



Volume 5

2020

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Recommended Citation

Köck, Joschka (2020) "Global TO Movement(s) and its Discontents," *Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal*: Vol. 5 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/ptoj/vol5/iss1/3>

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Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal

Vol. 5, Issue 1 (Fall 2020)

Global TO movement(s) and its discontents¹

Joschka Köck²

In this article, I deal with the following questions: What qualifies it as a movement? What are its goals, potentials and resources as well as difficulties and contradictions? Why do we need a TO movement at all? I first give an auto-ethnographic account of how I experience moving in the global TO movement. My frustrations, expectations, ambitions become visible as well as the need to let go all the pressures connected to TO as a global movement. Then I deal with the organizational structure of the global TO movement using Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), and I focus on failures of organizing the movement on a global level in recent years within a federation and reasons for this while I recognize that TO has all organizational features of a social movement (e.g. organisations, staff). In the following sub-chapter, I search for the specific political goals of the TO movement in the declaration of principles of the International Theatre of the Oppressed organization (ITO) which form its collective identity based on New Social Movement theory. While no strategic political goals for concrete political change can be found apart from the actual achievement of Human Rights, TO politics points to more than just conventional politics but to “humanizing humanity”. A political goal is also TO’s anti-expertism as a demand for radical democracy and the acceptance of every human being as political beings. Afterwards I point out how TO could develop its own power strategy in the form of organizing the many. In the last sub-chapter, using Conway’s analysis of the World Social Forum as a comparison, I track TO movement’s complicity with hegemonic masculinity and structures of coloniality, to point out the necessary collaboration of TO movements on a global level in spite of all these differences and the pluriversal potential of TO movement’s goal of humanising humanity in a global contact zone. I conclude by acknowledging everything which already exists in the TO movement. I declare being part of a TO global movement and turn my desire of what I want the TO movement to be into utopian question of what could be.

1. Introduction

A lot has been written about the use of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) in Social Movements (cf. Bogad 2006). There is a discourse that TO is serving political social movements in the more conventional sense. Some political movements using mainly TO techniques such as Jana Sanskriti in West Bengal (Ganguly 2011) can surely be called social movements in their own right. Ferreira/Devine (2012) define

¹ Thanks for very helpful comments to Linda Raule and Ralph Yarrow, and to Ronald Matthijssen for a thorough discussion of the contents of this article and his willingness to share his experiences in an interview. This article was made possible through research grant of the graduate centre of the University of Kassel, Germany.

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TO as a rhizome due to its mode of diffusion all over the globe. Also, in everyday language TO practitioners often talk about the TO “movement”.

In this article I map activities of TO as a global social movement, which is something not done before. Between the lines you will easily be able to read my effort in trying to prove that the TO movement *is* indeed a movement, answering the research question: “Is TO a global movement?” In addition you will be able to read my effort in trying to search for a TO movement in the shape I want it to be but which does not seem to exist. Over time my questions about the TO movement, which interest me from both the perspective of a TO practitioner and social science researcher, changed to: What qualifies it as such? What are its goals, potentials, and resources as well as difficulties and contradictions? Why do we need a TO movement at all?

As a definition of the concept of a social movement Diani proposes the following: “*A social movement is a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.*” (Diani 1992: 12) On first sight, the global TO community fits such a definition. However, in this article I am going to investigate this more systematically, using two main strands of social movement theory to shed light on different areas of the so-called TO movement. While resource mobilization theory focuses more on organizational aspects of social movements and their strategies (the “how” of social movements) (McCarthy/Zald 1977: 1214), new social movement theories focus more on the “why” of social movements (Buechler 1995: 460)³ and offer “particular emphases on symbolic action, self-determination, postmaterialist values, collective identity, grievance articulation, and self-referential organization [which] reflect fundamental features of contemporary social activism and the structures they challenge” (ibid.).

The article also includes auto-ethnographic accounts of my own experience moving in the arena of the global TO community mentioned above. It contains my hopes, doubts, and wishes concerning the movement and tracks my experiences of frustration and enthusiasm. The autoethnographic encounters also reveal that there is an enormous pressure to do something as a global movement but no real will to action.

Autoethnography (=writing the Self) should not be seen as an individualistic endeavor in light of the fact that every human being/body/self/other/context/language exists only in connection and interrelation to one another (Spry 2016: 14f.). The autoethnographic accounts in my article try to represent the Other with equal commitment towards a “willful embodiment of we” (ibid.: 1, 14) – to develop Utopian narratives of hope and transformation (ibid.: 1) while opening spaces of that reflect

³ I recognize that mainstream and recognized social movement theories are made by presumably white men and wonder about feminist and anti-colonial stances on social movement conceptualisation.

complexities within the movements and avoid easy answers. The autoethnography is also a great way to ground my arguments in time and place. While you might miss critical reflection or distance of the memories I write about in the autoethnography, it is explicitly meant as a different way of writing and performing scientific knowledge production and the choice of experiences was done very consciously.

This means on the one hand not avoiding positioning myself as a white male academic TO practitioner from the Global North and reflecting this position in regard to less privileged social positions and global TO practices. On the other hand it means taking the risk and quoting and writing about other TO practitioners worldwide and trying to do their perspectives justice. I hope I managed to do that. Research-ethic wise, I tried letting all people quoted here in person know of my writing and confirm it.

To get an understanding of the potential of a TO movement it was obvious that I had to track back to the moment when it seemed to peak, at least at the level visible for all. That moment can easily be dated back to the heyday of the International Theatre of the Oppressed Organization (ITO) and the corresponding website www.theatreoftheoppressed.org. In 2008 and 2009, the website received more than 40,000 unique visitors, of whom 1,200 had subscribed to its newsletter; the website also displayed an array of more than 250 TO organizations in almost 80 countries around the globe. Many people regarded the website as the ultimate representation of the movement. The decision to interview the person who moderated this website between 2003-2010 was quickly made: Ronald Matthijssen, who worked at Formaat, a Dutch TO organization, for 12 years, was not only the website moderator but also a joker, fundraiser, researcher, and playwright. He was (co-)author of two books in Dutch about TO and people with psychiatric conditions. He is currently preparing a book on the issue of TO and power.

Overall, the objective of the article is to criticize current processes within the TO community but do so with benevolence and argue for the value of continuing global connection between TO practitioners. Also I argue that besides all difficulties of and frustrations in global movement making, it is worth the effort!

2. Moving in the global TO arena – an autoethnographic account

Now contemplate [consider carefully engaging body and mind as a unity] this:

December 20, 2018, Badu, Jana Sanskriti, Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed (CTO) India: At the end of Muktheadhara, an intensive two week festival organized by Jana Sanskriti, the world's biggest TO movement, tired and eager participants sit together in a large circle in the Augusto Boal auditorium. We are about to discuss our future collaboration as the global community of TO.

A week before the meeting: I sit in Sanjoy Ganguly's home (what an honour, thank you Sanjoy-da for the invitation!) with Ralph Yarrow and Ronald Matthijssen to discuss Jana Sanskriti's International

Research and Resource Institute (JSIRRI) and its future. I share my tiredness with editing its newsletter and my will to hand it over. I share that I find it strange that four guys are sitting together in a private room to talk about the future of the movement (which for me is JSIRRI), three of them over 50, while the young activists sit in the CTO next door and talk into the late night. “Don’t be so religious about representation! It is not always about who is present,” frustrations not only with me, also with my colleagues... at the end we discuss how we can bring back *theatreoftheoppressed.org* and its yellow pages and who pays for that... So important, but to me these are details...

Have I heard and listened with my heart to what the other people in this room had to say?

“Where there is monologue, there is oppression,” no dialogue.

Breathe! (BREATHE, dear reader, breathe), in, out.

Sanjoy Ganguly: “At one point, we need to talk about the global community ... Can we do it tomorrow? Ok, so let’s say, when we arrive in Badu, everyone takes a shower and eats and then we can meet, ok?”

Now. The meeting.

The structure of this meeting mirrors to me completely the structure of the global movement. Love and chaos, implicit hierarchies challenged by some but left untouched by others (there are the famous and experienced jokers, there is a Post-Boalian generation of jokers who never met the guy), great hopes, great enthusiasm, and in the end frustration. Mostly Western jokers are present and talking, not the masses of TO activists from the South; the meeting language is English, what else? And even though JSIRRI, Muktaadhara as a Jana Sanskriti event, and the global TO movement and community are strictly very separate things, lines tend to blur and overlaps arise. So is this meeting about Jana Sanskriti’s family, JSIRRI or about “the” global TO movement – or all of them?

The whole festival has witnessed cultural misunderstandings. I am torn. Between knowing and having witnessed the political practice of Jana Sanskriti, our hosts, feeling that it is legitimate that Sanjoy, as our host and someone to whom global TO practice seems to be a personal issue, is chairing the meeting and young Western activists like me sitting and listening first. He often (but not in this meeting) stresses how Augusto Boal passed on his legacy unto him and Jana Sanskriti. With it, in my interpretation, comes the responsibility of taking care of the global movement and being its home. So this is very emotional to him, too.

And between seeing that perspectives of younger participants and women are just less appreciated in this space as I have been in constant dialogue with my colleagues from all over (mostly) the West who have criticized what was going on during the whole festival. Representation matters.

Torn also between acknowledging the efforts of preparing this meeting that took this issue into account and seeing these efforts fail.

When a Greek friend and TO activist mentions that all our action should be “good enough,” my body becomes lighter, I am relieved. Just one action day, a global one, with existing plays, should be possible, shouldn't it? Let's make a small communal and global TO action, but let us make one. It will be good enough! Let us celebrate what we are doing, we are doing so much already! He says, with commitment and enthusiasm it is our responsibility to make good enough projects.

I say to myself: Let us embody the change we want to see in the world, let us not chase goals we cannot reach, what a capitalistic thinking! Let us be sustainable in our doings, if possible. Ideas begin to form in my head...

What is good enough as global action? What are our ambitions towards TO in the face of growing urgency through fascism or ecological crises?

Breathe! (BREATHE, dear reader, breathe), in, and out again, that's right. You see, here you are. In and out. And sigh. Aah!

In January 2019 I write about good enough action “Good enough is the things we really want to do from the heart, the things that we really feel the urge to do but then do them wholeheartedly.”

At Jana Sanskriti, they love to play a variation of the famous Glass Cobra game, the trade union game. The participants stand in a circle and feel the head, hair and shoulders of their right neighbour with closed eyes. To introduce the game, they say: “You are a trade union that is about to be divided because you have closed your eyes. Your closed eyes symbolize your submission and lack of awareness of political parties infiltrating your union.” (Adapted from Ganguly 2017: 82) Then the facilitator will separate everyone into various corners of the space. “You have been won over by the communists, by the labour party, by the conservatives” (ibid.) In the end every single one stands isolated. “You are no longer a united worker's front.” To reunite, participants have to get back into a circle.

Games are social metaphors (Ganguly 2010: 101). How does it relate to the TO movement?

What if we as TO practitioners, organizations, as human beings might be the union?

Who has an interest in dividing us? Who has an interest in our personal conflicts? Who has an interest in seeing us fail to work together?

Do we actually define as one global movement? How do we come together?

Ambition, ambition, ambition: How can we change the world with our practice? What does it mean to change the world with TO? Ambition, ambition, ambition?

Sanjoy's monologue/summary in the end of the meeting (how I heard it, and what stayed with me, so it is real and fictional at the same time, metaxis, theatre, call it as you wish):

Sanjoy: "We need a United Front that has never been witnessed before in the world. The need is there. The first problem is that we will have differences, if we respect our differences too much, it will prevent us from being a community. We will have multiple monologues instead of dialogue. Climate Change and polarization, fascism, these are very relevant topics. Artists have come together in the past and we are at a Juncture of History where we need to be united as a global front. We need to be more connected to combat global issues. In Jana Sanskriti's dream, this would be 14 days against politics of separation or domestic violence. Let us be connected by the issue! If 20 countries address one issue together, they can generate optimism!"

Everyone is tired, everyone is hungry. We all want to eat. The meeting was long. We didn't come up with any conclusions. Frustration rising. Nothing is gonna happen?

About two weeks after the festival: I decided to work hard to finish the latest edition of the JSIRRI newsletter. I see it as an effort to keep the thing alive, to keep things going. Hand it over finally. Only waiting for Jana Sanskriti to send it.

After some time a short notice that Sanjoy put the newsletter on hold, someone else told me. Personal reasons.

Disappointment. Has Sanjoy refocused on Indian TO matters? For sure there are so many projects that need attention apart from the global family! Does he not like me anymore? Why does he not reply to me? I am hurt. Have I hurt him? After a while I give up, let silence heal potential wounds!

Fuck, I do feel alone in wanting this global unity! Do I really want it?

July 2019: Writing these lines I feel old wounds opening up again. My connection with Jana Sanskriti suffered from this JSIRRI matter. I write an email and re-connect.

At that time, I don't wonder and bother anymore about global movements, I go with where my energy is drawn to: With results from the meeting in Badu and with other young TO practitioners I form Resilient Revolt at a residence at a TO festival, a forum theatre movement on climate justice with the ambition to have intersectional representation and be as global as possible. It is issue based because I believe people connect around politics rather than around TO and TO is an add-on. But everyone who comes, does TO. Goals besides doing forum theatre: learn how to multiply and learn how to facilitate horizontal processes that are resilient. And every time I get overly ambitious and wonder why no one replies to our content briefs and why people are cancelling on short notice or why people are not interested at all in this most urgent issue of our times or why again the network is so white and middle classy, I breathe. I sigh. Good enough action. I sigh. I breathe. I live. Good enough action.

Breathe! (BREATHE, dear reader, breathe!), in and out, and sigh.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic strikes this world. In April, after some time in lockdown, there are initiatives for Global Joker Exchanges, Zoom theatre shows attended by people from all over the world, blooms born from crisis. I wonder: What is it exactly that pulls these TO people back together at such a point of time? What makes our ties? What draws me there?

A month later, in May, cyclone Amphan hits West Bengal and Bangladesh and Jana Sanskriti's rural peasant movement hard. Livelihoods are destroyed. I donate, TO practitioners and organizations and people much beyond donate. \$20,000 and more in few days. Jana Sanskriti has a worldwide TO family that has evolved because of their never-ending love. These are all jokers and theatre makers. But are they also political activists together? And where and how does Jana Sanskriti's global family and the global TO movement overlap?

COVID-19 and the cyclone also make Jana Sanskriti postpone the next Muktheadhara to 2021. Another hit. Maybe I will go. How can we come together as a global family now?

[Don't stop contemplating, when you read the rest of the article]

3. Resource Mobilization Theory: How the TO movement works from an organizational point of view?

Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) emerged in the 1970s in the US (McCarthy/Zald 1977). RMT proponents claim to be close to activist practice as they "stress problems of mobilization, the manufacture of discontent, tactical choices, and the infrastructure of society and movements necessary

for success” (McCarthy/Zald 1977: 1212) for “explaining individual and organizational involvement in social movement activity.” (ibid.: 1216) RMT is used in this subchapter to map the organizational status quo of TO movement activity.

Since the emergence of TO as a technique of applied theatre and social change, a culture of TO was generated pointing towards movement activity:

“There used to be a clear thing, ok, we have a local organization here, we have a regional meeting point there, there is festivals, we had this strategic idea, that everywhere in the world we would have these contact points, where people could rally, maybe not every month but there would be enough spaces where people could meet, develop new ideas, and get ... back into society again, and to have these grassroots groups that are everywhere to reinforce them.” (Matthijssen 2019)

Important actors within social movements according to RMT are Social Movement Organizations (SMOs), “a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement ... and attempts to implement those goals.” (ibid.: 1218) They have strategic tasks like “mobilizing supporters, neutralizing and/or transforming mass and elite publics into sympathizers” (ibid.: 1217) even though they are criticized for their interaction with authorities. (ibid.) There are examples of SMOs within the global TO community: Civil society organizations such as TONYC (US), Cardboard Citizens (UK), GTO Maputo (Mozambique), CTO Rio (Brazil), Jana Sanskriti (India), AHRDO (Afghanistan), Formaat (Netherlands) and so many more (even smaller and entirely volunteer based groups).⁴ These are all organizations mainly working with TO techniques and function as lighthouses of TO in their local contexts. They have the organizational strength to host festivals, workshops, discussions, etc. to mobilize people into the movement and make them sympathizers with TO. Different SMOs each have their own political goals and need resources to achieve these goals (ibid.: 1220), while how much anyone can do towards reaching their goals is “crudely” based on the resources an organization controls (ibid.: 1221).

Resources of individuals and organizations are “legitimacy, money, facilities, and labor” (ibid.: 1220). RMT claims the least resources an individual can have and contribute to a movement are time and labor while elites control larger resource pools. (ibid.: 1221) Some people in and around TO organizations are working professionally and some not. RMT explicitly includes unpaid labor and voluntary work in movements’ resources.

⁴ I apologize for all the organizations I can not name here. I know that naming, recognizing, and representing is a very sensitive issue within our movement. I do not and can not know all existing TO organisations (How beautiful is that!). Instead of making only a partial claim towards the existence of a global TO movement because of my limited experience as an internationally oriented TO practitioner and focussing on my experience with Jana Sanskriti, I still believe I have the right to make a more global claim, as a global TO movement in full bloom would certainly have come to my attention.

For example, TONYC is an organization with some continuously employed jokers, often those most experienced, a managing staff, some jokers that are employed on a project base, and volunteer actors. It reaches out to elite resources through fundraisers and employs fundraising staff. In contrast, the SMO Jana Sanskriti with 40,000 grassroots, voluntary activists also employs several full time staff, but wants to be (making a normative choice) independent from any money associated with political parties and thus the state. Both organizations have a lot of legitimacy as a resource, TONYC by making affirmative action a priority and consequently trying to employ non-white non-middle class jokers from the communities they are working with, and Jana Sanskriti by being strongly rooted in local communities on a grassroots level. Looking at the resources available Jana Sanskriti is probably bigger than TONYC even though their monetary budget might be much smaller. It is, however, a normative, ethical and political question for TO, whether it utilizes mainly or only resources of humans (labor and time) or also uses resources of elites. This can't be answered by RMT but only by TO and its practitioners.

RMT defines social movement industries (SMIs) as the “organizational analogue of a social movement” (ibid.: 1219) which therefore consists of all SMOs, for example, of the TO movement. In contrast, federations of one SMO “serve ... to organize constituents into small local units.” (ibid.: 1227) In what follows, I will focus on past and present efforts to found an organization functioning similarly to a global federation of TO, the first being The International Organization of Theatre of the Oppressed (ITO), founded in 2003.

The declaration of principles of TO⁵ summarizes ITO's main tasks: “The ITO is an organization that coordinates and enhances the development of Theatre of the Oppressed all over the world” (ibid.: 295, Matthijssen 2003a) and

does so by connecting Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners into a global network, fostering exchange and methodical development; by facilitating training and multiplication of the existing techniques; by conceiving projects on a global scale; by the stimulation of the creation of local Centres for Theatre of the Oppressed (CTO's); by promoting and creating conditions for the work of CTO's and practitioners and by creating an international meeting point on the internet. (Matthijssen 2003a)

The explicit goal of this endeavor is to make a global (!) network. But even more, in the sense of RMT, ITO had the task to mobilize resources for TO by multiplying knowledge, conceiving big projects, and being a resource by having the Yellow Pages as an international digital meeting point with a newsletter. This also included an “email address where everybody could raise questions [which] was so handy,

⁵ It was “drafted by Augusto Boal with Julian Boal, Luc Opdebeeck and Ronald Matthijssen in November 2002” (Fritz 2017: 86)

[be]cause ... what comes in, comes in, and then through the newsletter you could bring it back to the world.” (Matthijssen 2019) Maybe unknown to many, there was also the idea of a Flying jokers program (ibid.) which would have employed experienced jokers for multiplication. ITO was also trying to subsume all TO activities worldwide: “The ITO will assume that anyone using the various techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed subscribes to this Declaration of Principles.” (Matthijssen 2003a)

However ITO’s activities ceased to exist shortly after Augusto Boal’s death in 2009. Even if “there were people who were still believing that this should happen on a global scale ... they didn’t have the authority anymore.” (Matthijssen 2019) At the global TO conference in Rio in July 2009, “some people were generally disoriented after Boal died, didn’t know how to continue, ... maybe they were not even thinking about continuing on a global scale anymore. ... [T]hat ... was the drift of the conversation that we shouldn’t waste too much energy (ibid.)” on working on that level. The demise of ITO after Boal’s death, contributed to the fragmentation of the movement (ibid.)

The importance of the ITO website rose to such a high level that the international TO community seized control of it in the aftermath of Boal’s death and the conferences in Rio de Janeiro and Graz, all in 2009. As a result, the attention given to the website decreased substantially. The contents of the website were migrated to Jana Sanskriti/JSIRRI in 2014, but because of technical problems, the website disappeared in 2017.⁶ The loss of the ITO website meant losing the global overview over the movement: “In the days before 2009 it was still possible to name the 80 countries in which TO was practiced, including the name of at least one contact person. Today, I don’t believe a single person is able to draw the entire global TO map. This isn’t necessarily a problem, unless there is a notion that we need each other to survive and/or strengthen our work.” (Matthijssen, January 2019, personal email communication)

While there was no linear transition from ITO to the founding of Jana Sanskriti International Research and Resource Institute (JSIRRI) in 2015 (and a lot of things happened in between), I definitely see organizational similarities between ITO and JSIRRI: On the one hand the mission statement from 2016 reads:

We are a non-profit organization, with a strong basis in emancipator[y] theatre (Theatre of the Oppressed), pedagogy and activism. JSIRRI ‘s intention is to explore how Theatre of the Oppressed and related theatre and art forms can foster a culture of dialogue, strengthen participation and stimulate liberation by engaging with a wide range of disciplines and fields of work. (JSIRRI 2016a)

On the other hand, besides the effort to transfer the old ITO website to a JSIRRI webspace, a global newsletter of and for TO practitioners that I edited with others for around two years was created. In

⁶ Meanwhile, the Instituto Augusto Boal website, founded in 2010, has taken over the web presence of the TO movement, at least for those who speak Portuguese: <http://augustoboal.com.br/o-instituto-augusto-boal/>

JSIRRI's case, the failure of global organization/federation was probably also due to the fact that it was "to date [an] unfamiliar body to a large portion of the TO community." (Matthijssen, personal email within JSIRRI, 6st January 2019) or because it was seen as a solely Jana Sanskriti initiative.⁷

Matthijssen's outlook at least for global TO federation is bleak: "there is no body, there is no formality here at all. The whole thing is that we, we very quickly trust, try to imagine a structure in an organization in everything" (ibid.) but without anybody having the authority to hold the common process, thus "it's far too complex to get it back on the rails, especially because the whole thing is so sensitive among some people obviously." (ibid.)⁸ How do we get out of this vicious cycle of lack of joking/moderating/hosting a global networking process?⁹ And from a wider perspective: If all of this federation building and networking fails, is TO really a global social movement?

It is not far-fetched to believe that to make or define a movement this kind of federation, or close global ties, are needed. Just because the techniques of TO are used in so many contexts and organizations worldwide, this is not automatically a reason to call it a movement. Also, ITO and JSIRRI are no longer active. But at the other hand, the clear intention to be a global movement was there.¹⁰ RMT also doesn't argue for a federation as a necessary condition to qualify (both conceptually and structurally) as a social movement. Social movement interactions can be totally informal (Diani 1992: 12). Even though TO lacks federation structure, it forms an SMI as the sum of all TO SMOs in the field.

Ronald Matthijssen refers to Boal's compelling metaphor of the cashew tree to describe the different conceptions of the global TO movement. Cashew tree branches grow towards the ground where they form new roots, from which new trees can emerge. The TO movement can be seen as spreading like a cashew forest:

Organic growth, much more like Augusto Boal's cashew tree than Augusto Boal's AITO [a predecessor idea to ITO, JK], is the future of this movement. If coordination and leadership is necessary, or if the movement connects with other, differently organized, movements, it will take a

7 Again, for Ralph Yarrow JSIRRI constituted more a process than a global structure. He wrote: "For me, as I've often said, JSIRRI is not an entity but a process, a channel of communication. For me, ... what I think it can/should do is to tell people about what's going on, offer ways to share and understand practice, maybe to get inspired to do projects and create things together. That is for me vastly more important than worrying about who thinks they are in charge of anything or has historical status (Yarrow, JSIRRI email communication, 28th February 2019)."

8 To remedy this, however, there might be a need for "some catharsis within the movement" and working on "everybody ... having [...] beef with someone" (Matthijssen 2019), or in other words "How do we make sure that we don't put out each other's lights, blow out each other's candles?" (ibid.)"

9 Or how Ronald Matthijssen states it in an email on JSIRRI in January 2019: „[I]n the past (and I could go back to 2003 to substantiate that) there have been multiple attempts to create some sort of hierarchical networks that have failed not because of the hierarchy per se but because of people immediately looking at "those responsible" for action. The problem is and has always been that "those responsible" were unable to perform their tasks because of the general overload of anyone eligible to be "those responsible". It's a vicious circle you can't escape from."

10 We should also not forget the existence of regional/national movement federations such as the PTO in the US or Federation of Theatre of the Oppressed India (FOTO) that are working very well.

new shape; locally and regionally. On a global scale, we should let the cashew tree grow.” (Matthijssen, JSIRRI communication, 6th January 2019)¹¹

I invite us to also see the beauty in non-hierarchical, cashew-nut growth of a movement. In a more anarchistic sense, is it not amazing that everywhere in the world, you can meet people doing TO and you get into an exchange? That if one group might stop working, there are still so many others going on with TO? Again, I want to point to Ferreira/Devine’s notion of “TO as rhizome” (2012), in which the fungous growth of the technique quite resembles the cashew tree metaphor.

So what remains are the normative questions, but with humility and without any jealousy, authority, or other personal reasons in the back of our minds. Might it not be *desirable* for the TO movement to have an international federation organization? What shape do we *want* the common movement to have? This goes in line with the analytical claim that RMT has for itself: “[I]t provides a corrective to the practical theorists, who naturally are most concerned with justifying their own tactical choice.” (McCarthy/Zald 1977: 1213)¹²

4. New social movement theories: TO Movement identity and goals

The multiplication of TO techniques is definitely a task of resource mobilization (for SMOs) but resource mobilization is not a movement goal in itself. While Resource Mobilization Theory was developed in the 1970s (just like TO), new social movement theory emerged with the so called new social movements in the 1990s. These movements resist neoliberal globalization (like displacement, dispossession, and environmental destruction) while they “invoke community rather than class identities ... to eschew prescriptions for social transformation.” (Wilson 2017: 2685) Paradigmatic for this way of politicization is the Zapatistas’ slogan “‘one no and many yeses’, with the no being to neo-liberal globalization and to

11 There is actually no contradiction between organic and informal growth of networks and a more formal structure and these two could co-exist, the above questions regarding the vicious cycle of moderating global TO action remain.

12 There are many other normative questions (“What is good or bad TO?”) connected to Resource Mobilization within movements which are tactical, ethical, and political choices of the TO movement/TO community. The scope of this article is too small to deal with them in detail; however Matthijssen (2019) raised them in connection with the global TO movement and they do make debates around the global TO movement more complex: From whom does the TO movement take or reject money? Are there any taboos? How do we survive financially as jokers (TO practitioners)? If you become a joker, does it mean you become an economically marginal figure in society? How do we deal with the fact that jokers in Northern societies can earn more both in relative and absolute terms? Do we install mechanisms of redistribution? Are you still in the movement when you earn a salary/become a professional within TO? Are you still an activist then? Are you allowed to earn money with TO at all? A particular political question was: How does the TO movement relate to the state/the society it works in? Does it try to evade it totally or does it try to change it from within by getting into or close to power?

I suggest every practitioner of TO find their own answers to these questions (and we do already). And still this leaves open the question of whether all kinds of different answers can coexist within the same movement. In the past differences in the answers to these questions have led to many of the personal and ideological conflicts within the TO movement about the future direction of TO and the “right” application of the techniques.

the European modernity model underlying it, and the many yeses being region-specific, movement-specific.” (Escobar in Wilson 2017: 2685)

Buechler (1995: 442) names some of the major characteristics of new social movement theories: They “underscore symbolic action in civil society or the cultural sphere as a major arena for collective action alongside instrumental action in the state or political sphere” and “stress the importance of processes that promote autonomy and self-determination instead of strategies for maximizing influence or power.” Rather than social movements being fixed organizational entities, new social movement theory “recognizes a variety of submerged, latent, and temporary networks that often undergird collective action.” This might imply much less need for a consistent global federation structure to call TO a “movement”.

We can describe TO as a new social movement, then, by pointing towards shared goals as a movement identity. My reading of the ITO declaration of principles (Matthijssen 2003a),¹³ aided and inspired by Fritz’s (2017), examines the ways and the scope by which TO conceptualizes oppression and its work towards transforming it.

Paragraph 13 of this declaration reads: “The Theatre of the Oppressed is a worldwide non-violent aesthetic movement which seeks peace, not passivity.” In her Freirian reading of the declaration of principles, Birgit Fritz interprets this notion of the movement as a “‘will to meaning’ and entails a cycle of action and reflection, in which movement towards humanity resides” (Fritz 2017: 94) in a continuous re-development of TO. She interprets the movement essentially as the physical and meta-physical movement towards a better world, while I rather see this paragraph as the proof that TO identifies as a political, social, and aesthetic movement – a loose network of people working towards a common goal. However, her interpretation leads one to consider that the only explicit goal ever stated by TO was “humanizing humanity.” (Matthijssen 2003a). As a new social movement, TO is “about something larger than conventional politics (Buechler 1995: 451)” and is “not without structural effects.” (ibid.: 446) As a new social movement its focus is “on *personal, spiritual, or expressive aspects* of modern life” (ibid., emphasis added).¹⁴

In Birgit Fritz’s reading, “this means that humanity is at present de-humanized” (Fritz 2017: 87), that our whole potential is not yet reached (ibid.), and that we are “living in an inhumane world” (ibid.).

13 Even though ITO has not succeeded in providing an organizational anchor for the movement, its declaration of principles is the only valid political statement ever made by TO. This is why it is the only valid reference point in searching for a shared movement identity.

14 Still, there is a danger, that this “humanization of humanity” instead of pointing to something larger than conventional politics (s.a.) is only a non-concrete quasi-religious (humanist) philosophy with no political content, strategy or implications, even though Julian Boal states his father never has been religious (in contrast to Paulo Freire, J. Boal in Emert/Friedland 2011: 175).

Thus the ultimate goal of TO is both a defensive political standpoint and pointing into some unknown, better future. For Matthijssen this is one of the central problems of the TO movement:

“So that's not a real movement in terms of, you want to move something towards something, and it's just we have to recuperate what we have lost[,] ..., there is no picture of society after we got everything back.” And: “Boal said: We are non-ideological (JK: Hmm). And that's clear in the declaration of principles, that's one of the things he always stressed: ‘We don't have a plan.’ Which is the main problem, because if you don't have a plan what's going to happen in this world, so it's, actually it's a humanistic operation ...” (Matthijssen 2019)

What Matthijssen portrays as a problem to social movements (not having a clear vision of the future and specific political demands) are actually main characteristics of new social movements: “[N]ew social movement constituencies derive more from an ideological identification with certain issues than membership in some homogeneous social base.” (Buechler 1995: 453) An example is a shift from “the worker's movement” to the “equal wage movement.” TO is clearly a value-based community that suits the characterization of new social movements above with “one no and many yeses.” Not having a definite plan for transformation makes it context-specific in its respective political goals. TO definitely has something to say about specific political injustices such as “equal wage” or “against domestic violence.” TO plays often deal with oppression and violation of human rights in everyday life. TO plays and movement organizations can look very different in different contexts and societies.

The ITO declaration gives clear political guidelines about what the shared political goals of TO are when it defines the oppressed as “individuals or groups who are socially, culturally, politically, economically, racially, sexually, or in any other way deprived of their right to Dialogue or in any way impaired to exercise this right.” (Matthijssen 2003a: paragraph 10) While this is already a reference to Human Rights, the declaration goes on more explicitly stating that TO is “finally a tool for the achievement of economical and social justice, which is the foundation of true democracy. Summarizing, the general objective of the Theatre of the Oppressed is the development of essential Human Rights.” (ibid.: paragraph 16)

However, can we then talk of *a* or *the* TO movement if issues and contexts vary so much? The question might be, whether TO is serving other movements with its tools, techniques, and ethics, such as when it is applied in land struggles. Matthijssen (2019) argues that the political struggle always predates TO and its interventions, working with the example of the Brazilian landless movement *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)*: “The struggle is already there. Look at MST in Brazil, that is one of the finest examples..., MST and TO are very close ... but MST was there first.” (ibid.) There is a difference between a global TO federation that is based on techniques and a TO movement that supports explicitly political organizations and projects worldwide which already exist. So

when Sanjoy Ganguly talks about a global “united front” of artists, similar to the way Jana Sanskriti lives, I think he means a political unity based on relational/spiritual ties, rather than a global federation of TO in the sense of Matthijssen and the ITO which is based on techniques. This points to the potentially unresolvable dilemma of TO *being a movement* and of being used *in movements* (cf. also Bogad 2006).

TO does not lack a struggle of its own. With a clear focus on the life world and how systems influence our everyday lives (cf. Buechler 1995:445) it stresses “the importance of participation in politics by everyone and potential for democratization.” (cf. *ibid.*: 451) The declaration of principles echoes this: “3. *Every human being is theatre!* (Matthijssen 2003a),” and “6. *Every human being is capable of acting.*” (*ibid.*, emphasis added, JK)

New social movement theory distinguishes social movements as ‘more political’ or ‘more cultural.’ While “political movements are at least in part focused on influencing or altering state power, and such movements must thereby have some explicit strategy aimed at transforming power relations,” (Buechler 1995: 451) cultural movements “emphasize the decentralized nature of both power and resistance so it is not particularly macro-oriented or state-centered but focuses on everyday life, civil society and the creation of free spaces between state and civil society.” (*ibid.*: 458) The latter formulation describes the TO movement quite well, emphasizing its broader conception of what power relations are and in which sphere they can be found.¹⁵ The goals of more culturalist movements are more about what the movements actually are fighting *for*: “quality of life, projects of self-realization, and goals of participation and identity formation.” (*ibid.*: 446)

According to Julian Boal, the goals of TO as a theatre movement include the “[a]bolition of the social division of labor, the critique of the autonomy of art, confidence in the capacity of self-emancipation of the oppressed.” (J. Boal in Howe et al. 2019: 294) That means privileging the political standpoint of “the Oppressed,” their visibility and self-emancipation (that is in fact seen as a given but prevented by oppression), and the demand that every single member of our societies is viewed as an artist, and gets the right to make art – that is, confront social division of labor into manual and intellectual work.

This anti-expertism of TO which is radically democratic is not only concerned with the theatrical but also the social reality. Every human being, including the oppressed who are usually denied their

15 Cultural versions of social movements often are called “apolitical” by critics. (*ibid.*: 458) The accusation is that “the notion of ‘the personal is political’ became deformed in such a way that excessive attention to personal life came to substitute for any sustained form of political action aimed at institutionalized power” (*ibid.*: 452) which can lead to “such antipolitics of identity ... to apolitical introspection, an emphasis on politically correct lifestyles, and the substitution of personal transformation for political activity.” (*ibid.*) This can for sure be a critique addressed to some examples of practicing TO, and we have to be careful to still link it to system intrusion in life-worlds (cf. Habermas in Buechler 1995) and making collective solutions an issue within TO.

right to even exist as humans, are capable of being actors not only in theatre but also in reality. (Fritz 2017: 110f.) Therefore, TO is a political movement trying to change political culture and democratize it and not only a theatre movement. Rejecting the notion that cultural movements are apolitical, TO challenges power itself, in addition to posing specific political demands. To illustrate, let me quote an Indian union leader's answer to a question about how TO changed his life. He said, referring to the use of TO in political meetings: "First one person spoke, now a hundred people speak." TO has a radical democratizing tendency as it poses question such as: Who has the right to be an artist in our societies? Who is seen as an intellectual? To whom is attributed a political consciousness and understanding? One of the political goals of TO is demanding the right to Dialogue of and by the oppressed. In Birgit Fritz's reading, Dialogue "means to place oneself in relation to the world, to co-create, to change the world with one's own existence, adding one's talents and dreaming one's dreams." (Fritz 2017: 90) Let us not forget, for example, the unique bodily component that TO uses to enrich political dialogue. "We learn to be human, to recover our language, by fully exploiting our sensory as well as intellectual resources, and thus taking part in reality as whole people." (Fritz 2017: 90)

When looking at Theatre of the Oppressed from the wider angle of applied theatre, TO often seems to have a very strong identity connected with its methods and ethics. Which other political theatre group or stream in the world can legitimately say of itself that it is practiced in over half of the countries of the world under the same name? TO practitioners share a deep relationality because of the techniques, knowing each other on a bodily basis, and because of Freirian dialogue as a political principle and an important part of the identity of the TO movement. The belief that forum theatre and TO can and will change the world and the belief in the "humanization of humanity" are very strong.

5. The TO movement and its power strategy

While I argue above that TO's focus might not lie in conventional politics, but go much beyond that towards everyday life, I also want to argue that there is a power strategy inherent to it which is often not yet realized. Matthijssen applies the need for a power strategy to TO:

[Y]ou need leverage in society, you need people in power or you need to create the power yourself, by being many, and being strong which is... Do we have a power strategy? I was asked this question. What is the hegemony strategy? How are we going to win over power and if we can, how are we gonna use the power? Is there a strategy to do that, and there is none ..., there is no book, [...] nothing you can find on, 'Now that we found love, what are we gonna do with it, you know?' (JK: hmm) There is no ... strategy to get into power. (Matthijssen 2019)."

Behind this statement stands the question of how do we measure the impact of our doings, or more critically, by doing TO, do we really want to change something in society? At another point in our interview Matthijssen summarized this as follows: “[B]ut what are we gonna do tomorrow? ... We had fun together, we imagined change, which gave us hope, which is a good feeling ..., what is that? That is not TO, and I agree with Boal saying: ‘I don't want that to happen.’ It is just a passtime, people doing it as a recreational thing. How many people are doing it as a recreational thing?” (Matthijssen 2019)

What Matthijssen describes here is a feeling I know very well. I have conducted so many forum theatre performances, and as a joker I always say this is about consciousness raising, the awakening of critical political subjects, so that people get motivated to join the protest for a world free of oppression and believe that the world is changeable. But do I really believe that? I like saying I am an activist, that I do forum theatre to change the world for the better, to humanize humanity, but do I also perform that with my actions? What makes TO activism so important and effective?

My argument here is that the answer to TO's power strategy is organizing – if I/we/you are honest in our belief that the world is changeable and even more, that in acts of radical self-efficacy, I/we/you can indeed change this world for the better and humanize it. In order for the masses/Oppressed/non-elite/ordinary people to get real power (also true for TO), there is need for high numbers and scale, says Jane McAlevey, an experienced union organizer from the US. (2015) She argues “for movements to exercise maximum power, the power required in the hardest campaigns, there is no substitute for a real, bottom-up organizing model.” (ibid.: 263) This organizing model “places the primary agency for success on an ever-expanding base of ordinary people.” (ibid.) It is not enough for organizers (read: Jokers/TO practitioners) to see the ordinary people as their “secondary power strategy.” (ibid.)

TO – as an ethics, politics, and method – has all the playing cards for being an effective method for organizing in the manner McAlevey describes (even if I sometimes doubt that) and should rely on its focus on ordinary people/Oppressed as primary source for a power strategy. Organizing is the power strategy that is suitable to TO's ethics, its belief in the intellectual capacity and strength of ordinary people. In other words, if there is a power strategy linked with TO it will be organizing of the many.

To be fair, there are movements within Theatre of the Oppressed that are based on an organizing strategy. There is Jana Sanskriti organizing more than 40,000 rural peasants as spectactivists, and being seen as a threat to state power to an extent that they experience threats in return, and using forum theatre (e.g., Where We Stand) as a tool to learn how to organize better. There is Combatants for Peace where TO is included in a wider non-violent struggle for peace between Israel

and Palestine.¹⁶ There is the emerging Greek TO movement that works entirely without money and, following the principles of the eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin's radical ecology (1982), works to build a hierarchy-free society, which is also a way of organizing by focusing on love and relationship as a basic principle for political change.

In the TO community there are several different perceptions about the subjects of the TO movement: Some would say it is a movement of jokers, of theatre makers, sharing a political philosophy. Some would say it is the Oppressed as political activists who are members in movements such as Jana Sanskriti or MST. For others (maybe young, Northern) TO might just be a space for personal development and a way they can authentically be an activist in turbulent times and not a movement at all.

This distinction and differences became visible again in the recent Global Joker Exchanges (Spring 2020) due to the corona crisis. On the one hand a magic moment of re-uniting a global community, the focus was rather on the exchange of methodological ideas and possibilities for theatre in lockdown than on organizing political struggles, even though some people still promoted views that put political activism in the foreground. Aside from a keynote by Sanjoy and Sima Ganguly from Jana Sanskriti, the Southern movements of political activists using TO had no major place in the discussions. While there can be no movement built solely around methods and tools (if TO is perceived as such), personal ties and deep relationality of specific jokers are also no reason to call something a movement. Only by perceiving the TO movement as a movement (or movements) of activists fighting for the same cause, can it adapt an organizing strategy as a way of getting leverage power in society.

For this organizing strategy to have any chance it is definitely necessary to know who is in the movement? Who are the people that say that TO is their primary political identity or most significant movement membership? Why did they become part of it?

6. The TO movement and its Others

In this last sub-chapter, I will argue that the global TO community is deeply complicit with the oppression structures it has set out to face and that this is exactly one of the main reasons why it needs to work together: Identifying as a movement (structurally and consciously) is a tool to decolonize our practice.

Without radically practiced self-critique, doing TO is not possible at all. TO needs to work against oppression both inside and outside its global movement and community. To admit to be part of structural injustices and power takes courage, but to believe that there is any "clean" or innocent

¹⁶ Both movements were part of my original PhD proposal on TO movement(s) as case studies, that I changed towards a more global outlook.

political consciousness in a world with oppression is naive. Denying identity as a global movement essentially means denying and ignoring the power structures within it.

I will mostly base this argument on analyses of the “putatively horizontal space” World Social Forum (WSF), a global federation of movements against neoliberalism, which set out with similar goals (Conway 2011a, 2011b) and therefore is a perfect analogy for the struggles of the TO community. The argument is formed by a third social movement theory strand which is a postcolonial and feminist critique of movements. By doing this, I certainly and consciously suggest that we place the struggle of TO in “humanizing humanity” within anti-globalization movements and activism even though an explicit alignment has never taken place. (cf. Matthijssen 2019)

The dilemma that is posed for emancipatory/liberatory movements such as TO is illustrated by Matthijssen (2019):

JK: Why can we not talk about it [oppression within the movement]?

RM: Because it would, it would mean, it would imply that we are living differently from what we, that we don't practice what we preach, (JK: hmm) which makes us hypocrites.

JK: Is that even possible? RM: Well... JK: To live what we preach, without cognitive dissonance?

RM: yeah ... that's an ethical discussion. I think you should try as much as you can.

JK: Yeah.

RM: Otherwise you are judging others by the things that you don't actually put into practice yourself; that's hypocrisy.”

Conway argues that the oppression structures in the world are also at work within social movements. (Conway 2011b: 218) Ignoring or denying the dilemma Matthijssen maps above is not a solution at all: “Treating the WSF as if it is an open space free of power relations simply allows for the reproduction of hierarchies that the movement claims to be opposing.” (ibid.) In other words, it is just camouflaging oppression and by no means helps us (?) live up to our (?) ideals.

So what is the consequence of the fact that we now know that we are inconsequential in the face of oppression? Who of us can stand patriarchy in the TO movement? Who of us can stand unequal North South relations between TO organizations? Who of us can stand the fact that we don't deal with these questions together as a movement? From our discomfort must the will to change and the belief in change and the change itself be born. If we want to change something in society, we have to change ourselves, our everyday practice, as well.

Conway (2011a: 226f.), following Freudenschuss, describes hegemonic masculinity within WSF in the following way:

The leaders in the putatively horizontal space of the WSF and those who speak authoritatively about it are gendered male. They are cosmopolitan, multi-lingual in European colonial languages and accustomed to speaking before crowds, often in academic discourses [and] They are light-

skinned men of the European and Latin American lefts, occasionally joined by men of dominant races and classes from other regions. They promulgate univocal analyses of capitalism, in which sexism, racism and other forms of oppression, when they are acknowledged at all, as in the WSF Charter, are understood as epiphenomena of capitalism. (Freudenschuss 2007: 43 & 42)

Exceptions to this type of hegemonic masculinity in movements must surely exist. However, the general tendency persists. Within TO I have experienced myself and other (white) male joker colleagues being more sensitive towards struggles other than capitalism, such as the notion that the private is political. However, I still painfully recognize myself in descriptions such as these when I and other men like me sit in private offices talking about “the” global TO movement or JSIRRI, or choose just to talk with another white man as an expert on the global TO movement. I hope to do better by putting these issues on the agenda, but I know I will fail in my goal of not reproducing any of the power structures of which I am a part.

While it was one of the few times a global TO movement in action came to my attention, the “Joker Tsunami” in Ukraine in 2014 was also an example of hegemonic masculinities within the global TO movement at least from my outsider’s perspective. Six, almost all white male jokers went into a country striving for true democracy to raise up the spirits of protests and create dialogue. Painstakingly, most of the preproduction work (organizing, hosting) was apparently done by women. How will the global TO movement deal with this fact in the future?¹⁷ Of course, this is not to criticize the whole great project but only its masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity, as analyzed above, is one issue of structural power relations within movements, and it is closely connected to the coloniality of power. If the contextualized local and specific movements discussed above meet each other in the global arena, they

are encountering each other on a historically unequal playing field constituted by the coloniality of power. Recognising the character of the contemporary world order as one of global coloniality puts decolonisation on the agenda of movements world-wide, not just in their frontal contestations with hegemonic powers, but in the relations among movement themselves, especially across North/South, non-indigenous/indigenous, and modern emancipatory/subaltern ‘other’ divides. (Conway 2011b)

17 There is also a lot of ambivalence in this poignant example: Sruti Bala consulted the project throughout the process as a female joker. In a second wave of the Joker Tsunami, Hanna Maria Trap and Xris Reardon went as female jokers. Also, of course there was diversity within the men participating as jokers, and Andriy Knyzhnyi was also doing a lot of organization work. But the overall impression stayed for me as an outsider. See the documentary about the project here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7OEybEJFXs> (downloaded 22nd July 2019). Also, from this project evolved a respected feminist NGO and TO organisation in Ukraine: <http://tdd.org.ua/> (Theatre for Dialogue), as reflected in Joffre Eichhorn (2019). While criticizing hegemonic masculinity in our movement here, I explicitly want to honour Hjalmar Joffre Eichhorn, Oksana Potapova and their whole team for even making an effort to make TO a global movement.

This means, we need to recognize the coloniality of the TO movement(s) and work towards decolonization of this movement in very many ways!¹⁸ While putatively a “pluralism of ideas, strategies, practices, modalities and scales of activism is explicitly embraced” (ibid.: 222) in both WSF and TO, there is still a representation issue on the global scale:

JK: And on the global scale: you would say it is mostly white jokers?

RM: No, no. On a global scale it isn't, but the non-white Jokers don't have the necessary influence.

JK: The influence on what?

RM: On what are the issues that are discussed within the movement. (Matthijssen 2019)

If the TO movement recognized the sheer numbers of Southern participants in global meetings (let alone 40,000 members of Jana Sanskriti and so many other Southern practitioners who have no means to travel to international meetings, even if they are located in the South, in appropriate numbers due to visa and economic problems), this would mean a huge shift in topics discussed and also things such as the conversational language.¹⁹ But decolonization of the movement must also happen on a local level; for example in the Austrian federation of TO and within our member groups the members and jokers are mostly part of the white middle class. Thus, participation is structured by coloniality.

In the WSF organizers have taken active steps, “considerable reflexivity and constant innovation,” and “great political creativity” dealing with this, such as subsidies for slum-dwellers and *dalits* (Conway 2011b: 225). TO, even though a considerably smaller community, can learn from this model. Also it shows that it is possible to do something about colonial difference in global movements by affirmative action (ibid.: 226) even though it might be impossible to totally overcome them. Content-wise the participation of the subaltern movements made a huge difference in the WSF:

It foregrounded issues central to the survival of tribal peoples: their subsistence rights to lands, rivers, forests and water against the destruction wrought by mega-development projects, resource extraction, privatisation and corporate control of nature. These movements are rural, communitarian, oriented to subsistence livelihoods and embody the links between bio- and cultural diversity. Their survival struggles forced ecological questions to the centre of the WSF's agenda. (ibid.: 224)

It seems like this foregrounding of subaltern movements led to a foregrounding of a global struggle for subsistence. What if the call for a “united front” of JS is actually one of foregrounding subsistence

¹⁸ And while one goal of this article is to challenge TO practitioners worldwide through scientific analysis into reflecting their on and entering into a dialogue about our practice, I know that this English article for a North American journal will probably primarily reach again the ones privileged enough to learn the colonial language of English. With Under Pressure, the ITO newsletter, the idea of a language translation was practiced, even though again it was again mostly colonial languages as *lingua franca* in respective regions.

¹⁹ Again, a paternalising comment would be that apparently these subaltern TO activists have no interest in participating in a global TO arena. How can I know? (And I know counter-examples for sure!)

economies and independent politics of people worldwide as the only way to save our planet rather than (or as well as) a call for deeper relations of love between theatre activists? These politics go unheard also because of colonial difference.

One way forward to address inequalities in a global movement is to create “subaltern counterpublics” within movements. (Conway 2011b: 226) Within the TO movement the Magdalena network of TO by women is a prominent example of that. It evolved from the notion that women needed their own TO practice and were not equally heard in the global arena. “They participate in the WSF [or the TO movement, JK] intent on the need for their own spaces on their own terms. They are also simultaneously making a claim on the WSF [or the TO movement, JK] as a whole and on its constitutive movements, agitating for recognition, inclusion and solidarity.” (ibid.). These spaces, this recognition and solidarity is a result of intra-movement struggle and not graciously “given” to them by dominant (tendentially male, white, colonial) actors within the TO movement. In discussions with female joker friends, one of the reasons why they did not consider themselves part of a global TO movement as they perceived it existing, or why they wished to opt out of it, was the existence of structural inequalities within the movement that nobody dared talk about. However I also have experienced self-reflexivity in the movement about these inequalities, e.g. when the Greek TO movement gave a workshop using TO techniques during the Muktheadhara festival in 2018, in part about hierarchies and the use of money within the movement which resulted in important discussions on inequality.

Matthijssen writes on inequalities within the movement and its history: “In 2005, at the Barcelona gathering, it was the North/South divide which almost split the movement.²⁰ Before and during the 2009 conference in Rio, it was the gender issue which led to heated debates.... The old/young discrepancy has since gradually increased in importance.” (Matthijssen, personal JSIRRI email, 21 January 2019)

In that sense, to me, the TO movement as a “united front” resembles more and more the WSF where “movements recognize each other as friends and allies, across barriers of language, caste and class, gender, sexuality, religion, way of life, political practice and civilizational difference.” (Conway 2011b: 225) Conway frames the WSF after Boaventura De Sousa Santos as a global “contact zone” (ibid.: 219), a permeable space of translation where movements can “mutually recognize and respect the specificity of each while making possible the cross-cultural intelligibility necessary to constructing counter-hegemonic collaboration.” (ibid.) However, this contact zone is still “alternately cosmopolitan and colonial in its dynamics.” (ibid.)

²⁰ Southern jokers were not present at all at the conference. The ITO website was criticized for not being fully accessible technically and language wise from the Global South.

“Translation” as the collective task for a global TO contact zone would mean “to generate new knowledges and practices capable of confronting neoliberal globalization and oriented towards plural conceptions of social emancipation.” (ibid.: 228) What if this would be the very goal of a global movement, not “[w]ithout prior consensus that there is not and can be no general theory of social transformation?” (ibid.) I want to add that there can also be no general theory of what a global TO movement should look like.

I believe that TO has good playing cards for this “translation” work. “Humanization of Humanity” as the overarching goal can be filled with pluriversal content from all societal spectrums and positionalities without having to agree in a general way on what it means to end oppression, so this is something a lot of people can identify with. However, for a global movement consciousness to emerge²¹, some common political content is needed. If TO is about to go the way of consciously identifying as a global contact zone of movements, which I recommend, a “more explicit strategy of decolonisation” (ibid.: 234) might be necessary.

7. Conclusions

Summer 2015, a warm summer night. I sit in a hot Neapolitan kitchen in a very small flat. An Italian TO practitioner has opened her door for my then partner and me. Her son has found another place to sleep for some nights so we can use his bed.

We didn't know each other before, but she is a friend of another Italian TO practitioner friend of mine. We eat amazing pumpkin pasta together (I still have the taste in my mouth, the smell in my nose). And even though we don't speak each other's languages or have a common tongue, TO is our connection. “Che si bello!” (Is that even Italian?) We talk with hands and gestures, we laugh, we have a good time. At some point a friend who speaks English comes over and we talk about what we do in TO. We find common values, we share our most amazing stories with the practice. We're human together.

In this article I wanted very much to show that TO is a global social movement. Afterwards it feels very much like a fight with demons done. Breathing and letting go of that strong want while writing led me to understand that it is not about wanting something, but about being something, believing in something and becoming something.

Breathing and letting go. I hope in this article I lowered the pressure over what the TO movement normatively *should* and *should not* be. There is no need for a global federation of TO even though to some of us it might be desirable. Also, there is no need to have a political strategy with specific goals to be able to consider oneself a movement, if there is a bigger cause with which TO has

²¹ A related question here is, if the goal of creating an overarching TO movement and a respective organization in itself is a white male ideal?

an impact on reality (which doesn't need to be a power strategy, but it can). Most of all, I guess I learnt about the importance of identification. I was confronted with my doubts about whether I actually have a TO movement to identify with. I also want to highlight that an analytical view through social movement theories helps make struggles within the movement less emotionally charged with our normative and tactical choices and thus helps us let go of this pressure.

Even though the TO movement(s) might not (yet/anymore) be a global movement defined as an organizational entity with strategic goals according to resource Mobilization Theory, there are still many resilient local groups engaging TO for "humanizing humanity" which is perhaps close to Ferreira/Devine's (2012) notion of TO as rhizome. This article was also about the obstacles between the now and the utopian future of TO.

Do you, dear reader, consider yourself part of this global TO movement? I hereby declare it proudly: I am practicing TO and by doing so I am part of a global theatrical social movement which wants to "humanize humanity," which believes that change is possible in the world! I believe I am not alone in that with all the doubts that run alongside it. To me, the TO movement as a global contact zone is something very valuable even though it is flawed and not outside the systems of oppressions we are fighting, embracing all its coloniality, patriarchy and other structural inequalities. Who joins me?

No matter what your answer to my question, I guess we agree that it would be neglecting the whole of TO to view TO only as a method or an ethics and not as a social movement or community.

I also found out that I am young and I still feel I have only scratched on the surface of TO movement histories and herstories on an organizational and personal level. I have a lot to learn still. This ignorance reflects itself in this article and I embrace it.

Breathing and letting go, "what should be" becomes What *could be*? And opens space for formulating (my personal?) utopias for the global TO movement(s). What would be possible if a lot of people agreed with me that they are in such a movement, working to commonly agreed political goals? What if Birgit Fritz's description of Augusto Boal's revolutionary politics of the body as "The Courage to Become" (2017) would become the premise of whole societies? What if we would perceive the TO movement as a global union like in Jana Sanskriti's glass cobra game variation?

Regarding resource mobilization: What if there were global political action days of the TO movement? What if there was a global federation where global actions are collectively agreed upon, maybe in the form of a festival? What if we would honestly speak about informal hierarchies within the movement to identify organic leaders (cf. Conway 2015) to break the vicious cycle of a lack of hosting global processes?

Regarding TO as a cultural movement and global contact zone: What if our collective "no!" to neoliberal globalization would become lived everyday practice? What if we had a collective movement

consciousness that acknowledged and worked against global inequalities within the movement? What if we organized TO as a movement in which various issues and life realities find recognition? What if we had a global collective dialogue on what societies we want to live in?

Regarding TO as a power strategy: What if we became a movement of political activists instead/besides exchanging ideas and methodological questions? What if we perceived ourselves being in a collective political struggle? What if we engaged in transnational strikes and mass actions, and organizing? What if we faced global challenges like the threatening ecological crises, capitalism, or fascism together with a global perspective on them? I believe this to be truly revolutionary.

Let me end with some of the questions posed to jokers by Geraldine Nicole Velez Loza in a recent TO anthology (Joffre-Eichhorn 2019) and apply them to the TO movement: Are we ready to have the same dialogue (about oppression) all over again? Are we capable of receiving criticism and seeing our own mistakes? Are we ready for change? Can we control our ego? (cf. Velez Loza 2019: 157ff.) Humanization is a matter of love, of relating and relationship and it includes deeply human qualities such as attention, listening, responding, dialogue, humility, curiosity, and interaction.

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