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Language of Liberation? A Dialogue on Image Theatre Practice

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Language of Liberation? A Dialogue on Image Theatre Practice[1]

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Image work is a central and integral modality of Theatre of the Oppressed. This article examines liberatory, oppressive, and (at times) neglected aspects of Image work. Starting with the desire to know what the Image is really about, the authors invite the reader into a conversation by asking: why do we use Images, who are the Images for, how are Images experienced, and are they doing what is intended? Recognizing the inherent contradictions of using words alone to engage with Images, the authors employ a combination of text and photographs to facilitate this conversation.

Image work is a central and integral aspect of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and has been used to create innumerable Forum, Invisible, and Legislative Theatre productions. For each of us, it is a frequently used tool both within and outside of (strict) TO contexts. In this essay, we set out to explore aspects of Image Theatre connected to story-sharing and uncertainty. In particular, we are interested in

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how Images based on people's lived experiences relate to oppression and/or liberation. Why is it that people want Images to be explained with words? How, and when, do we teach the language of Images? What happens when, as suggested by Boal, others come and adjust/manipulate/dynamize "their" Image? Are there some populations, or times, when it is better to work in the language of Images, and others when it is not? We invite you to ponder and reflect on these questions alongside us as we use prompts to generate and read Images, explore why we create Images silently, examine the function of language and the language of Images, and consider Images as pedagogy. We invite you to do this by accompanying us through our own Image dialogue processes.

In order to contextualize this piece, we'd like to introduce some thoughts about our individual Image work. As a youth educator and adult professional development facilitator, Pavla finds Images useful both as a story-sharing tool and as a means of illuminating the power dynamics and their effects in inter-personal and professional relationships. Images slow things down. They allow for witnessing, for experiencing, they have the capacity to highlight important elements of the story shared. Through the Image, we are closer to the meaning, the subtext, the intention. Creating Images is a gift which facilitates deeper understanding of the situation, the individual's role in it, and the intricacies and patterns of relationships to power.

Images then become both the objects and the subjects of the exploration as they seem to have their own way of communicating and working. This process is not an attempt at personification, but a realization that we witness the workings of a methodology that brings the unknown—the unexpected—and carries the possibility of seeing, visioning, and the "what ifs" out into the world—into the individual and group consciousness of those with whom we work. We are presented with ambiguity, which might be uncomfortable for some, but holds a potential to generate meaning and thought-provoking questions where our biases and points of view are exposed and examined. "Image and imagination thus become an interplay of structure and de-structure, the image providing a form of closure to play with; the imagination

providing a way of opening up the form to possibility" (Linds & Vettraino, 2008, p. 4). From this understanding, we can individually and collectively build a new future as we work toward positive change and as we together create new possibilities for being in the world. Through Image Theatre facilitation one can learn to step into the unknown and to trust that Image work will bring rich insights that would not have otherwise been possible—would not have been achieved by other teaching, examining, or reflective means.

Wolfgang resists Image work based exclusively upon a single person's story if that person is not going to have the opportunity to share their story. It is difficult for us trained in language to leave language. Too often images are seen as representations of reality and ways to symbolize rather than universalize, or sign. This issue raises the question for us: is part of our work to train people to move away from thinking of Images as representational, and to teach them to think of them as something… else? We wonder if it is perhaps unfair for us to ask people to "leave their story" or give their story to the group. Might this request be seen as a sort of theft? We ask someone for their story for us to use, for us to "manipulate" in an effort to find the universal, yet we will not even honour the Image maker (the story teller) by allowing them to share it with us in its untouched form. Does the Image maker perceive some sort of silencing or erasing in that process? This becomes a particularly sensitive issue when we work with marginalized or already silenced communities. Can the limiting of their actual voice to find the collective voice be a form of violence or oppression upon the individual?

We explore these questions in this paper through our documentation of three consecutive sessions of an ongoing monthly gathering of TO practitioners, academics, and affiliates based in Toronto called the TO Hub (Hub). During these gatherings, we created Images in response to verbal prompts and questions as well as in response to other Images. This work, done mostly in silence, developed to a process we call *Image Dialogue*.

We invite you to explore our questions through engaging with many of these Images. The photographs accompanying the text throughout this essay are core meaning-makers in this article and serve as anchors to the theoretical and applied issues we explore within. We include them in hope that they stand on their own, just as the actual Images in space and time would. We acknowledge the difference, of course, between looking at a photograph of an Image and being present in the same space and time as the Image created. Nonetheless, we resist presenting you with an analysis of the Images, and choose not to comment on them except for providing the context of their creation and the prompts that initiated them. We also include a question for you, the reader, with each Image as an invitation to connect cognitively and emotionally. We invite you to spend some time with each Image and examine it carefully as you would during Image Theatre workshop or session.

<center>**Literal Meaning Acknowledged?**</center>

This paper was born from a workshop at the Hub in March 2017 using TO techniques to look at homophobia and transphobia from the perspectives of family members, social service providers, and justice activists. Wolfgang facilitated the workshop, which was open to anyone interested in exploring the identified themes through TO techniques; Pavla was one of the workshop participants. After about an hour of theatre exercises and warm-ups (much of it Image-based), participants moved into groups of three. They formed triads based upon "socio-grams" with people who were frequently in different socio-locations than themselves.

Once they had formed groups, participants were asked to share a situation they had been part of (as oppressed, oppressor, ally, or witness) that was about oppression based on sexual orientation or trans-identity. Once they had shared, they were asked to find common elements of the stories and make a series of five Images. People were allowed to use speech/sound in their presentations, but they were not required to. Few chose to use words. Pavla noticed there was a strong desire in her group to tell the stories behind

the Images. This observation led her to send the following thought-question to Wolfgang immediately following the session:

> Many times, while facilitating Image Theatre in groups, I find people express a want to share exactly what the story was about—the story, the setting, and other details. Then, the work with the Images (exploring Images) becomes a guessing game from the audience to which the Image actors either vigorously nod or shake their heads. So, it seems that moving from the literal to symbolic/representative/ambiguous is a bit of a problem for some people. I, in my facilitation strongly move away from the literal, but at the same time, sometimes I sense that people are possessive and want their "truth or reality" be acknowledged. Your thoughts? (P. Uppal, personal communication, March 26, 2017)

Pavla's prompt sparked many additional questions regarding Image work with groups, particularly those who have not been "trained" in TO techniques. This discussion resulted in a process of reflection, discussion, reading, and analyzing. We decided to dedicate two Hub gatherings to Image making around questions posed by Pavla's prompt. The Hub members gather once a month to explore, share, and develop TO processes. All participants are encouraged to bring ideas for exploration and we thought this would be an ideal community to delve into these topics more.

Thus, during our next Hub session, we read Pavla's thought-question to the group but instead of a verbal discussion, we asked them to create Images in response. We were interested in discovering what we could learn by holding our initial conversation through Images alone. Wolfgang as a Joker read the prompts and was also available as clay, Pavla documented the process by taking pictures. The following five photographs are documents of the responses. Through the language of Images, a dialogue began during which we worked non-verbally, creating Images and then responding by sculpting other participants into new Images. Throughout the Image Dialogue process all participants, including the Joker, worked silently. The large mirror in the studio allowed us to do that as clay could see/witness the Image from the

outside as well. In these Images, the sculptor had the option of including themselves into the Image, which all did. In Image 1, one person sculpted the first Image based upon the initial prompt: "In my facilitation of Image Theatre, I move away from the literal. However, sometimes I sense that participants are possessive and want their truth or reality be acknowledged. Your thoughts?"

Fig. 1. Exploration of the initial prompt, June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What do you see in the image?

Fig. 2. Exploration of the initial prompt, June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: How did the Image change by moving to another spot and changing posture?

Fig. 3. Exploration of the initial prompt, June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: Do you see "literal" and "universal" in the Image. If so, where?

Fig. 4. Exploration of the initial prompt, June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: Do you see "reality" or "Truth"? If so, where?

Fig. 5. Exploration of the initial prompt. June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: Do you see "participants" and "facilitators"? If so, where?

Why Use Images?

In developing his adult reading programs, Freire (1973) drew upon images as a tool to analyze the world. In *Education for Critical Consciousness*, he shows reproductions of drawings (images) he used to teach reading. The images were shown and analyzed through questions and answers. From the analysis, themes were identified, and then words—related to the lives of the learners—were taught. Dialogue was central to Freire's (1970/1990) work:

> Dialogue is the encounter between men (sic), mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming-between those who deny other men the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them…If it is in speaking their word that men, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which men achieve significance as men. (p. 76-77)

While Freire uses the image, it is always in service to understanding the world, and as a step towards dialogue—to challenge oppression.

Boal, of course, was significantly influenced by Freire. Like Freire, the Image was central to Boal's work. And like Freire, Boal (1979) saw the Image as one stage in the route to discourse "in which the spectator-actor creates 'spectacles' according to his (sic) need to discuss certain themes or rehearse certain actions" (p. 127). This process is achieved through Boal's (1979) original four-stage process whereby the spectator "transforms" into an actor through "knowing the body," "making the body expressive," "the theatre as language" (which has three degrees: Simultaneous Dramaturgy, Image Theatre, and Forum Theatre), and finally "the theatre as discourse" (p. 127). Image work, as originally conceived, was one aspect of a long series towards discussion, towards dialogue, towards change. "In order to understand this *poetics of the oppressed* one must keep in mind its main objective: to change the people—'spectators,' passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon—into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (Boal, 1979, p.122). Boal (1979) explains:

> In Image Theatre, the spectator participates in a direct way. He is asked to express his views on a certain theme of common interest that the participants wish to discuss…The participant is asked to express his opinion, but without speaking, using only the bodies of other participants and "sculpting" with them a group of statues, in such a way that his opinions and feelings become evident. (p.135)

Thus, we see the demand for work without words. Boal is adamant that the sculptor "is not allowed to speak under any circumstances" (p. 135), and he restates this several times in the pages describing Image Theatre. For Boal (1979), Image Theatre has "extraordinary capacity for making thought *visible*. This happens because use of the language idiom is avoided. Each word has a denotation that is the same for all, but it also has a connotation that is unique for each individual" (pp. 137-138). The differences between words and Images, for Boal, is the clarity that exists with the Image, arguing that with images there is "no denotation-connotation dichotomy. The image synthesizes the individual connotation and the collective denotation" (p. 138).

In his later work, Boal expanded upon this idea. Image Theatre became a way to understand the connotation. What does family mean to you? Create an image. What does boss mean to you? Make an image. What are your desires? Show through image. Image Theatre becomes a way to understand who we are working with, and what different ideas mean to those in the room. Boal (2002) also recognizes that images "don't replace words, but they cannot be translated into words either—they are a language in themselves" (p. 175). For Boal, images can be *sinaletic* or *symbolic*. In symbolic images, "signifier and signification are separate (the flag symbolizes the Mother Country, but it is not it)" (p. 175). With sinaletic images, signifier and signified are the same…The 'thumbs up gesture for 'OK' is symbolic, a look of sadness is sinaletic" (p. 175). Boal explains that "Dealing with images we should not try to 'understand' the meaning of each image, to apprehend its precise meaning, but to *feel* those images, to let our memories and imaginations wander: *the meaning of an image is the image itself*" (p. 175, italics in original).

In our own work, creating and sculpting Images in silence deepens the process of making the body expressive and relying on the language of Image to communicate what we want to say. All the Images we share in this article were created in complete silence by different sculptors. We asked the Hub members: Why do we create Images silently?

Fig. 6. Why do we create Images silently? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: If you could physically respond to this Image, what would you do?

Fig. 7. Why do we create Images silently? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What feeling does this Image invoke?

Fig. 8. Why do we create Images silently? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What insight does this Image bring to your understanding about creating Images?

Learning the Language: Why do People Want to Use Words?

If, as Boal suggests, Images are a language, then it is important to find ways for those we work with to develop the language skills by which to communicate. We asked members of the Hub to sculpt in Images their responses to these ideas through the question, "Why do you want to explain the Image?"

Fig. 9. Why do you want to explain the Image? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What answers does this Image offer for you?

Fig. 10. Why do you want to explain the Image? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What might be some reasons for the desire to explain an Image that are explored here?

Fig. 11. Why do you want to explain the Image? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What title would you give to the Image?

Intriguingly, this question garnered the most conversation (Image creation), from all the prompts that we subsequently explored during Hub sessions. The desire to explain is a common one, and it is a pressing one. We look at an Image, we observe, and the observation leads to responses. We respond emotionally, intellectually, physically. One response is an *interpretation*—either internal or vocalized. We humans cannot help but interpret behavior or body language of our fellow humans. Thus, spectators inevitably, often subconsciously, engage in the process of interpretation. This process is not initiated by a facilitator; we suggest it is an innate and essential human capacity. We need to be able to discern friendly body language from unfriendly one—on the most fundamental level, it is a survival skill (Moore & Yamamoto, 2012). Such interpretation is a process of meaning-making, as we need to "understand" what is being communicated to us. The understanding of non-verbal language—of Image (static or in action)—comprises a variety of elements: emotional, factual, cultural, historical, physical, and visual (aesthetical), all moving towards story-telling/making. It can include one or all of the elements, interwoven. The viewer

thinks: "I understand the meaning." "I can relate." "I can respond." Or, not. Such ability to use body for both meaning-making and for communicating should allow us to work in communities with groups that have never had formal theatre training.

Nonetheless, the urge to explain ourselves verbally so that the others will understand intellectually or have something explained to us verbally and intellectually is a strong one. Such explanations frequently stay in the realm of literal meaning. And, as we discuss below, they strip the Image of its diversity of meaning, its metaphorical, symbolic, or sinaletic and transcendent capacity. As Boal (2002) explains,

> . . . [T]he whole method of Theatre of the Oppressed, and particularly the series of the Image Theatre, is based on the *multiple mirror of the gaze of others*—a number of people looking at the same image, and offering their feelings, what is evoked for them, what their imaginations throw up around that image. This multiple reflection will reveal to the person who made the image its hidden aspects. It is up to the protagonist (the builder of the image) to understand and feel whatever she wants to or is able to take from this process. (p. 175)

Perhaps the need to explain an Image comes from an ingrained need to belong to a group that shares the same view—a tribe mentality. We all know the feeling of satisfaction that develops when we have arrived at the same conclusion with a group of people. It is a moment of congruence or validation, a moment of belonging. Such moments are important and need to be celebrated and acknowledged. We suggest it is sometimes necessary to explain an Image verbally as it will facilitate group cohesion or deeper connection to a vital issue shared by the group. Standing alone with an opinion is a formidable act; while brave, it is not one that all of us are capable of doing in all moments. Sometimes, we prefer to *understand*.

Fig. 12. Why do you want to explain the Image? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What do these people have in common?

When the need for explanation comes from the Image creators themselves, different aspects, relationships, and motivations need to be considered. As a group facilitator, one needs to balance the energy and attention between the individual and collective. Sharing personal stories is a powerful way of being in the world; listening and witnessing other people's stories facilitates the process of being heard and being seen. However, in Image Theatre we are ultimately moving away from individual to the collective as we search for the universal (Boal, 1994).

Images have the power to invoke stories and bring responses shaped in stories. One of the immediate responses to seeing an Image may be creating a story, especially to supply meaning for oneself. When we facilitate work with Images, we often ask: "what's going on?" even though we are looking at a static Image. We immediately start the process of story-making —filling in answers to questions such as who are the characters? What is their relationship? What might have happened before, or what is likely to happen after? This ability to create and believe a fiction story is a trait unique to humans (Harari, 2016).

Image Theatre as story-telling brings two important worlds to consciousness: the world of "what is," and the world of "what if."

The main purpose of TO is to create change. If we are to change anything, we need to view reality as malleable and ourselves as agents of change. An experience, a situation that happens, is a neutral thing. It is the story we tell about it that has the impact on how we cope and on our quality of life. Thus, changing the way we tell the story will change our ability to change our actions (Wilson, 2016). Viewing an Image, and seeing the multiplicity of interpretations and the diversity in responses, we start to open the door to people that view the world differently from us, and start to realize that we ourselves may be able to shift what and how we see reality around us. It is the process of *conscientization* Freire (1970/1990) describes: growing social critical consciousness about the hierarchies in the world and our ability to relate to other people and varied social contexts. From this shift in perspective, we realize that the story can be re-told and changed, and that we can be the actors in such change.

Fig. 13. Why do you want to explain the Image? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What if you cannot explain what is going on in an Image? How does it make you feel?

Change, even change for the better, is a stressful event. The uncertainty of what will or might come is scary for many. Is then the fear of uncertainty behind resistance to let the Image speak for itself or behind the urge to tell everyone what the Image is supposed to communicate? What is my own facilitator's comfort level of uncertainty? How much risk can I take as a facilitator? The uncertainty is not an ephemeral concept, but a very real and practical pedagogical principle. Freire's (1970/1990) pedagogy brings the element of uncertainty into the center as it invites the students/participants to a dialogue in which both teacher and student are co-intent on the learning. In true dialogue, unlike in banking education, the educator/facilitator does not know what will happen. They ask a question and truly listen—waiting for response. Images are practical representations of liberating or problem-posing pedagogy, generating meaning together with participants, not knowing in advance what will come. In dialogic pedagogy, all participants produce themes for discussion and pose questions. This pedagogical principle is a fundamental one filled with uncertainty and trust: trust in the student or participant's ability to respond, trust in the facilitator's own ability to accept the response and generative themes, and trust that they can be worked with further. In banking education, the educator/facilitator possess all the knowledge and thus is in control of the process at all times holding the power over the meaning-making (Freire, 1970/1990, p. 71). In work with Images, this would mean that one dominant interpretation of an Image would be accepted as the correct one, and such interpretation would be forced on others.

Is the fear of uncertainty that participants often express, locked in the body-language principle of Image Theatre, in the fact that we, modern humans, are getting far removed from body knowledge and thus losing the trust in our body's expressive ability? We do not usually create formal Images to communicate in everyday life, and as such, collectively, we may not be sure what people in the room will make of our Image. Further, the body is not a neutral sculpting clay with which we create Images and can insert any meaning we wish to communicate. Bodies carry their own meaning irrespective of our intentions—they communicate and are interpreted in moral, social, political, cultural, community, personal, and other

contexts that are present in the room. This is certainly why Image Theatre work has the potential to bring rich critical dialogue in and about any of the given contexts; however, it also makes it difficult for some people to have clarity on communication through Images. Images are a language—are we losing the ability to understand the language of Images? We consider that Image Theatre is not a new language in the context of human evolution. However, it is becoming clear to us that in our cultural and social circumstance we need to make people aware again of their bodies and train the bodies again to be expressive and receptive.

After working non-verbally with Image Dialogue for almost two hours at the Hub session, we verbally discussed how working non-verbally and relying on the body-language feels to the participants.

> Yuen Chun Chan: "...[W]hen I let go of the notion of wanting to understand what she [the sculptor] wants to …. what is the meaning, let go of this demand [gesturing circular motions toward her head indicating thoughts], and then the room is full of energy…reflective, inspiring me [gesturing circular motions toward the centre of her body] and the group suddenly—the, the energy! That's what I really enjoy…"
>
> Helen Dea: "I feel like it's more freeing as well. And I am almost conscious of being almost self-indulgent. Because it is a wonderful feeling … because it is language that feels really! Comfortable."

Both these participants express an emotional response to sustained Image Dialogue which seems to go beyond intellectual understanding, and moves towards pleasure through the dialogue. While it is not possible to make any assumptions based up these two quotes, we are left wondering what knowledge was gained that words might prohibit.

Is There a Risk of Perpetuating Violence by Denying the Use of Words?

There is a discomfort with the idea of facilitators refusing to let people use words to describe their images when working with populations who have historically been denied voice, such as LGBTQ+ youth who have had to remain silent about their gender-identity or sexual orientation due to fears of violence. There is a discomfort at times for both of us in how we work (analyze, dynamize, manipulate) the Images. In TO, it is imperative that one has an awareness of oppression and how we perpetuate individual and systemic aspects of it. During one Hub meeting, prior to doing Image work for the day, those present were speaking about a recent PTO conference (2017, in Detroit). One participant shared about a session she had attended which used Images. During the session, a young woman of color had been sculpted into an Image. It was a physically difficult Image to hold and so she had put her knee down. One of the participants (read by those telling the story as a white, cis-male) said that the Image was not actually the same when she knelt down and asked her to move back into the original position. The woman complied. This small act, one that most facilitators who work with Images are very familiar with, became the embodiment of power-over for the person sharing the story. In making the Image, there was a forcing, and ignoring of power.

In the dictates of Image work there are many rules, stated and not, and these at times risk perpetuating oppression. The example above is one of a physical nature. There is also a silencing. Did the person in the Image perceive herself as having the opportunity to state her discomfort? If she had the opportunity, did she feel comfortable, confident, willing, or able to do so?

Image 14 is a response to this story. The choice of who was standing (three white-presenting cis men), who was lying down (a woman from China), and many other elements (hands, faces, eyes, feet, etc.) were carefully decided. After the clay who was lying down stood up, she started to cough. She informed the rest of us that when she lies down, she has physical reactions, that we should not worry about it, and she would do a few things to deal with her health. Prior to making the Image, we were unaware of these factors. The person "chose" to lie down after being placed in that position, and to stay quiet while doing so, yet

there were physical consequences. She did speak about her health and needs after the Image was created.

Fig. 14. Why do you want to explain the Image? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: How does this Image interrogates power? Is there power in "explaining an Image"?

We have both had experiences of participants—unexpectedly and unannounced—leaving multi-session arts programming we were facilitating. We suspect this is common to many who work in community: sometimes people leave programs and do not return. Sometimes there are ways to reach out to have a conversation about their decision to leave, and many times there are not. One may hear rumors, ideas, suggestions, and comments about why they left, but it is often difficult, or impossible, to substantiate these. How many people have left workshops or programs because of a sense of silencing or oppression within the workshop? We worry that in our work doing Image Theatre with communities we may have, at times, silenced participants.

Experiencing Image Work

Pavla sent the following email to participants of the initial homophobia and transphobia workshop, a few weeks after it had ended:

> I wanted to ask you a two-part question. In my work, I often encounter that some people want to share exactly what the image is about and what they were trying to communicate through the image. At the same time, I as a facilitator want to move from the personal to the universal and beyond the representational interpretations. On Saturday, we worked with the images—giving titles, intervening, dynamizing and no-one discussed the actual/ literal. So, I wonder (this is the personal part of the question) if any of you were left "hanging" because we did not acknowledge what the image was about for you or you were not given any space/time for that kind of sharing. And (this is the facilitator's hat part of the question [sic]), I wonder whether you experience this dynamic in your work, and then how do you work with it/approach it.

The following are responses from a few of the workshop participants:

> Sarah Magni: "I actually went through a similar thought process. Where I internally asked both these questions. I've lived the life of many artists. Initially and primarily my background is that of theatre as entertainment first. I went to theatre school, I was paid to perform in the work of others and under that hat I would say it's up to the audience (and maybe even the performer themselves) to perceive what they perceive, feel how they feel, leave with questions and continue to digest that meaning after they've left. I'm used to the element of mystery. But I'm trained/wired that way so I wonder what that experience is like for others who aren't. I would imagine it might feel as though their story isn't being heard the way they want it to but I'm also sure there are ways to avoid that feeling without literal explanations of images too. This type of thing comes up with the youth I work with all the

time. What's important for me to explain is that this isn't a guessing game and more importantly than explaining the literal or trying to figure out what literally is going on it's about a connectedness that transcends literal and is much bigger. It's about human expression and feeling and seeing and accepting and listening to yourself and others. It's powerful and I find, with youth at least, once they can get beyond having to present and explain they really get it and it feels magical for them. It was most profound to me to work with two other people whose views and experiences of the world could not be more different than mine (thank you to Wolfgang for setting that up this way). I've been learning and re-learning listening and empathy. This was a way to test and keep tuning that. In the end, TO is not about me it's about us and beyond us."

Magni brings up many important points: what is comfortable for the individual, training, not feeling heard, the idea of guessing and "right" answers, symbolic vs. sinaletic, the intellectual vs. the affectual, listening, and the notion of community. A crucial element is the transformation of the young people she works with once they embrace the structure imposed upon them. Like many things in life, there is an initial discomfort. We have a language we use, which denotes and connotes, and as TO practitioners we are asking people to shift the language used. As Wittgenstein (1953) points out, language is both practical and social. When one enters into language one is entering into a culture, and once one masters the rules and understands the denotations one is tacitly obeying the rules. We are asking participants to learn a new language.

We are reminded here of Lorde's (1984) phrase "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 110). Although Freire used images to teach reading he refused to use the texts of the dominant ideology to do the teaching. His was a rejection of banking education. Is there a parallel rejection that can happen with Image work? We wonder if the comfort of words keeps participants, and us as facilitators, obeying the rules we seek to question. At the same time, we strive to honour the perspectives, feelings, and experiences of those we work with.

Patty Jarvis: "In response to your question, I had a moment of frustration when I felt that my interpretation of one of the images seemed completely different from what others said. I convinced myself that the actual meaning wasn't relevant to the process but I wonder now if, at times and depending on the group it would be good to discuss interpretations of the images. I recall from many years ago now that the actual story was not as important as understanding how we interpret the story from our own unique experience.

If the participants shut down, become frustrated, and feel silenced, are we serving any noble purpose? While Jarvis "convinced" herself "that the actual meaning wasn't relevant to the process," her response and feelings are relevant to our process as facilitators. We wonder what might be lost or harmed in a participant having to convince herself that what she thinks and desires are not relevant for the process. Returning to Boal's intention that Image work is a route towards discourse, facilitators must decide how, and when, it's *okay* to have discussion.

Carrie Hage: "As a 'participant' I loved not sharing what our stories were, and as a 'facilitator' I come across the desire to share all the time from participants. I often see it in younger ages, and try to emphasize the importance of observing and developing an understanding for universal stories."

Pavla: "I would like to share why I love Image work as a participant. Being asked to work with a variety of oppressive situations or stories, I welcome the safety of Images—not having to explain any details or having to explain myself verbally, is super liberating for me."

What about the Clay?

We have focused a lot, up to now, on the Image creator's desire to tell their story. The other side of this, which became apparent in the Hub gatherings engaging these issues, was the spect-actors, as well as the clay's desire to "know" what the Images were about.

At the last Hub session, at the end of about 40 minutes of non-verbal work, we moved into verbal dialogue—in keeping with the intention of Image work as a step towards discussion. People who had been in the Images quickly articulated a desire to know what the Image creators were meaning or intending in their Images. Interestingly, sculptors did not express a strong desire to explain a particular Image they created.

Pavla asked the question concerning the "clay," "How did you feel inside the Image?" The question was dissected by the participants' plethora of questions in subsequent discussion: you mean how I felt as a person? How I felt as an actor? How I felt before I heard the audience responses—or after? How I felt as a sculptor before entering the Image—or after? These questions highlighted for us the relevance of such discussion, as well as it inspired a new question: "Who is the Image for?" Our purpose was to interrogate the multiple potential "ownership" and "purposes" of one single Image: the sculptor, the clay's experience, the audience, the facilitator's agenda.

Fig. 15. Who is the Image for? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What if there wasn't a mirror in the room?

When learning a new language, one frequently wants to translate everything into the language with which they are most familiar. Some say one knows a language when the person stops translating into their most familiar language. When learning to communicate in a new language, is it realistic to expect people to not want to translate? The more we (Pavla and Wolfgang) have worked in Images, the more comfortable we are not using words.

Facilitators (ourselves included) frequently come into a community, work within for a period of time, and then leave. Various factors limit the time spent, and the focus is often on making a play or responding to a particular issue. These limits are structural and pragmatic. Funders rarely pay for ongoing or multi-year projects with the same group, people move on, classes in high school/college/university end, new jobs arise. Thus, the people who have the greatest Image language proficiency are (likely) those who come into, and then leave the community. There are perhaps echoes of a colonial agenda in this. I, the facilitator/joker will come into your community, tell you that you cannot use your own language, impose a new language upon you, not give enough time to truly learn the language, and then leave.

Fig. 16. Who is the Image for? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: Who holds the power here?

Fig. 17. Who is the Image for? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What does seeing the facial expressions add to your understanding of the Image?

Is This Dialogue?

This is clearly not the intention of TO. We are thus presented with the question: how might we invert the didactic nature of such an approach to one that is dialectic? For us, it starts with listening and literacy. Perhaps it is up to those from outside a community to learn the language of the community in order to read, and thus understand, the community. We are concerned about the implications of imposing a way of working upon others. While we have a language and process, so too do those with whom we work. When TO facilitators are invited into community, sometimes they request us to come in order to learn "our" language. If, however, we are gathering a community, or imposing ourselves into one, we are concerned about the implications of forcing our language upon *them*. We wonder how we can listen to and understand the language of the community as the foundation for TO-based Image work.

Fig. 18. Who is the Image for? June 19, 2017. Question for the reader: What does this Image make you think about?

We would like to conclude with Diamond's (2007) story of one of his insight moments at a workshop with Boal.

> People kept asking Boal the same question over and over again: "If "x" happens, what do I do?" It was as if there were supposed to be a formula. Of course, there isn't one. . . .There is a question to ask other than "what", and that is "why": Why are we making this investigation?" (pp. 60-61)

Why do YOU use Images in your work?

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