, I believe, in the mind of Boal during his long exile from Brazil in Europe in the late 80's. While up until then, working in South America, when he asked a group what oppressed them, they would report how the police had dragged them out of bed in the middle of the night and beaten them. Meanwhile, in Paris, London and Stockholm he was more likely to hear answers such as - *'I can't seem to communicate with my wife'* or *'I'm oppressed by this feeling of emptiness in my life.'* At first Boal was dismissive of these bourgeois concerns but a turning point came when he learnt that Scandinavia at the time, with examples of the most advanced social system and egalitarian democracy in the world had a suicide rate higher than the whole of the southern hemisphere. He recognized that a system of techniques needed to be developed to work with the internal oppression, those *'cops in the head'* that make you do things you don't want to or stop you doing the things you most desire. So

with CTO Paris and it is suggested the expert advice of his wife and psychotherapist Cecilia Thumim he developed a range of techniques to bring those cops out into the open and deal with them.

What is in Your opinion so special about *Rainbow of Desires (RoD)*?

What is most special for me with the techniques I think is that they make use of and are deeply rooted in an ethical dimension which affirms that these cops, oppressive notions, *idée fixe*, implicit laws whatever you want to call them - have been implanted in the psyche by parents, teachers, culture society etc. The headquarters of these 'cops in the head' are outside and they have been internalized. Because we more or less share common exposure to culture and society, when through the processes we start to share and externalize our cops it doesn't feel at all like a therapy session focused on individual personalities. It feels more like one of those deep and meaningful conversations where you discover some common truths but, and this is really the icing on the cake, these truths are realized in every cell of the body not just the mind, because RoD is a conversation in the total language of theatre.

Can RoD actually change anything?

Change is inevitable, but living a life through habit in order to avoid change is not. Perhaps more than ever in history people are living mindlessly trying to make the next moment better than the one they are presently occupying. Capitalism thrives and promotes through continual re-enforcement this sense that there is something lacking right now which consuming something will satiate. This politician, this new lifestyle, this new gadget, this show.

Up to now we have for the most part willingly played along because going from one satiated desire to the next is comforting and change and in particular a change in perception can be frightening because we have a lot at stake in how we see the world and our place in it. That place is very often projected forward into the future into what we are becoming and not what we are being: what we will change into rather than what we really are. Staying with what we really are without seeking to change it is to my mind the first step in RoD, and that is a big change!

But as you can see with this groundswell of public protest around the world - that whole movement is thankfully grinding to a halt in the minds of so many people. The capitalist machine's momentum is strong and will continue to grind its teeth, but I think people can no longer stand the hollowness of our mass culture any longer and want to confront reality head on. RoD, I believe, is one of the interventions among many others that is helping with this reckoning.

Which is the most biggest form of oppression, the difficult one I mean, to deal with?

Gravity. It's a bugger! Joking aside, it is a most pernicious kind of oppression that we are not educated to ask for what we really want but for what we have been told we can hope to get. It is the grasping kind that succeed in our society and then dictate what it is that you and I should aspire to. I think everyone has a vocation or a natural calling and it is often contorted from a very young age by these globalized and localized implanted desires which tell us what it is to achieve and to fail. But such is the force of this conditioning that it is as powerful as gravity, holding us in a place where we think we have to negotiate continuously with the outer world to maintain a certain position and to get by. But I think humanity can do so much better than get by, we could get on for a start. That would be an achievement.

You have said, that oppression is lack of awerness. Can You explain this one?

I don't want to get too metaphysical on your arse here! BUT. I might also say oppression starts with awareness. When we are infants all there is is everything. Then we become aware of a mother and a separation occurs. There are two, and as Boal explains in the prologue to Games for actors and Non-Actors, it is at this point when the human is invented that so is theatre. Theatre therefore depends on this awareness of self that if not uniquely human has reached its apogee in this species. From there autobiographical memory starts, because now there is a self to which things that are happening occur.

Once that the idea that there is someone to which things are happening becomes a fact then oppression is inevitable. Why? Because we have a deep physical memory of the time

when we were everything and we WANT everything again! The problem is that it appears to us that there are other people who also want EVERYTHING and that is just impossible. Boal's gift to humankind, I think, is not so much to a political cause as many in the TO world would like to think. That is such a diminution of the power he has unleashed. He changed the way we can participate in theatre. You see, theatre is a metaphor for consciousness and he changed the metaphor so that when we practice TO we also change our consciousness. Consciousness becomes more fluid and dialogue can happen. By dialogue I mean a 'flow of meaning' and while in that flow we can sometimes encounter *communitas* - this is a kind of trans-personal feeling of wholeness, a bonding together which is a taste of that which we continuously sense is lacking. Of course, while there is someone there experiencing this *communitas* then there is still a separation but it makes oppression more difficult to practice.

Aren't You afraid of showing people the real oppression? Aren't You afraid of the responsibility You take with this?

Not sure I understand the question. It's really tempting isn't it to get turned on by the fight against the oppressors, against injustice and the destruction of the environment - to be galvanized by it. What I like about the Occupy movement is that they have been galvanized into inaction. Into just standing together in a street and shouting STOP! Inaction is the most positive action in that sense because they really don't know what they want yet, just that things cannot go on as they are. And for me this is really exciting because it means confronting reality together naked. Which means something really new has to happen.

What I love about TO and in particular RoD is that if facilitated in a way that is not prescriptive it can bring about such creative and new actions. But occasionally it brings about really astonishing inaction which changes entirely our perception of reality. My responsibility is to hold the space in a way that gives that a chance of happening and that is not something I fear at all. In fact, it is where I feel most at home.

By the previous question I mean that, as You said before - one of the biggest oppressions might be not asking what we really want. So my question is - You might show with Rainbow of Desires to people what

they really want. And it might be scary. You kind of hold responsibility for that.

Responsibility can be defined as '*where the buck stops*' - who is to blame or to take credit for what happens. But I don't buy into that because it creates such distance and fear. I make quite clear that each participant is responsible for themselves by that definition. Nevertheless, we are all in this together, trying to work out what is happening and what can be done or not done about it.

As a facilitator I prefer to define responsibility as my ability to respond (rather than react) and that depends on a lot of factors but most of all on respect and compassion. The root meaning of the word 'respect' comes from the Latin '*to be seen*' and 'compassion' comes from '*willing to suffer with.*' So I want therefore to really 'see' the people I work with and for them to see me and that means never coming to a conclusion about someone, always being curious and supportive in my attention. It also means not hiding behind the 'mask' of the facilitator, or at least wearing it lightly. If I can stay mindful, open and in solidarity with the group, and the group for each other then we can work together as equals, not just in principle which is worthless in the end, but in actuality. Actual equality, I think, is connected to compassion: to a solidarity based in allowing ourselves to share together this mysterious sensation of being alive in all its comedy and tragedy.