

Rainbow of Desire – Environment, Growth, Development¹

at the 4th Austrian Development Conference, Innsbruck, November 14th – 16th

Workshop (Nov. 15th, 3.30 – 7.00 p.m.):

At the Workshop with 12 mainly young female students (one man, one woman older than 25) we started with “point and turn”, after I learned the names of the participants and sharers of knowledge (in German: Teilnehmerinnen und -geberinnen) by heart as a matter of respect. The insights into the issue were already interesting and the collective consciousness began to awaken. One comment e.g. was about how our thoughts already change and train our physicality. On a general level and understanding of ourselves as a community that is a bigger living organism (in German: Gemeinwesen) it became meaningful to see how awareness and consciousness are already a way of action, whereas the intellectual discussion was still asking for concrete suggestions of what to do! Other thoughts were about possible growth in relation to the imagined infinity or how an imagined goal couldn't be reached. One term manifested the dualism and double meaning of “going on” and “(further) more” (in German: weiter). “Going on” is thinking about the time aspect of life (spirit) and that it will go on. “More” is focusing on the space (material) and that there should be always more of the same. We continued with “Hypnosis”, first one leading one and then one leading the whole group. The reflections and the meaning making of these two exercises lead us to some important cores of the issue (Environment, Growth, Development). It was about responsibility, pleasure, exhaustion, chaos, changing directions, gaining speed and how simple movements can create huge effects. It was astonishing to see the effects already with 12 people – imagine them within a community, a society or within global connections! Just about responsibility: the difference between being in a couple and caring about one other person versus having 11 people somehow attached to you was recognizable. People immediately lost the sense of responsibility towards them and concentrated on their own behaviour without caring about the others or even recognizing that they are there! With the “Gordic Knot” we recognized that two separate circles are possible although it seems that there was interconnectedness in the first place! What does that mean regarding the global market, economies, the idea of that we are “one world”? Are we? Does the Western World allow that other worlds co-exist? A second “Gordic Knot” showed us that humanity seems to have a tendency towards complexity. We don't accept that easy ways are there. Isn't it a paradox that we value easy ways of doing things less, that it creates disappointment when something was easy to do, that answers are not accepted if they are simple? After a short break we did “Complete the Image” or as I call it “Dialogue of Images”. Because of time pressure I decided to include “Stop'n'think”, “Internal Monologues” and then Dialogues into the “Dialogue of Images”. It worked very well and they could do it. Only the step into the Internal Monologue and then from Monologue to Dialogue needed some time for some and created a little confusion, but creative confusion. After that I asked for three images that they first should create in their minds about themselves in relation towards either the Environment, Growth or Development or a representative of the three issues. Three volunteers offered their images and the group voted for one. The benefit of not naming the image allowed us to see different stories within the frozen image. Was it a “Third World Country” trying to climb out of the dept trap and the World Bank or the IMF or the “First World” standing with disrespect, shaking its head, telling that this is stupid? Or was it a daughter deciding to work in the development sector (in German: EZA), going her own way making a difference in the world and a mother telling her

¹ Rainbow of Desire is a technique of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) (www.theatreoftheoppressed.org). The way I do and understand it is very much influenced by David Diamond's Theatre for Living (www.headlinetheatre.com), which is an offspring of TO.

that this is senseless and stupid? It also could have been an NGO on one leg, jumping and “making the clown” to impress the powerful lobbies that decide on the money. A brief discussion didn’t lead to an agreement about one story and so I decided to let the improvisations decide. Now I think it would have been helpful to agree beforehand to avoid certain dynamics. It turned out to be the story between a mother and her daughter. The daughter wanted to reach her goals facing the opposite direction of the position of the mother, and it took some time to find something out about the goals. Still they were in a haze. The mother wanted that everybody does what she says and I asked her what’s behind that desire, not addressing her desire to others. She wanted to be “big” (important). The Rainbow of the daughter included a cowering position in front of the mother (a fear), a standing posture looking up with spread arms (a desire), a posture lying on the floor with one leg and one arm risen (a fear) and a posture confronting the mother with palms up (a desire). The improvisations showed that there were also other desires like being supported, without naming a concrete action of support that could have been done by the mother, the will to go and leave everything behind, the need to gain understanding. The mother was either laughing, shouting, or patronizing in a very harsh way, telling her daughter that she is not mature enough, that she never had done anything on her own, that she is worthless, that her plans will always fail and so on. The relationship between First and Third World, as we call it, was always visible too. The improvisations and reflections afterwards lead to insights about how difficult it is to change an established system, how frustrating it is to be confronted with somebody who always knows better, how much we (the daughter, NGOs, underprivileged) move around and try things whereas the others (the parents, the First World, IMF, World Bank, the USA,...) stand still, not willing to move and just repeating their unnegotiable statements.

Unfortunately we didn’t have time to do the mother’s rainbow.

Public Rainbow (Nov. 16th, 9.30 – 10.30 a.m.)

I started with a brief explanation of Rainbow of Desire and invited the approximately 250 people to do “X and O” with me. Then we did “X and Names” as an introduction game. Using the example of the two sides of the brain that try to collaborate in this exercise I made a statement of how complicated it could become if we work in networks, that linked thinking is difficult and that we are already linked to more in the world that we are capable of. (I didn’t mention, but examples would have been: we are linked to coffee farmers in Central America, to Sweat Shop workers in Bangladesh, to miners in the Congo and so on.)* Then we all did the “Dialogue of Images”. There was a lot of laughter in the room (for the first time at the conference) and a lot of movement (also for the first time). Then I asked for images of “Me in relation to Development, Growth, Environment” that show my confusion after this conference and the complexity of the issues on a personal level. Three people came up with images in their mind. They wanted to create their images in relation to environment (a young female student), development (a university professor of my age) and growth/development (a lady ~ 45). I asked for volunteers who can be true and empathic with these issues and the three created their images. The audience chose the student’s image with her/us^o and the environment, both facing the same direction, one foot in front, fists up. She said that she feels powerful and wants to change something (again the “something”, impossible to name, except for “the world” which is as good as “something”). The environment wanted to fight. We did three colours of the Rainbow. The desires and one internal ambivalence of us (2 told by the student, 1 by the audience) were: embracing the environment, sitting in the back of the environment (ambivalence) on the floor, standing with spread arms. When she created the posture on the floor I asked her what kind of desire this is. She replied that it’s not a desire (I was asking her to create a desire). I asked if it is a fear and she said no. Then she tried to explain what it is but I didn’t understand. It was an intense moment for me, being on the floor

with her in a tiny, cowered position not knowing what she is trying to tell me. There was silence in the room and the silence was on my back. It seemed endless but I guess it was just 2 seconds and then I stood up and asked the audience: Does anybody in here has an understanding of what she explained. A lot of hands in the air and a big relief on my side. Who can represent that? A volunteer entered the space and she gave me the idea of an “internal ambivalence” that is there on the floor. We continued and the student sent the colours of the rainbow one by one to encounter the environment. It was beautiful! There was dance, laughter, dialogues of understanding and misunderstandings, motions in space or being stuck and an audience that had a lot of ideas what they were seeing, watching and observing and how this relates to the issue of Environment. I did a few techniques to clarify some things but very little was necessary to get impressive images of how we relate to the environment. This time my timing was much better and we did the environment’s rainbow as well. Then we saw the desires and the ambivalence of us and the desires and fears of the Environment encountering in an aesthetic space. To me the most impressive improvisation was how the environment responded to the embracing desire where it became obvious that the environment is afraid of its protectors. The audience loved this point of view and it explained a lot about the unique status that mankind reclaims for itself lowering everything else and that it sometimes doesn’t matter any more if man either destroy or protect environment as long as we don’t change our attitude and recognize that we must not separate us from everything else (nature, the others,...) but see that we are nature, that we are also the others! It was amazing how everybody seemed to enjoy the theatre and the knowledge that emerged out of it. By accident (?) the last improvisation offered us again a musical, also seen by an audience member as a special kind of Austrian genre called “Heimatfilm” which is romantic, idyllic and emphasizing the beauty of everything (like Sound of Music). Within this beauty there was a lot of ignorance and cruelty and at the same time it was very funny to watch! In the end everybody received a big applause, a lot of happy faces where in the room, and I had nothing left to do than thanking everybody, thanking the organizers for their trust in me and thanking Augusto Boal and David Diamond who made it possible that I could to this! Peace, not Passivity!

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* In German: Je mehr wir “vernetzt” sind, umso schwieriger ist es , sich zu “ent-wickeln”.
° From this moment on it was not “her” image anymore but it belonged to all. It became an image of the collective consciousness.