



Theatre of the Oppressed Training Week

Ecodharma Centre, Cataluyna – 26th-31st October 2015

REPORT FROM CREATIVE DIRECTOR

“Life changing, totally awesome, inspiring, very intense, thought provoking, highly educational, a week I will always remember.” - Participant Lex.

Project Goals & Beneficiaries

The main aims of the project:

- 1) 6 hours per day of Theatre of the Oppressed Training were delivered to 12 participants (10 female, 1 male, 1 indeterminate) for 6 days, totalling 36 hours of workshops, focussing on Image Theatre, Forum Theatre and the Rainbow of Desire, with an emphasis on enabling participants to deliver and facilitate workshops themselves.
- 2) Image discussions were held around the theme of gender. Forum theatre pieces were designed to discuss sexual harassment in public spaces, strategies for discussing work conditions with bosses, abandonment and isolation, and problems with domineering characters in meetings. Rainbow of desire techniques were used to examine a moment when someone didn't know what to do (a marriage proposal) and communication problems within a mother/daughter relationship in a family experiencing domestic violence.
- 3) Facilitator George Wielgus was financially supported by RtR to attend and run workshops.
- 4) Contacts were made with a variety of socially-engaged artists, particularly based in the UK and the Netherlands.
- 5) Facilitator scored 5/5 from 8 votes, 4 abstained.

“ I am honestly deeply impressed by what he’s offering this week. Fantastic workshop, really knows what he’s doing. Has been delightful to spend time with him.” - Alex, organiser.

Future Impact:

- 1) George Wielgus has been invited by the group to attend the COP21 Climate Conference in Paris in December 2015 to facilitate workshops designed for public performance of forum.
- 2) GW has been asked to design a set of masks for use in future workshops by one participant.
- 3) Ecodharma has expressed an interest in running more workshops in the future. A number of participants requested a longer series of workshops, establishing a key partner for future work.
- 4) One participant has made an enquiry as to whether Reboot The Roots can assist funding her expenses as a volunteer in a community garden for refugees and asylum seekers in Sheffield.

NOTES ON CONTENT OF COURSE

Introduction

The first day was intentionally very emotionally intense, and one participant reacted very strongly to the 'Chair of Oppression' exercise, citing an experience in her youth when she was wrongfully admitted to a mental asylum. Subsequent discussions designed a support network within the group answering the question 'what do we need?' to feel held and safe within the space.

Image Theatre

The Image Theatre work focussed on the topic of gender, and a discussion was generated around the ideas of gender-norms and representation. After initially designing an image of oppression around gender, the protagonist, although initially reluctant, was persuaded to try and design an ideal image, and afterwards reported a transformative sensation around the experience. A key discovery was around the idea of 'unintentional oppression', where despite the best intentions of a character, their very attitude and confidence may feel oppressive to others, despite the insistence that they 'be whatever they want'.

Forum Theatre

The forum theatre sessions designed three pieces:

1) The Impossible Task

WORKER 1 is moving cushions from one spot to another. A boss enters and informs them that if they move all the cushions, they will get a raise. The worker sets about the task, but WORKER 2 arrives who begins to put more cushions into her pile. Despite working very hard, when the day is finished, she still has many cushions, and is informed by the boss that she will get no raise.

INTERVENTIONS

- a) WORKER 1 attempts to speak to WORKER 2 who informs them that they had tried to strike last year and it had ended very badly. WORKER 1 tries to convince WORKER 2 that the mission is impossible.*
- b) WORKER 1 mutely accepts that the work cannot be done, and keeps doing it anyway.*
- c) WORKER 1 tries to talk to the BOSS, physically blocking their way and trying to explain that the set-up of the factory means the work can never be completed.*
- d) WORKER 1 manages to convince WORKER 2 to go and talk to the BOSS together and they attempt to negotiate better working conditions and get a raise regardless. The BOSS argues the raise is an incentive, not a promise.*
- e) WORKER 1 calls the International Workers of the World who send a union representative to the factory. WORKER 1 calls representatives from the other factories, and assembles a line of people across the factory who face off to the BOSS and explain that the working conditions are unsatisfactory. A tense negotiation ensues, with the threat of a strike and the closure of all factories.*

2) Abandonment

A sits dejectedly in a chair next to B. A explains that he doesn't want to be here, and doesn't understand why they have to do this. B replies that they agreed it already, and that they had decided there was no other option. C enters, ignoring A, very busy, and hands some forms to B to fill in. B

fills in the forms, makes excuses, and leaves, abandoning A.

INTERVENTIONS

- a) Replacing A, protagonist tries to discuss with B how he is feeling, what his desires are, why he is not comfortable staying there.*
- b) Replacing B, protagonist challenges C on her behaviour, getting her to talk to A and explain more fully what is happening.*
- c) Replacing C, removes B from the scene, and talks to A about his options, why he is here, that he can leave at any time, how the process works.*

3) The Meeting

Three people are excitedly and equally discussing the potential for a new project, where the road should go, where the ponds and orchards should be, when TOM enters and dominates the meeting. DAVE goes very quiet on his entry and says nothing, LUKE stares infatuated and nods assent at everything TOM says, while SID tries to get the others to speak and challenge TOM on his assumptions and control of the situation.

INTERVENTIONS

- a) DAVE tries to explain how TOM makes him feel when he enters and doesn't listen to the others, discussing better ways of communicating. He suggests a check-in before going on to work on the project. TOM becomes very defensive and closed.*
- b) TOM becomes much more effusive and open. This was rejected by the group as MAGIC.*
- c) SID rallies the support of DAVE and challenges LUKE on agreeing to everything TOM says before he enters.*

Rainbow of Desire

The RoD Technique – a woman has dinner with a man, they are both happy to be reunited after so long. The man invites the woman to sit on his knee, which she does, and then he reveals a ring and proposes to her.

The participant was invited to make images of the emotions she felt at this time: Excited, Shock, Nervousness. The audience suggested two more – Suspicion and Contentment – which the participant accepted. The scene was then replayed with each of these images in the protagonist's place. The participant then arranged them into an image, then an ideal image, then dialogued with each of them trying to convince them to become ideal. The images then battled each other.

Participant reported the experience 'fascinating' and 'powerful', and that it allowed her to reflect on how she was then, compared to how she is now, and what areas of her life she still needs to work on.

The Analytical Image – a mother and child ride home in a car from visiting a friend who hosts many children. A conversation ensues whereby we learn that there is domestic violence between the absent parent and the child, and that the mother does not wish to discuss it. The mother suggests that the only solution is to call social services, who will take the child away and not punish the

abusive parent.

The audience made images of the protagonist and the antagonist, which were then paired off together and the scene replayed. The participant whose scene is was also played the part of the mother, and reported that it helped her understand a good deal more about the dilemma of her mother. She also reported that it was encouraging for her to be able to analyse the images rationally without succumbing to emotion.

OVERALL

The residential nature of the experience did heighten the intensity of the week's work, not allowing people to return to what is normal or familiar. Many participants initially expressed surprise that the week would be facilitated by a single person, however, by the end the group were universally convinced of the facilitator's ability to hold a space and conduct the workshops. The workload was heavy but not unmanageable, however, the facilitator raises the point that RtR needs to discuss employing facilitators rather than just supporting their attendance financially in the future, especially as this course will hopefully generate a significant amount of funding in the future (1000 Euros in August 2016).

The future outcomes (Paris, Sheffield and repeated workshops) are very exciting, and bode well for the establishment of RtR branches in the UK and ideally the Netherlands. The Creative Director intends to follow up these opportunities and try to involve more people in the project.

CD is awaiting access to the participant profiles and will forward them when given. Generally, the participants were aged between 24-60, 3 from the Netherlands, 3 English but based in Spain, and the remainder spread between Bristol and Brighton. All were engaged in socially conscious work, including dramatherapy, music teaching, gardening, utopian communities, mental health and LGBTQI issues.

Suggestions for the future largely focussed on integrating the workshops more into the environment (Ecodharma). The CD thinks this would be more possible with greater planning before hand with the organisers, and potentially having a second facilitator. Overall, it was not an aim of the project to integrate it with the environment, but to facilitate training in TotO.

Several participants had an issue with one activity called 'Brazilian Indians' – a direct name from the book. Although understanding the concerns of dehumanising an 'other' the CD argues that it was intentional to trigger strong responses from the participants, who possibly were suffering from an attack of political correctness.

One of the most exciting successes was the facilitation of the Rainbow of Desire techniques – a more complicated, subtle and introspective version of forum theatre. It is hoped that in the future, RtR can suggest to split the different branches and do seperate workshops on FT, RoD and joker training.

And contrary to the Chairman's initial concerns, the CD had more than enough material to fill 6 days. :-)



FEEDBACK FORMS FROM PARTICIPANTS

THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED TRAINING WEEK Ecodharma, 26th-31st October 2015

1) What did you think of the week overall?

SUZANN: Blooming marvellous!

ANON 1: I did learn a lot. I felt comfortable. The timetable did work out well. During the training there was enough time to rest.

ANON 2 (F): I loved it! I learned so much both in terms of the techniques and in terms of learning *&^% for my facilitation technique in terms of the importance of going beyond language and playing it out. Embodying.

LEX: Life changing, totally awesome, inspiring, very intense, thought provoking, highly educational, a week I will always remember.

ANON 3: Pretty wicked! Great group and facilitation.

KATY GEORGE: Inspiring, motivating, very intense, thought-provoking. A little claustrophobic, in terms of emotions and social/private space/time. Very memorable, packed with learning. Feel very empowered and fairly confident to use a load of new skills.

JANNEKE: A great introduction into theatre of the oppressed and it motivates me to explore.

ANON 4 (F): The best educational thing I've done for years! It was a great learning/empowering on a personal and potentially work related/social level. Life changing.

RUTH CROSS: Fantastic facilitation. Beautiful group. I have learnt so much. Thankyou.

2) Which parts of the workshops worked best?

SUZANN: Experiencing – more valuable than the discussing.

ANON 1: Forum theatre. Rainbow of Desire ... Actually the whole concept. If we didn't do the games than the group process and trust weren't possible.

ANON 2 (F): The forum theatre days were really great and in depth. The first day was an intense and powerful introduction to the content of the course – especially the chair of oppression exercise.

ANON 3: Energy levels managed well. Good mix of mostly practical. Liked the exercises, games, analyses, openness, discussion, fun, experimenting.

KATY: The dynamisations/energisers. Machines exercise. Things involving touch.

JANNEKE: Clear instructions and doing it straight away. A good example of being a facilitator.

ANON 4 (F): The creative aspects ie the 'doing'. The feedback from actors and spectators. The strength of the guidance and space-holding and clarity.

RUTH: Loved getting straight into the games each day – then reflecting more afterwards. Peer-to-peer sharing. Depth and humour together.

3) What could be improved?

SUZANN: Possibly a 10 day course? We covered so much which felt necessary but it was so fast! Time in the programme structured around 10 days might have included opportunity to take relaxation/walking enabling the participants to more fully digest the experience and write a journal to consolidate the experience.

ANON 1: Preparation.

ANON 2 (F): I guess more reference back to the learning aims of the participants through the course. More handouts.

LEX: The little path next to the yurt. Include morre walking and break it up with some outside time. Have extra days to decompressor, split the week with a break inbetween. Connect this course with the land here more. Take the games outside and also adapt them to include this area. Outdoor decompression time. Connect with the garden. Work in the garden, we could have pruned all the trees, fed all the beds with an hour a day in the garden. (Giving people an opportunity to earth themselves and connect with the land.) Walking up to the community, get to know the area better and how people live. Have more outdoor adventures.

ANON 3: Removing the term 'Brazilian Indian/not asking the group to act as a group that most of them probably know nothing about – may encourage large ignorant generalisations and ideas of 'other'/backwardness.

KATY: Do half the activities/sessions outdoors. Split the course, have 1 and a half days in the middle to process alone; come back for final 3 days? Make it 2 weeks with practical-forum in street in Barcelona? Use the land here at Ecodharma. Put something 'back' in the earth e.g. have all participants do one half day session in the garden. Connect people with the things needed to eat, keep warm, be clean, drink water in the environment. Spend a half day working with the community at a 'halfway' between retreat house and the community point (garden). Do something 'real' and active outside of thought/imagination/emotion realm. Maybe make use of the drum. Use the surroundings as inspiration. Rocks bare crags. Forest creatures scree slopes, plunging valleys, snowy peaks, tiny farms ... could all this be integrated? So Ecodharma and TotO 'converge' somehow? Might be interesting.

JANNEKE: Ummm ... Maybe add in some meditation at the end of the day. And/or at the end of every session (5 min or 5 breaths).

ANON 4 (F): Questioning blind use of some exercises that could perpetuate discrimination (ie Brazilian Indians)

RUTH: It could be 2 weeks! With the 2nd week making some forums to try with the public.

4) How will you use what you learned in the workshops?

SUZANN: May use. Possibly within therapist training session. Practical theatre trainings in education and communities eg playback ...

ANON 1: I can use a lot of the exercise and games in my work as a dramatherapist. And I will start a training group with friends and other participants to try out new methods of Augusto Boal!

ANON 2 (F): I will use Rainbow of Desire techniques in workshops and courses supporting people to explore inner issues. Games and exercises in supporting reflecting, focus. Forum theatre for exploring issues in groups.

LEX: I will use it lots in my work creating a touring theatre show with 'aim to fly' the disabled led aerial group I am part of.

ANON 3: Practise by facilitating/joking workshops in small groups where I live and then would like to use it in therapeutic ways e.g. co-counselling and in activist groups, work places and community settings.

KATY: Hopefully with a refugee/asylum seeker women's group. Youth work. Outdoors!

JANNEKE: I'm curious to find out what I'll use. For sure the 'not forcing an opinion but aiming to discuss' – attitude of the joker.

ANON 4 (F): Will use techniques with Mental Health Service users and co-counselling groups to empower self-awareness and change. Also to suggest a course to be set up at the Recovery College. Use techniques to help LGBTQI and BAME voice/challenge the unique intersectional discriminations faced.

RUTH: I will integrate this with my facilitation work. I can't wait to try out in a workshop setting in Paris/Hungary.

5) What would you like more training in?

SUZANN: Everything! Joking particularly.

ANON 1: Cops in your head. Invisible theatre. Rainbow of Desire.

ANON 2 (F): Invisible theatre – devising, considerations, how to rehearse without 'the audience'.

LEX: Joker training, running groups, leading groups.

ANON 3: All of it after practicing a bit probably.

KATY: More joker training. Practice with diverse audiences. Less 'predictable' audiences. How to deal with emotional responses to exercises.

JANNEKE: All the separate parts, only then one week focussing on one.

ANON 4 (F): Joking. Variations on the technique. Invisible theatre to help reduce the stigma of mental health needs.

RUTH: Joker training – and more in-depth training in facilitating this technique esp. invisible theatre moving into direct action.

6) What did you think of the shape of the days/week and the daily schedule?

SUZANN: Opportunity for check-ins (time-held!) could be built into the week. Schedule did work for me. Perhaps an alternative might have been to have longer lunch breaks so offering participants chance to digest the morning before commencing, then working later into the evening.

ANON 1: It could be more days ... please.

ANON 2 (F): Great to have the evenings free.

LEX: Very packed and full – I would like a day at either end to arrive and decompress and also a little more time in the day in nature, with the option of being alone.

ANON 3: Perfect. Maybe one day we could start at 9 and finish 1 hour earlier for lunch to go for a walk – explore the landscape around.

KATY: Great that we learned so much but very busy. Lots in each day. Little processing time.

JANNEKE: Felt good.

ANON 4 (F): Really good, systematic and linked.

RUTH: Excellent – loved how much spaciousness there was. Felt able to balance learning sessions with nature connection and meditation.

7) What did you think of the group building support?

SUZANN: This particular group needed little support in that it self-managed. However that might not always be the case.

ANON 1: Okey – maybe sometime more checking.

ANON 2 (F): Amazing support from the group and this support seemed to be a natural outcome of the methods used.

LEX: Not sure what this means – I felt very supported by the group, the facilitators and totally held by this amazing location.

ANON 3: Not much needed with this group but the exercises/games helped during workshop, and liked the self-nominated listener method.

KATY: Felt very supported throughout. Think pairs/group work helped but also a very warm group who were open and inclusive.

JANNEKE: Worked well. I liked the personal responsibility.

ANON 4 (F): Although there were self-nominated people to offer support but think most found support from those they 'clicked' with which worked. It was important to establish that it was not our place to be therapists. Also the feedback in whole group after each exercise allowed for support.

RUTH: Good -really supportive group with long evening times. Would have liked to have had 'check-ins' in the mornings.

8) What did you think of the food and accommodation?

SUZANN: Superb! Thankyou Andrew, Alex and Ronja.

ANON 1: Good ... very good and beautiful.

ANON 2 (F): Wonderful food – great accommodation (except for the noisy woodworm). Amazing place! Maybe some handwash by the toilet would be good.

LEX: Excellent food, fantastic beds, great living room – I loved it all and will miss it :-). I did find it hard to have a cold shower when all the processing was full on – so I didn't and felt pretty yukky. A bit warmer shower would be nice.

ANON 3: Food was perfection. Accommodation good too.

KATY: Food was excellent. All of it. Accommodation lovely too. Lack of hot water made me wash very little but not a big deal.

JANNEKE: Great!

ANON 4 (F): Great, fantastic (apart from lack of hot water for showers!) Thank you. Ronja for the delicious food and Andrew and Alex for everything else.

RUTH: Perfect!

9) What did you think of the pre-course support?

SUZANN:All good.

ANON 1: I would have some more information before the training started.

ANON 2 (F): Really good help with funded places.

LEX: Excellent – the email were great and all my questions were answered very quickly.

ANON 3: Andrew was good at contacting me/getting back to me by email.

KATY: Great, really helpful and friendly. Attentive to detail, made the whole process very easeful. Thought provoking material.

JANNEKE: Good!

ANON 4 (F): Excellent. Everything was clear and I felt I had enough information.

RUTH: Perfect!

Please rate the facilitator (1-lowest, 5-highest):

1	2	3	4	5
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Please rate the content of the workshops (1-lowest, 5-highest)

1	2	3	4	5
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FACILITATOR/CONTENT

SUZANN: 5/4

ANON 1: 5/4

ANON 2 (F): 5/5

LEX: 5/5

ANON 3: 5/5

KATY: 5/5

JANNEKE: 5/4

ANON 4 (F): 5 (Thanks George :-))/4

ANY OTHER COMMENTS (please continue overleaf):

SUZANN: What dates are the next training? C'mon George! I personally would have liked more elders on the course. Aware that this cannot be scheduled/arranged into the training. There was a dominant age-range which made for a certain dynamic which I struggled with at times.

LEX: Thankyou very much to George who has shared his huge amounts of knowledge so well. He

is a great educator. Thankyou to Alex, Andrew and Ronya for keeping things going. This week has been a total privilege and I will do my best to share all the precious jems I have gained this week. I couldn't thankyou all enough for making this possible for us to come on a funded place. Big thanx, big hugs and tea's in the post.

ANON 3: The recommended donation seems very high (the start/lowest price) – would expect the amount to start at the price that covers one participant's costs at most.

KATY: Alex and Andrew were also really great. Warm and helpful and felt very much like part of things not separate; but watchful and caring.

JANNEKE: It would be great if there would be support in exploring further. Where are good examples? Maybe even option for seeing, joining, learning more.

ANON 4 (F): I would love this to develop into a longer course with more strands. It was an invaluable tool for every part of life. I am grateful and inspired to make changes to my life and others. Awesome!