



Conflict and Compassion

- A story of combining Theatre of the Oppressed
and Nonviolent Communication

By Sini Moilanen

Candidate number 601

Master's degree program in Visual and Performing Arts: Drama
and Theatre Studies

The Department of Art, Design and Drama

Oslo Metropolitan University

2023

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The front-page picture is by the author, 2023.

Abstract:

This is a qualitative practice-led research on how the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Nonviolent Communication (NVC) can complement each other as methodological traditions. It is based on experiences from a workshop conducted for adults interested in learning the basics of NVC and exploring them with techniques of the TO. Methods of data gathering include the workshop itself as well as interviews. Besides the empirical finds, I discuss the origin of these methods and how they can affect each other when combined.

The finds indicate that TO can offer a functioning arena for the practice of NVC. The aesthetic properties and the body's involvement are beneficial for understanding the concepts of NVC. NVC can contribute to TO with a further understanding of the mechanics of oppression through language and provides concrete tools for navigating conflict in a life-enriching way. These methods can support each other and create a comprehensive methodology for learning to recognise violence and oppression at different levels of experience and exploring concrete action strategies for liberation.

Keywords: Drama, Theatre, Nonviolent Communication, Theatre of the Oppressed, Conflict, Violence, Oppression, Compassion

Sammendrag:

Dette er en kvalitativ praksis-ledet forskning om hvordan De Undertryktes Teater (DUT) og Ikkevoldskommunikasjon (IVK) kan utfylle hverandre som metodologiske tradisjoner. Den er basert på erfaringer fra en workshop gjennomført for voksne som er interessert i å utforske grunnleggende IVK gjennom teknikker fra DUT. Metoder for datainnsamling inkluderer selve workshoppen og intervjuer. I tillegg til de empiriske funnene, diskuterer jeg opprinnelsen til disse metodene og hvordan de kan påvirke hverandre når de kombineres.

Funnene indikerer at DUT kan tilby en funksjonell arena for utøvelse av IVK. De estetiske egenskapene og kroppens involvering viser seg gunstig for å forstå konseptene i IVK. IVK komplimenterer DUT med en ytterligere forståelse av mekanismen bak undertrykkelse gjennom språk og gir konkrete verktøy for å navigere konflikter på en livsberikende måte. Disse metodene kan skape en utfyllende metodikk for å lære å gjenkjenne vold og undertrykkelse på ulike erfaringsnivåer og utforske konkrete handlingsstrategier for frigjøring.

Nøkkelord: Drama, Teater, Ikkevoldskommunikasjon, De Undertryktes Teater, Konflikt, Vold, Undertrykkelse, Medfølelse

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And finally, to my parents back home

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1.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the background and the premises of this work and lays out the structure of the thesis for the reader.

1.1 Background

The idea behind combining Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) came to me several years ago. I didn't explore this combination before this research project but the idea persisted in my mind. A few times, some things have struck me instantaneously without me having a conscious notion of why, but accompanied by a feeling from which I recognise that this is something that will stick. This was the case with these two methods and especially their combination, as I sensed the potential to create something valuable in their intersection.

Nonviolent Communication is a way of thinking and living in the world developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg (2015). It helps us stay in compassionate connection with ourselves and others and solve conflicts efficiently and peacefully by connecting with the feelings and needs that are alive in us. It is best known for the practical process of communication it introduces. Theatre of the Oppressed, in turn, was created by Augusto Boal (2021), as a set of participatory theatrical methods, where actively dealing with oppression and

rehearsing action is central. The democratic techniques aim to critically analyse and transform the reality of the participants. TO has a long history that glides from the socio-political to the socio-individual to the individual-political and back again (Boal, 1995, p.xviii). In these two methods, NVC and TO, there are common themes of personal power, empowerment of communities, and social change. I wanted to research what happens when combining these methods and see if it can produce applicable results, that could benefit people and communities. The previous research on this topic is limited and more research could be useful. This thesis can hopefully benefit professionals who work with any of the two methods, especially if they wish to work with their combination.

My interest in these methods stems from a sense of a need for the Theatre of the Oppressed and Nonviolent Communication within myself and experiencing them has shaped and continues to shape me. Since starting to properly invest in learning NVC, I have experienced its many benefits, of which some come quickly, and some take much practice until becoming tangible. Besides this, I see and sense the need for these methods in the surrounding world, from our everyday interactions to society at large.

Initially, when coming up with the idea for this work, I thought that as Theatre of the Oppressed is meant for practising actions for “real life”, I figured it could also be an effective way to practise Nonviolent Communication. I was also aware of how well the benefits of drama in general, align with NVC, as it supports self-expression, creates empathetic bonds between people and enables playfulness and creativity. During the preparation for the workshop, I got curious and wondered if Nonviolent Communication could also give something back to the Theatre of the Oppressed. And could this happen while staying true to the nature of the Theatre of the Oppressed? Maybe this was possible, since the core aims of these two methods are the same, to bring awareness and help find strategies to create a change towards what is ultimately desired, a society free from violence and oppression.

Throughout this work, we are looking at conflict, which is at the centre of much of the human experience, and theatre. With the combination of Theatre of the Oppressed and Nonviolent Communication, we explore what is underneath the surface, to create greater understanding and explore new strategies to meet our needs. In an attempt of this, one of the techniques used in this work from *The Rainbow of Desire* (Boal, 1995) brings out our different “colours” on

stage so that we can examine them properly. “...in the same motion as when the white light of the sun, passing through rain, mutates into a rainbow in which we see all the colours the white light concealed.” (Boal, 1995, p.150). The rainbow reveals what hides in complexity, and can be simultaneously a symbol of hope, of calm after the storm, just like, according to NVC, there is potential in conflict to reach a greater connection than before.

1.2 Research Question and Structure of Thesis

The reflections in this thesis are based on experiences derived from doing a two-day workshop inspired by Nonviolent Communication and Theatre of the Oppressed. Besides my reflections and observations from the workshop, I have gathered data by interviewing the workshop participants, as well as Marta Skorczynska, a practitioner of NVC and TO who has created a similar workshop. My main research question is, “*How can these two methods, Nonviolent Communication and Theatre of the Oppressed, complement each other?*”. I have also investigated the philosophical background and the purpose of these methods and reflect on the similarities and differences.

In the following chapter 2.0, I will describe the methodological choices, followed by the presentation of the theory

and central concepts in chapter 3.0. Chapter 4.0 gives an overview of the structure of the workshop. The techniques, results and reflections will be discussed further in chapter 5.0. This fifth chapter, “How can Theatre of the Oppressed and Nonviolent Communication complement each other?”, consists of insights and knowledge derived from the workshop experience and a deeper reflection on the techniques used in relation to Nonviolent Communication and Theatre of the Oppressed. Later in this chapter, I investigate the philosophical landscape of the methods and question how they can come together in this work. In chapter 6.0, I discuss potentials for future applications, such as applying it to different focus groups and topics that could be explored. This chapter is followed by a conclusion where I conclude the results and present a possible model of combining these techniques based on my reflections in the earlier chapters.

Before moving onwards, I wish to express that while having done research in both these methods, so that I can feel confident enough to explore them with a group, I don't have an extensive previous experience with Theatre of the Oppressed, and I am not certified in Nonviolent Communication. This indicates that this work is based on my own understanding of these methods. Nevertheless, I

have not attempted to make significant changes to the forms, except for some slight adjustments to the techniques following the applicable nature of Boal's exercises. Throughout the workshop and the writing process, I've attempted to keep in mind what Adrian Jackson says in the foreword in Boal's (1995) *The Rainbow of Desire*: “The rules in this book should be treated with similar combination of respect and disrespect - like a good cook, users of the book should be prepared to vary the recipe to suit the ingredients and the tastes of the eaters, because the work is always about what is going on in the moment, not what is going on on the page.” (Jackson, 1995, p. xxiv).

Where this balance in the combination of respect and disrespect lies, can only be found by examining one's intentions, listening to the intuition, and observing closely what is happening in the room. Through the workshop, I have reflected on this balance between respect and disrespect, and at this moment, it feels like the balancing act is advancing forwards.

2.0 Method

This is a qualitative practice-led research. For gathering and analysing data I have chosen the phenomenological methodology while twining in aspects from hermeneutics. The data is collected through interviews and exercises and observations made in a workshop context.

2.1 Qualitative Practice-led Research

Qualitative research goes into the depth and derives from empirical data with the researcher as the main instrument for the gathering of data. The empirical data is open and ambiguous and is derived from the perspective of the research subject. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008, p.17)

I choose to call this research practice-led, since practice-led research allows to incorporate a creative aspect into the study and gives freedom to use various methods and research tools that are characteristic of the discipline. “/.../ creative practice – the training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and the process they engage in when they are making art – can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and

written up as research.” (Dean & Smith, 2009, p.5). My interest in the research is in the practice of Nonviolent Communication and Theatre of the Oppressed. The research process is guided and motivated by empirical experience within these practices, from which reflections and questions arise.

I would also like to point to post-qualitative research or the so-called performative paradigm, since some of its terminologies seem to go well with ideas presented in this specific research and speaks to me as a way of conducting research. In qualitative research, it is recognised that the researcher is the main instrument for gathering and analysing the data, as mentioned earlier, which affects the results. In the performative paradigm, it is also seen as a strength that the researcher is involved in the process with all their senses as a researcher-body. “The researcher-body is understood as a resource and an outcome of the research as situated knowledge. Notably, the researcher is not static in the research, but instead changes with it.” (Østern et al., 2021, p.1). This paradigm is used primarily in artistic research and sees the world (also the researcher) as always in “becoming” as opposed to static, which is a central concept in both Nonviolent Communication and the Theatre of the Oppressed. Another aspect that the performative paradigm shakes up, is research

being representative and ‘true’. “We still argue that performative research is sound and trustworthy, because it seeks to keep, not flatten out, complexity. (...) Performative research, then, does not seek to represent the world, but engage with it, producing new insight and situated knowledge.” (Østern et al., 2121, p.14). As this research is based on practical methods exploring not only what is, but also what could be, the aspiration has been to engage with the world and produce new insight, while acknowledging the complexities along the way.

The idea of the world constantly “becoming” and us being the co-creators of this world is also an interesting perspective to look at Social Constructivism from.

2.2 Social Constructivism

According to social constructivism, reality is subjective. People give the world and actions a meaning depending on their experiences and ideas, which can vary greatly among individuals, time and space (Aure, 2021, 30.11). Both Nonviolent Communication and Theatre of the Oppressed examine these social constructs. They aim to enable social change and aid in shifting the constructs of how we are used to acting or communicating with each other. This shift has the potential to change the way we experience reality.

Social constructivists mean that we construct parts of our reality through labelling things, as in “typification” of people or “objectification” of things. This means a thing or a person will be embedded with a given meaning, and these ideas override the face-to-face relationship. Language is especially important in constructing a “social knowledge base”, which will create routines of action and become like a recipe book for dealing with situations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008, s.85). This is how Nonviolent Communication sees the application of language as well, it is an essential dimension in how we construct our reality and that by changing the language we can change how we look at the world. Also, Theatre of the Oppressed is very interested in what meanings we give certain words and attempts to get beneath the labels. In both methods, we look at these constructs that will determine how we see the world, think about it, and organise ourselves in it, which shapes our experience. Therefore, we try to understand them and see other options.

Paolo Freire (2014), who developed the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (introduced in chapter 3.2 Theatre of the Oppressed), believes that oppression is a choice we humans have. We can either support humanity or dehumanise others which leads to violence. The struggle against oppression is possible from this belief that we can

choose differently (Freire, 2014, p.44). This choice is possible when we have understood and critically examined the present constructs.

2.3 Phenomenology & Hermeneutics

Phenomenology studies the structures of consciousness through the subjective experience of a person and the person's relation to the world. Instead of just considering experiences acquired through hearing, seeing and other senses, it includes experiences like memories, feelings, fantasies, will and even bodily awareness, embodied actions, social activities and so on (Jacobsen, 2021, s.109).

In this research, I am interested in the subjective experiences of the informants with their inner and external worlds. Phenomenology takes into consideration the holistic view from which also Theatre of the Oppressed operates, “We start from a principle that the human being is a unity, an indivisible whole. (...) A bodily movement ‘is’ a thought and a thought expresses itself in a corporeal form.” (Boal, 2021, p. 49). The thinking and experiencing body is as important as the rational mind.

Hermeneutics is about interpreting, and while it stems from biblical research, it is widely used in different disciplines, wherein the study of arts. This philosophy claims that humans always express

meaningful thoughts and actions, and this meaning is what hermeneutics interprets. There are many variations of the so-called hermeneutic circle, of which the most common is to shift the perspective between a smaller part and its broader context. From doing this repeatedly, one creates a sort of spiral that deepens and widens the understanding and births new ideas (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008, s.193-196) (Theodore, 2021, chap. 1.3). In my discussion, I move between the broader context of philosophy and theory and the concrete experiences. This has been an ongoing process of reflection throughout the whole period of working with these themes.

There seems to be a discussion of whether phenomenology is compatible with hermeneutics. Hermeneutic phenomenology can be described as follows. “Human lives, experiences and the world as lived (human lifeworld and its phenomena) are understood within their particular temporal, situated frame through an interpretivist epistemology, that draws upon intentionality, intersubjectivity and hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation.” (Cross et al., 2020). Kjersti Johansson (2016) discusses this compatibility in her article about phenomenology and hermeneutics. While she says it is possible

to take parts of one direction into the other, she recognises their differences and recommends taking a position in one or the other.

I choose to place this research mainly inside phenomenology, but I also bring up some aspects of hermeneutics. I am occupied with our ability to access a direct experience through our bodies and attempt to lift out pure experiences from the participants, which is a phenomenological approach. Parallely, I also focus on the matter that our inner world is also constructed of our thoughts, which are already interpretations and based on context. Kjersti Johansson points out the relational aspect of the hermeneutical understanding, and that in Hans-Georg Gadamer's (as cited in Johansson, 2016) meaning, understanding is arrived at by two people coming to an understanding together through dialogue, which is a central idea in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, that Theatre of the Oppressed is based on. (Johansson, 2016).

2.4 Data-gathering Methods

In this chapter, I will discuss the data-gathering methods, including the workshop itself, the observations from the experience, as well as the reflections and observations of the participants themselves. On top of this, I interviewed a professional in the field.

2.4.1 Recruiting and Selection

The target audience to join a workshop combining Nonviolent Communication and Theatre of the Oppressed and to participate in this research, was adults interested in working with NVC and open to theatrical methods. As the topic is so universal and my focus is on the methods themselves instead of a specific group of people, I didn't frame the group in more detail. I recruited the participants through my personal connections and posted about it on a Facebook page with people interested in self-development and conscious living as well as a group for professionals in drama. This type of recruiting will mean that the people joining can have different backgrounds but share a common interest and openness for this type of work. Like this, I could also observe what reactions the work evoked in very different people.

I aimed to have between 6 and 9 participants per workshop. While both the workshops were complete or almost complete in inscriptions, because of sickness and other obstacles, there were seven participants on the first weekend and five on the second. About half of the participants had at least heard about Nonviolent Communication before and a little less than half knew something

about the Theatre of the Oppressed. The participants were of varying ages, from 26 to over 50 years old, with different backgrounds.

2.4.2 Workshop

I planned and conducted the workshop to experiment with combining Nonviolent Communication and Theatre of the Oppressed. This workshop was intended to give empirical data on the methods. The two-day workshop was conducted twice in Oslo in October 2022, with different participants each time. The length of the workshop, two days and 9,5 hours in total, was determined by the amount of time I anticipated people would be willing to, and able to commit. I believe that with a shorter workshop, it would have been challenging to properly explore the methods, and with a more extended workshop, it would not have been easy to get enough participants.

I consider this workshop partly an artistic method from its creation phase to its execution. Besides that, it works as soil from which the other data sprouts in the form of reflections, experiences, observations and interview material.

2.4.3 Participating Observation

During the workshop, I gathered data by participating observation. Through observation, one can validate the findings made through

interviews and find new information, as well as see possible gaps between what the informant says in an interview and what they do. One can also find information that doesn't transmit through words. (Krumsvik, 2014, p. 142-143).

My role as a researcher was known by the workshop participants. The role I participated through was that of a pedagogue, or the leader of the activity, and the role of the researcher was slightly subordinate to that role. While this choice was beneficial and essential to ensure the quality of the workshop and the data derived from it, the observing researcher was left with fewer resources during the activity.

2.4.4 Field Conversations and Reflections

Since the role of the researcher was subordinate to the role of the pedagogue during the workshop, I have taken support for my observations through discussions. I have written down reflections from conversations with my colleague who hosted the workshop with me, and in this way could validate my observations and add to them. These reflections have been written down after each planning session, before and after the workshop days, and whenever they have spontaneously arrived. These discussions, which are not planned interviews, can answer unpredictable questions and an additional validation for interviews and observations made (Krumsvik, 2014, p.

145). Furthermore, I have written down reflections throughout the process of this thesis.

2.4.5 Participants' Insights

To find out about the effects of the workshop on the participants as they themselves experienced it, I gathered data in three different ways: at the end of the workshop, I instructed the participants to write a text (poetic inquiry) and conducted a semi-structured group interview. Three months after the workshop, I interviewed three of the participants again, to find out more after they had had the chance to integrate and possibly test out some of the knowledge in practice. The participants for this interview were chosen based on their willingness and availability for the interview.

I consider the texts gathered from the participants to be a “poetic inquiry”. In poetic inquiry, the texts can be created in many ways, for example, by the informants or by the researcher based on interview material (Leavy, 2015, p.80). “The representation of data in a poetic form can help the researcher evoke different meanings from the data, work through a different set of issues, and help the audience receive the data differently.” (Leavy, 2015, p.79). When describing reality, sometimes the meaning can be lost in the description, and poetic language can better bring forth the essence of what is said.

Poems are meant to move you, not just inform your intellect, and that’s why I think it is an exciting way to put an embodied experience into text. The participants were encouraged to write a text in a free form, as poetic or non-poetic as they wanted, inspired by what had come up in a creative writing exercise. The creative writing was a three-minute-long session, after which the participants had ten minutes to write the final text. The creative writing was kept private, but the participants were informed that the final text would be shared with the group. After sharing the texts, I asked permission individually from each participant to document and use the text anonymously. Some of the poems and texts can be found along the pages, and the selection was made based on how organically they would find a place and connection with the topics brought up in this thesis. I have also taken the liberty to include only parts of some of the texts. Most texts were written in English, which we used at the workshop. I also chose to include one text originally written in Norwegian, as it was simply translatable into English.

All the interviews I’ve conducted, group or one-on-one, are semi-structured. A semi-structured interview is a hybrid between a standard open-ended interview (or a structured interview), where all the interviewees are asked the same questions in the same order, and

an informal interview, which takes the form of a discussion without priorly planned questions. The weakness of a structured interview is that one cannot follow a path that seems suddenly interesting or ask questions that pop up in the situation. Its strength, on the other hand, is that it can be useful when it is helpful that all the interviewees are held to the same format for the sake of comparison (Lotherington, 1990, p.3-7). In this research, I chose the semi-structured method as I think it is of benefit to follow the paths that appear in the situation to find out what is important for the person, but also to have the possibility to guide them to answer questions, that are of particular interest for me as a researcher.

I wanted to interview the participants, as I am interested in how they are thinking and what their opinions and feelings are, to answer my research question and find out if they can perceive their own (and others) behaviour differently and if they have acquired new strategies of action. These interviews were documented by making notes. In the book *Intervju som metode (1990)*, the objective of an interview is explained in the following way: “We want to know how different people subjectively experience the phenomenon we study, and we want to understand it through their own way of expressing it.” (Lotherington, 1990, p.2, my translation). I noticed that when

conducting the interview, sometimes the informants answered, not precisely to the question I asked, but to what they wanted to discuss, which I let happen.

The group interview at the end of the workshop gave a possibility to hear the immediate thoughts surfacing in a joint discussion among the participants. Three months after the workshop, I also interviewed three participants in a one-on-one interview to find out what kind of effects the workshop had in the long run. I decided these interviews be individual so that there is space to go deeper and more personal. Besides asking them about the workshop and what they think in retrospect about using the methods of Theatre of the Oppressed, I asked about their experiences with violence/oppression and what had happened to their ability to identify and deal with violence/oppression since the workshop. I asked if they had gotten other help from the tools the workshop provided and brought up using NVC in the *inner dialogue*, which we didn't discuss in the workshop beside a brief mention. I also asked what they would like to focus on, if we were to have a “part two”, a second workshop where we would continue the work.

2.4.6 Interview

To gain more insight into the research and to have an additional perspective to both challenge and confirm my findings and reflections, I interviewed Marta Skorczyńska, who has been working with combining the methods of Nonviolent Communication and Theatre of the Oppressed, and whose work I have been inspired by when preparing for the workshop. She is a non-formal education trainer, applied drama trainer, and actor in Forum Theatre performances, as well as a graduate of Psychology and Social Animation studies at Gdansk University. In 2009-2018 she has supported international volunteers as a mentor, coordinator, and coach, and since 2018, she has supported other youth workers as an Empathy Based Communication trainer. In her work, she finds inspiration from voice and body training methods, and educational games. She is also trained as a needs-based coach and mediator and is in the process of training in Gestalt Psychotherapy.

This one-on-one interview via Zoom included questions about her experiences and thoughts around these methods and the challenges, prospects, and potential they might hold. This interview is also semi-structured and was recorded to ensure precise citations later.

2.5 Methodical Challenges

Here, I am mentioning some of the methodological challenges I can identify and discuss why I have made these choices.

I chose to preserve the intimate atmosphere in the workshop and an environment that allows dealing with personal topics and not making a video intake. As the role of the researcher was subordinate to the role of the pedagogue during the workshops, the notes were taken during breaks, and so some of the observations I could have made might have been lost.

Another limitation is that I don't yet have an extensive previous experience with either Theatre of the Oppressed or Nonviolent Communication. I have experienced Theatre of the Oppressed through a course during my bachelor studies and committed to my private research around Nonviolent Communication. I chose to use these methods since I was optimistic about my ability to conduct a workshop and arrive at relevant insights and results already with the experience I had. The users of these methods can face challenges and pitfalls on the way, especially in the beginning. Nonviolent Communication presents challenges as it is easy to use the method inaccurately in the beginning as your understanding of the method has yet to fully develop. Theatre of the

Oppressed also requires having an understanding of the principles of the work. The advantage of these methods is that there is readily material about their individual use, so I could be aware and prepared to face some of the typical challenges. Additionally, I could get support with combining the methods through the work of Marta Skorczyńska (introduced in chapter 2.4.6 Interview). A challenge I faced during the workshop was my questions about how to keep Forum Theatre true to its nature. Now, reflecting on it, I can see how that can be achieved within this concept.

A two-day workshop (conducted twice) is relatively short, and a more extended workshop would have allowed diving deeper into the methods. The reason I chose this length was to ensure participation, while still being able to gather sufficient data. This is also why I think the interview with another professional, and comparing experiences with them, is essential data that can give trust to the results of this research.

During the process, I also faced questions about where we are within the philosophical and political worldviews when combining the methods, if they are compatible, and if it is important to anchor the work somewhere. As I attempt to answer what happens on this philosophical level when the two methods merge, I realise, that even

though I consider it to be an important point to discuss and that it has fundamental effects on the work, a clear conclusion is challenging to arrive at due to the complicity of the subject.

3.0 Theory

In this chapter, I first present the theory of the two central methods in this work. Under the subchapter “Concepts and supportive theory,” I will further open up the meaning behind main concepts and present the additional theory that I use as support in the chapters that follow.

3.1 Nonviolent Communication

According to Eide & Eide (2004), the word communication comes from the Latin *communicare*, which means to do something together, to include another, have a connection with. Communication refers to several phenomena in daily use, from personal discussion with one or more people to chatting and mass communication through different networks. As humans, we communicate from when we are born. Small child communicates with their eyes, smiles, cries, and movements before they learn to speak. Both non-verbal and verbal communication can be polysemantic, and the better we know a person, the easier it usually is for us to read their meanings. In our relationships, we often communicate verbally and nonverbally on many different levels - rationally and emotionally, directly and indirectly, distanced and empathically, controlled and spontaneously, consciously and unconsciously. Often nonverbal communication

plays as big of a role as verbal communication. The experiences and research point towards that despite having communicated since we were small children, most of us still have much to learn (Eide & Eide, 2004, p.16-17).

Nonviolent Communication, or NVC, was created to help us develop our communication in profound ways towards a more aware and conscious type of communication that improves the quality of our relationships and contributes to peaceful conflict resolutions. “As NVC replaces our old patterns of defending, withdrawing, or attacking in the face of judgement and criticism, we come to perceive ourselves and others, as well as our intentions and relationships, in a new light.” (Rosenberg, 2015 p.3).

Nonviolent Communication was established by the American psychologist Marshall B. Rosenberg, PhD (1934-2015). He taught it around the world during his lifetime and worked as a mediator in different situations. He put NVC into action, from conflicts between groups of people in areas with severe conflict and war, to conflicts between married couples. The purpose of NVC is to inspire heartfelt connections between ourselves and other people - connections that allow everyone’s needs to be met through compassionate giving. It shows how to express what is alive in us and to see what is alive in

other people. Once we get clear on those things, we can look at how to enrich that life (Rosenberg, 2012, p.vii). Everything that has been integrated into Nonviolent Communication has been known for centuries. It contains nothing new and is intended to remind us of the potential we humans have in relating with each other.

In its simplicity, the practical process of NVC consists of the following four components: observation, feelings, needs and request. How these components are used is explained in detail in the many books and resources. This process can be used when expressing ourselves by: *“clearly expressing how I am without blaming or criticising, and clearly requesting that which would enrich my life without demanding”*, or when listening to another person: *“empathically receiving how you are without hearing blame or criticism, and empathically receiving that which would enrich your life without hearing a demand”*, (Rosenberg, 2012, p.xi). We can also use the process to communicate and connect directly with ourselves.

Although, Rosenberg points out that it is much more than a process, and that communication is only one part of NVC. Most important it is an intention to create a certain quality of connection that enables compassionate giving and receiving. It shows us a way in which we can connect with ourselves and others so that we operate

from a different energy than that of reward and punishment. It is a way of being, thinking, and living in the world (Rosenberg, 2012b, 4:50)

NVC evolved out of his interest in two questions. Through his life experiences, he got curious about the mechanics of violence, and he wanted to understand better what leads some human beings to behave violently and exploitatively, and, conversely, what kind of education serves our attempts to remain compassionate - even when others are behaving violently or exploitatively. In exploring these questions, he found three important factors in understanding why some respond violently while some respond compassionately in a similar situation: 1. The language we have been educated to use, 2. How we have been taught to think and communicate 3. The specific strategies we have learned to influence others and ourselves (Rosenberg, 2012, p.vii-viii) Language shapes perception and the way we see the world and interact in it. What Marshall means by “violent” language is a language of moral judgement, a language of blame, guilt and who is right and who is wrong. He claims that a lot of the language we use and are used to in the world right now is violent and leads to violent actions. In order to change that, we also need to change the language.

“NVC also considers violence to be any use of coercion or power over others — including any use of punishment, reward, guilt, shame, duty or obligation. This would also include most of our communication today and how our societal institutions (schools, church, prison, the judicial system) reaffirm this language and philosophy.” (Torenberg, 2019). According to NVC, any time a person does what we want, without their motive being to serve life (and in no way fearing punishment or feeling guilt, shame, duty or obligation), we will pay for it. We may win the battle, but we’ll lose the war. So NVC is quite radically different from the language we use today, as it encourages us to not do anything for reward or punishment, but only to serve life based on our own need of meaning and purpose (Rosenberg, 2021b, 8:12).

The most important takeaway from NVC, in my opinion, is the needs-thinking. That everything we do is an attempt to fill our needs. What NVC considers a need, are the universal needs that all humans have in common, i.e. connection, play, honesty, autonomy, physical well-being, etc. It is also essential to understand that it is not a language that makes you passive and submissive, but quite the contrary; the language of NVC makes one take responsibility for their

own feelings (and actions) and realise the power of choice in any situation.

The name itself, Nonviolent Communication, is funnily enough conflicting with its own philosophy by being non-something, focusing on what it is not, instead of what is desired. I’ve come across two reasons for this; The first one is that Rosenberg wanted to connect it with the Nonviolent Peace Movement associated with Mahatma Gandhi, which has inspired, for example the anti-war protests in the USA and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Besides that, the title can wake us up to question ourselves. Torenberg (2019) writes in his article that Rosenberg chose the provocative title to show “how insidious and violent our day-to-day communication is (and how we don’t even realise it)”. Yet, NVC goes by other names as well, for example, Compassionate Communication, Giraffe Language, or the Language of Life. The last one carries a lot of the essence of NVC that is expressed in these two questions: What is alive in us? & How can we make life more wonderful? These questions crystallise Nonviolent Communication, and finally the whole communication process can be boiled down to what is expressed in them.

3.2 Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the Oppressed, or TO, was created by the Brazilian theatre maker Augusto Boal (2021), originally developed out of his work with peasant and worker populations and is now used all over the world for social and political activism, conflict resolution, community building, therapy and government legislation. It is a community-based education that uses theatre as a tool for transformation.

It derives inspiration from the influential Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (2014) and his “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”. Freire criticised the narrative character of education and the presentation of reality as motionless and static. According to him, education thus becomes an act of depositing of information (rather than creating understanding and critical thinking), which he refers to as the “banking” concept of education. This type of education contains attitudes and practises that mirror the oppressive society as a whole (Freire, 2014, p-71-73). Instead, Freire emphasised looking critically at the world in a dialogic encounter with others, where the paternalistic teacher-student relationship is overcome. “Provided with the proper tools for such encounter the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as contradictions in it,

become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality and deal critically with it.” (Freire, 2014, p.33).

The tools that Boal (2021) proposes for this end, are the tools of theatre where the audience is not made of spectators but “spect-actors” who always have a choice to actively take part in what is going on. In the aesthetic space, Boal “stimulates critical observation and representation of reality, envisioning the production of consciousness and concrete actions.” (ImagineAction, 2023). Besides actors and spect-actors, an essential role in TO is the role of the Joker, who is the leader of the game, who explains the rules, corrects errors, and encourages the players (Boal, 2021, p.244). The work of a Joker is focused on dialogue and asking questions, without having predetermined answers. They assist the spect-actors to gather their thoughts and prepare their actions (Boal, 2021, p. 262). Adrian Jackson (1995) writes about the Joker not being as much of a ‘facilitator’ but rather a ‘difficultator’ undermining easy judgments and reinforcing our grasp of the complexity without letting it getting in the way of action or frightening us to submission. (Jackson, 1995, p.xix-xx).

The methods that I have used from TO include *Image Theatre*, which is a series of techniques that allow people to communicate their

meanings through images created by bodies in the space, and not through words alone; *Rainbow of Desire*, which helps us to visualise our internalised oppressions theatrically and reveal hidden dynamics. From this set of techniques, we used the exercise called ‘The image of the rainbow of desire’. And finally, *Forum theatre*, where the spect-actors are invited to replace the Protagonist and act out all possible solutions, ideas and strategies on stage and not from the audience. We used this method with the scenes we had already created earlier, when working with the Rainbow of Desire. (ImagineAction, 2023).

I will go deeper into the specific methods and their use with NVC in chapter 5.3 Theatre of the Oppressed in action. For now, I want to describe another vital term from TO, mainly in focus in the set of techniques of Rainbow of Desire, the ‘Cops in the Head’. It refers to the internalised social constructs which NVC also sheds light on.

According to Boal (1995), society is full of moral and political values that are present in the smallest incidents of our social life, all its structures of domination and power, all its mechanisms of oppression. This propagation of ideas, values, and tastes is called *osmosis*: interpenetration. Osmosis emerges everywhere. In the

family, (through parental legal power, money, dependence, affectivity), in work (through wages, bonuses, unemployment, retirement, etc.), in the army (punishment, promotion, rank, the seduction of the exercise of power, etc.), and advertisement, the church, etc. Even in the theatre. Boal claims that the oppressor produces two types of reactions in the oppressed: submission and subversion. These submissive reactions are caused by the Cops in the Head, the introjection. In TO, these “cops” are worked with in a way that attempts to activate the subversion by making the submission, the cops, disappear. This takes place by illustrating the oppression in a symbolic space with its own aesthetic dimension, where the internalised oppression can be seen for the first time. While discussing an individual case in this practice, we are also talking about the generality of similar cases and the society where this particular case can occur (Boal, 1995, p.40-46). All this is practised following the fundamental hypothesis underlying the totality of TO: “If the oppressed themselves perform an action, (rather than the artist in their place), the performance of that action in theatrical fiction will enable them to activate themselves to perform it in their real life” (Boal, 1995, p.46).

We didn't physically work with the "cops in the head" in the exercises chosen for the workshop. Still, when working with NVC, we are constantly aware of the existence of these 'cops', which construct a lot of the violent communication. When later discussing the prospects of developing this work also towards the internal dialogue, working more specifically with the cops in the head on the stage, is an inspiring possibility.

3.3 Concepts and Supportive Theory

In this subchapter, I will present theory which I will refer to as support when describing some of the recurring concepts. Additionally, I will open up the terms 'violence', 'oppression' and 'compassion' and lay the groundwork for further discussions.

3.3.1 Power vs. Force

The theory and methodology found in the book *Power vs Force* by David Hawkins (2012) are quite elaborate and advanced, which is why I will not go deep into the scientific explanation, but attempt to briefly describe the general idea, and why I find it relevant.

The scientist, physician and consciousness researcher David R. Hawkins (2012) developed a "map of levels of human consciousness" that uses a muscle testing technique called applied

kinesiology. Essentially in this technique, one is supposed to hold a statement or idea in their mind, and test the strength of a muscle. If the statement is considered false or life-destructing (catabolic), the muscle goes weak, whereas if it stays strong, it is true or life-enhancing (anabolic). The language of calling something life-enriching/enhancing vs life-destructing instead of good vs bad, is an important distinction, as "good" and "bad" are subjective moral judgements, whereas life-enriching vs life destructing is an attempt towards more of a neutral observation.

Firstly, I find this kinesiological method interesting already in itself. The way the body reacts to surroundings; may it be an idea, a thought or even an architectural form or a certain material. The body responds differently, and measurably, when something is life-enhancing or harmonious or when something is life-destructing or disharmonious (Hawkins, 2015). I find it interesting since the Theatre of the Oppressed works with the body, and Boal was aware of the effects of using the body as a tool. This theory gives a scientific perspective to one of the reasons Boal's methods work. One can also draw parallels to what Rosenberg (2015) means when he writes about something being life-enriching and how our body, through our emotions, communicates when a need of ours is either met, or unmet.

Related to this, he also presents the idea of “power” and “force”, where power is associated with everything that supports life and force with everything that exploits life. “Force is divisive and, through that divisiveness, weakens, whereas power unifies” (Hawkins, 2014, p.177). What resonates as power makes one test strong (life-enhancing) through the kinesiological muscle testing, and what resonates as force makes one test weak (life-destructing). Marshall Rosenberg, the creator of NVC, talks about “power with”, as opposed to “power over”, which seems to be very much in line with the concept of “power/force”. “Power with”, I think, is present in the desire in NVC to connect around feelings and needs in a conflict situation and find a solution, which is life-enhancing for each party involved, while respecting the autonomy of the concerned. When you influence through “force” or “power over”, it will eventually always collapse and come with unwanted, life-destructive, consequences. While influencing with “power”, or “power with”, might take more time, it bears more fruit in the end. And this is often the case with NVC.

Examining different actions or relations through the lens of “power”/“power with” and “force”/“power over”, and life-enhancing and life-destructive, gives a simple to understand, yet possibly

powerful tool to becoming conscious of the effects our different thoughts and actions have on others (and ourselves), and the effects that others have on us. This kinesiological perspective is also a reminder of our bodies’ knowledge and discerning capacities, at least as long as the body itself is healthy and balanced.

3.3.2 Oppression and Violence

Theatre of the Oppressed is concerned with overcoming “oppression”, Nonviolent communication is created to overcome “violent” communication. What is meant by these terms, and how do they relate?

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2023), violence is “Actions or words that are intended to hurt people”, or “Extremely forceful actions that are intended to hurt people or are likely to cause damage”, whereas oppression is “a situation in which people are governed in an unfair and cruel way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom”. In the Online Etymology Dictionary (2019), we find that ‘oppression’ comes from ‘ob-’, which means ‘against’ and ‘premere’, which means ‘to press, ‘hold fast’ or ‘compress’. Oppression seems to be related to authority, as violence is independent of the relationship. I would like to question somewhat the intentionality that especially the first definition of violence

mentions. We are aware that so-called internalised oppression can lead us to commit oppressive acts and have oppressive thoughts without us even being fully aware of that (i.e. internalised racism). I think the same can apply to violence. Violent language and even deeds can be normalised, and in some situations, we can remain quite unaware of the consequences, or blind to other solutions.

According to my personal experiences, data from the interviews with workshop participants, as well as the experiences documented by Boal (1995) upon his arrival to Europe, it seems to be difficult for many of us who live in Northern Europe to identify things we encounter in our life, as violent or oppressive. Perhaps we imagine other people having much more significant issues, and calling something violence or oppression seems like a strong label. I think it is essential to understand the different levels here, as even if the effects are of different calibre, the mechanics are similar. If we can be aware of the little aggressions we commit in our everyday life, and understand the mechanics and patterns behind them, we are surely less likely to be complicit in such events on a bigger scale.

“The smallest cells of social organisation (the couple, the family, the neighbourhood, the school, the office, etc.) and equally the smallest incidents of our social life (an accident at the corner of the street, the checking of identity paper in the metro, a visit to the doctor, etc.) contain

all the moral and political values of the society in which this particular case can occur”. (Boal, 1995, p.40).

As Boal (1995) came to Europe, the focal point shifted from overt oppression that he had experienced and worked with initially in Latin America (and also later in France and Portugal) towards a more hidden form of oppression that revealed itself to Boal, especially in contact with Northern European countries. These new forms of oppression included ‘loneliness’, the ‘impossibility of communicating with others’ and ‘fear of emptiness’. First, they seemed to Boal to be superficial and uninteresting problems, but he changed his mind and started considering these oppressions. This led to the creation of the Rainbow of Desire techniques, for which he was initially criticised, as the therapeutic arena was considered a relapse into bourgeois individualism (Jackson, 1995, p.xviii). Boal still stood behind his work and connected even this therapeutic work with politics. His hypothesis was that the ‘cops’ are in our heads, but the headquarters and barracks must be on the outside (Boal, 1995, p.8). Marshall Rosenberg talks about this as our cultural conditioning, and says that the language and use of words have a crucial role in it (Rosenberg, 215, p.4). David Hawkins talks about the hidden oppression in the book *Power vs Force* “But the real danger to society does not come from overt bigotry such as white supremacy (that

calibrates at 150), as such damage can at least be monitored. The really grave danger to society lies in the silent and invisible entrainment that stealthily conquers the psyche.” (Hawkins, 2012, p.308). As we come to understand that “hidden” or normalised oppression can be equally damaging and violent, we can perhaps become more ready to name it for what it is.

Both overt and internalised oppression manifest as violent language and even violent deeds. Paolo Freire (2014) states, “Any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his or her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual’s ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human” (Freire, 2014, p.55). According to Freire (2014), the struggle against oppression is a “pursuit of a fuller humanity” understood as the opposite of dehumanisation, which is precisely what NVC aspires towards as well, and what the violent communication inhibits. I consider violence and oppression being tightly bound together, often overlapping, with the possible distinction of oppression being a more political expression of a situation with a clear power imbalance

present. These opposites could perhaps be “freedom” and “compassion”.

3.3.3 Compassion

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2023), compassion is the sympathetic consciousness of other’s distress together with a desire to alleviate it”. It comes from the Latin *com-* + *pati*, where ‘com’ stands for ‘with’ and ‘pati’ stands for ‘bearing’ or ‘suffering’. The Buddhists define it the same way and write about the effects of compassion as follows:

“Compassion opens our hearts and minds to others, breaking us out of the lonely, self-imposed confines of thinking just of ourselves. We are all together in facing problems in life and, when we feel connected with others, we overcome isolation and anxiety. Being compassionate is scientifically proven to make us happier and feel more secure. Taking others’ pain and suffering seriously and wanting to help gives us inner strength and self-confidence. If we train ourselves to develop compassion, it becomes truly a profound source of well-being.” (Berzin & Linden, 2023).

David Hawkins also names compassion from time to time in his book *Power vs Force* (2012) and talks about it relating strongly with that which is life-enhancing, and, as mentioned above, our well-being: “As we shall see, our capacity to understand, forgive and accept is directly linked to our personal health.” (Hawkins, 2012,

p.233) So, it is about understanding others in their suffering and wanting to contribute to their well-being. Compassion also has positive impacts on our health. As Hawkins (2012) described, sometimes it can be beneficial to exercise forgiveness and acceptance when facing difficulties in meeting our needs.

Rosenberg (2015) brings up a slightly different perspective, defining it as “joy in other people's joy”, borrowed from Meister Eckhart's definition (Rosenberg, 2021a). Like this, he is placing the emphasis on the other side of the coin and the positive motivator of our actions. I think the joy in other people's joy doesn't come without also feeling with the pain, so I believe that these perspectives are complementary rather than conflicting. NVC shows a way in which we can create a connection that enables compassionate giving and receiving to happen naturally. This Rosenberg calls “giving from the heart”. When the giving and receiving happens in compassionate energy, you can't separate who is giving and who is receiving, since it is the same (Rosenberg, 2021b, 4:50). At the same time, Rosenberg believes that everything we do is to only fulfil our own needs, but that ultimately our strongest need is meaning and purpose, which makes us enjoy enriching life, as long as we are not forced to do it (Rosenberg, 2021b, 8:12).

Finally, I want to cite a Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska who asked where compassion has gone and described it as “the imagination of the heart”. This resonates well with the willingness in NVC to look for ways to make life more wonderful and be creative about how to create a world where everyone's needs can be met.

3.3.4 Conflict

Both the Theatre of the Oppressed and Nonviolent Communication examines the human condition and the conflicts of our lives. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2023), *conflict* (noun) is first described as physical fight, battle or war, but also “competitive or opposing action of incompatibles: antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests or persons)”. It can also mean a mental struggle resulting from incompatible needs, drives, wishes and so on (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023).

According to Boal (1995), theatre “denotes conflict”, and is also crucial in the Theatre of the Oppressed. Conflict plays a significant role both on the stage and in real life. “It can be considered as a condition of life, one that can prompt social change, establish human identities and terminate prospects. Human conflict has been the matter of theatre for thousands of years, not only for the tragic, but through comedy, irony, the absurd, allegory, the epic, naturalism,

Brechtian and post-Brechtian theatre, and the many inventive, contemporary hybrids of performance praxis.” (Heim, 2016, p. 1–2).

The book *Conflict* (Fabian, 2006) explores how conflict is present in our world through essays from several perspectives. One perspective explores the origin of conflict in human societies. There are many hypotheses around this topic ranging from Hobbes’ idea that man has the natural capacity for violence but is constrained by social convention and strong leadership, to Rousseau’s ‘noble savage’ claiming that man is by nature non-violent but is led to violence by unnatural social constraints (Cunliffe, 2006, p.64). There still doesn’t seem to be a clear consensus about the reasons for human violence. Through an astrophysical perspective discussed in the final essay in *Conflict*, conflict is seen as something that holds potential. On several occasions throughout Earth’s history, life became even more complex as a consequence of certain disastrous events, like asteroid impacts. According to the author, too many such events would imperil all complex life forms, while too few would result in a static biosphere with little incentive for innovation (Davies, 2006, p.148).

The key point is pictured as follows, “/.../violence has a creative as well as a destructive aspect, and that without exceedingly energetic and powerful processes that seem so awesome to human beings, life would be impossible.” (p.144).

Similarly, in Nonviolent Communication, conflict is seen as a gift that can make us closer to one another, or ourselves. While conflict has this potential, it often is a source of hurt and pain. With Nonviolent Communication, we can learn to navigate them and access ways to use conflict, when it arises, to enrich life and not deplete it. This potential for a meeting and connection can be accessed if we stay curious and open to the other person’s experience. Especially connecting to our needs is something that Rosenberg has found to be crucial, and particularly effective, for finding a satisfying solution to dissolve a conflict (Rosenberg, 2015).

The idea of conflict being a gift can also be found in some African spiritual teachings. Sobonfu Somé writes in her book *The Spirit of Intimacy* (1999), about conflict being a spirit gift that teaches us about ourselves and shows us new situations for using our own gifts. It is seen as a wake-up call from the spirit to remind us about our purpose, conflict should not be nurtured, but should be listened to and acted upon in a proper way (p.110). The author points out that we may think instinctively that the best way to deal with conflict is to adopt an antagonist stance toward the other person, but actually, it is best to come together and listen to the message of the spirit.” (p.111).

Conflict seems thus to be something to be found in all human existence. Conflict makes us face different sides of ourselves and

others, and it has the potential to expand awareness. This, I think, is what makes conflict interesting. Rosenberg (2015) and Somé (1999) suggest there being an option for people to divert the energy in a conflict either towards something life-enriching or life-destructive. We seem to have the choice to learn through conflict by not dwelling in it, but carefully listening to it and striving towards creating life-enriching solutions. With this curiosity about our human condition, compassion can arise from understanding the challenges we face in conflict.

3.4 Previous Research

Two results could be found when searching the internet for previous research combining TO and NVC.

The first is a research article about a case study done amongst Syrian refugees in Turkey (Alshughry, 2018). They asked whether NVC is beneficial for Syrians who have fled the conflict in Syria and if it is helpful to use TO to practise NVC among this group. It attempts to answer if NVC is beneficial for Syrians who have fled the conflict in their homeland, and if it is helpful to use TO to practise NVC among them. It reports positive impacts of improved self-compassion, compassion, communication, and collaboration with others. The participants also reported a change in their view of conflict, which

they had started to view as an opportunity to improve relationships. TO is described by the author as useful to engage and create empathy and collaboration, as well as helping the participants get in touch with their feelings and needs (Alshughry, 2018).

The second result I found, was a booklet compiled by Marta Skorczynka and Katarzyna Stepien (Nomadways, 2019). The booklet is not an academic research paper, but a guide for practising NVC through drama exercises, somatic exercises and TO. It includes exercises presented at a workshop created for Nomadways in 2019, an organisation developing international workshops for artists, educators and youth workers. This workshop was in line with what I had imagined creating myself, and I drew further inspiration from this booklet. It also made me contact Marta Skorczynska, to see if she was available for an interview.

In comparison to the earlier research, I take a somewhat different approach, looking from the perspective of both methods, trying to pinpoint where the methods are compatible and where they might seemingly conflict, to figure out how they can complete each other.

4.0 Structure of the Workshop

To create a space for the praxis of combining Nonviolent Communication and Theatre of the Oppressed, I planned and hosted a workshop directed towards adults who are interested and open to working with these topics and the methods of drama.

Some of the exercises are inspired by the work of Marta Skorczyńska, which can be found online (Nomadways, 2019). She pointed me towards getting familiar with Rainbow of Desire, which was previously unknown to me and led me to read the book *The Rainbow of Desire* by Boal (1995). Her idea of using the signature exercise, and exchanging the desires with needs, was something I wanted to include and I found it possibly the workshop's most interesting exercise. I will go deeper into the exploration of the TO methods used and the experiences derived from them, in chapter 5.3 Theatre of the oppressed in action, while in this chapter, I describe the progress of the workshop to provide the reader with an overview.



Fig. 1. "Picture from the workshop space", by Sini Moilanen (the author), 2022.

The workshop held space in Oslo in October 2022, with one week between the two rounds. While preparing the space before the first workshop, I felt inspired before this first trial of the whole, but also nervous as I was aware that things would arise that one couldn't foresee before trying things out. I was prepared to meet both strangers and people that I knew. Each time the groups worked naturally well together, and it felt easy to create a supportive, accepting and creative space with these participants. Noting that a few things were changed from workshop #1 to workshop #2, the two were not drastically different. The changes were cutting away an exercise that didn't serve a purpose and some other slight adjustments, for example, how the space was organised. The biggest changes were made to make the structure clearer and more solid on the second day.

To host the workshop with me, I had help from Kjell Erik Myrvang, who has been doing personal research in NVC and is experienced in communication and working with people. Our conversations have also been essential to my reflection on NVC and the workshop.

4.1. Structure of Day 1

We started the first day of the workshop with an introduction of the work, ourselves and the guidelines for working together. That was followed by a mindfulness exercise, where the aim was to land into our bodies, to become aware and in touch with what is going on in ourselves. The next step was to do quick exercises to free the body from its habitual patterns of everyday life and get the group to interact with each other through different greetings while moving around in the room. From there, we moved towards Image Theatre.

We did several individual images, using our bodies, based on words related to topics relevant to NVC. We then gathered and looked more closely at images created by two persons, the main image inspired by the word "power". In both Theatre of the Oppressed and NVC, discerning between observation and evaluation/interpretation, is essential. That means, the distinction between what objectively is presented, like a raised hand, and what is our interpretation, what it looks like to us or what we think when we see it. The aim of this is to identify and express what is the concrete thing we see or hear that makes us react. Stating our observations and interpretations, we discussed the images we saw and made new images. This part made us reflect on body language, laid a base for the dialogistic nature of

the workshop and prepared the bodies for the rest of the workshop and the exercises involving the body.

I observe
I evaluate
I am

I feel
I think
I am

I have needs
I create strategies
I am

I request something
I demand something
I am

Fig. 2. Text by Participant A, 2022.

After the lunch break, we returned to the space and made a quick warm-up to regain our focus and presence by making rain sounds with our bodies starting and finishing with a very soft sound. From there, we dived into the basic principles of NVC, which would be in focus for the rest of the day. We looked at the four components, *observation, feeling, need* and *request* (as portrayed in Fig. 2. together with the things that they are often confused with) and talked about NVC overall. We didn't want to spend more time than necessary sitting and talking, so for the rest of the day, we practised vocabulary around feelings and needs through a game of charades, divided the participants into small groups to make a scene (short drama) about different strategies one could take on to meet the need of connection, to explore the wide variety of strategies that can be used to meet the same need.

Finally, we did an exercise where the participants shared a story with another person in the group inspired by a photograph they chose from a prepared selection. In this exercise, they practised together to identify the feelings and needs in the story and be present and listen to the other person with all their being, not just their ears. After each exercise, we met in a circle to discuss what questions,

thoughts or observations had come up from the exercises. We ended the day by stating three things that were alive in us at that moment.

4.2. Structure of Day 2

We started the second day with a shorter warm-up with some of the elements from the previous day with slight variations. As the first day had given us some sort of base understanding of what NVC was, we did only a short recap of what we had gone through earlier and dived a little deeper into the fourth component of NVC, the request, which we hadn't gone through the day before. After this, we would get up on the floor and start setting the stage for Rainbow of Desire (Rainbow of Need) and Forum Theatre.

I had informed the participants the previous day, that we would work with real-life stories, and they could prepare by trying to think of a situation they would like to examine. The situation was to be one where two people meet, and it doesn't go very well, and a sense of dissatisfaction is left. At the first workshop, I had the participants prepare a story to propose in pairs, but I realised it was more effective to start directly in a big group and share potential stories to work on, as people had no experience with the technique and were unsure what kind of story or situation we are looking for. After the first scene, the second story came out easier and was more personal and intimate.

We improvised the stories with two participants, the so-called protagonists playing themselves. After seeing the situation played out, we started looking at the NVC needs inventory together and using it to help us figure out what needs are present in the two players. In Rainbow of Desire, one would typically work with desires, urges, and actions we desire to take. Now we worked with universal needs instead, a layer that does not exist originally in TO but is a core concept of NVC that brings us to the fundamental driving force behind our actions.

Once we had several needs listed for both the “protagonist” and the “antagonist”, we chose one need for each party to go and play in the scene, at first, they would ghost the “protagonist” and the “antagonist” silently following after them in the scene. Then we would remove the original players, and the participants representing the needs would play the scene instead. The players were supposed to embody the needs so that their bodies were all the time in a chosen shape that represented the need. The players are allowed to move around the space but are to keep their body position throughout the scene. If we had more time and more players, we could immediately have many players on stage representing different needs. Now we cut away some of the steps that originally are part of the Rainbow of

desire and made it more workable in the circumstances present. We did include some of the different modes, such as stopping the scene and letting the characters talk their thoughts, “Stop! Think!”, and playing the scene without words, “Playing for the deaf”. These are useful when the right mode is used for the right scene. After the needs had played the scene, we discussed what had happened, if the scene had now revealed something new about the dynamics, or did it perhaps change the communication or even the outcome of the scene. Then we played it one more time, this time choosing two new needs and afterwards discussing it again, now also comparing the two scenes.

The original players then returned on the stage. As we were already quite familiar with the scene, we changed our approach and started working with the same story as a concise Forum theatre play. The spect-actors got some time to discuss their ideas around different solutions that could be tried out to change the outcome. Then we would play the scene, and they could try their propositions on stage. I encouraged the participants to try out their propositions. I mentioned that they could attempt to involve only one part of the NVC process, as trying to use the whole process would most probably be too demanding at this stage. After the interventions, we would discuss

what happened in the scene. How did the different propositions work, and what questions or insights surfaced? As the Joker, my position was to ask questions to inspire the discussion, give space to the participants to form their own meanings, lead the game forward and encourage the spect-actors to try different solutions.

When we had worked on two different scenes, we started to round up the process by clapping and shaking and, in the second workshop, even some dancing. Before ending the workshop, we did an evaluation consisting of 3 minutes of creative writing, after which the participants got an additional 10 minutes to write something that they would like to share with everyone else. This writing exercise was free-form, and the participants were encouraged also to use poetic or metaphorical language if that felt right at the moment. As the ten minutes had passed, we sat down to share the reflections. When the workshop was officially finished, we spent another half hour conducting the group interview.

The weekend included many different ways of working, and while it worked to include them all, they could each be explored more in-depth with more time. For now, I found it interesting trying out the several different methods from Theatre of the Oppressed to get an

overview. And as Boal says, “All these forms are complementary, because human beings are complex and not so easy to understand as we would like them to be. The best way of using them is to use them all.” (Boal, 2021, p.10). This gave variation to the work and exposed the richness of the further possibilities that could be explored later.

5.0. How can Theatre of the Oppressed and Nonviolent Communication complement each other?

When you look at the aims of these two methods and the reasons they were created, you can see that they attempt to address similar societal problems. Theatre of the Oppressed was created as a response to witnessed oppression and out of a will to resist the oppressive powers, and Nonviolent Communication was created as a response to witnessed violence, with a desire to create a more peaceful world. Both these methods work to raise awareness of harmful dynamics and to find solutions to create better conditions for people to thrive. They aim to empower people, inspire new thinking and for people to become active agents in the process of liberation.

Initially, the idea that sparked this work came out of a thought that the Theatre of the Oppressed could be an exciting way to practise and explore Nonviolent Communication. Still, later on I came to see that Nonviolent Communication could also give something to the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed and they could find ways to complement each other. In this chapter, I will discuss why I decided

to merge the two methods, what happened in that meeting and what questions arose. But before diving further into the practices, I think it might be helpful to get a better understanding of what kind of violent situations we are talking about when working with Theatre of the Oppressed in this context.

5.1 Violence/Oppression as Experienced

What kind of oppression and violence do we encounter?

When working with the scenes derived from the participants' experiences during the workshop, I presented to them that we would work with scenes where two people meet, and the situation leaves them unsatisfied. In other words, it does not go very well. The scenes that came up were different situations between partners, persons you share your living space with, colleagues and friends, where they had difficulties communicating and connecting compassionately. Still, when interviewing three of the participants three months later, and asking about their experiences with oppression and violence, two of them either said not to really have experienced any or were unsure about classifying their experiences as violence or oppression. The violence/oppression that was easy for them to identify, was physical violence they had experienced, or discrimination. Nonetheless, when I started to ask more specifically about violent *communication*, they

could refer to several situations, of which many could be easily worked with inside the traditional Theatre of the Oppressed.

The third participant mentioned their understanding of violence had widened since the workshop and learning about NVC. They pointed out the subtle violent nuances that the small things we say to each other can contain, for example, the phrase “Jamen sånn er det.” (“It is what it is.”). Or when we try to push someone into doing something, for even if the intention is to benefit them, trying to force something on someone can lead to painful outcomes. As an alternative, they talked about being attentive to the other person and what’s alive in them, and that this approach is very different to the “robust” way of expressing ourselves that we often are used to. They could identify the subtle, everyday violence, even when it was communicated through body language, which was something they had not paid attention to in the same way before the Image theatre exercises we did.

When discussing how the “violent communication” they see and experience affects them, the participants brought up quite similar situations. They spoke of a lack of communication in workplaces, which causes problems that are extended in time and pile up emotionally from small incidents. Conflict avoidance is accompanied

by smiling and nodding, being careful around others, pretending everything is all right, and brushing the problems under the rug. One of the participants said that they have also assimilated this and see themselves now doing the same. Another said that this had led them to a dramatic outburst after some time. It seems complicated to break what has become a culture, and they also mentioned the fear around opening the “can of worms” and the consequences that it might bring.

Another situation was also introduced in one of the interviews, where it can be difficult to stand your ground, at the doctor’s. The power imbalance, the authority placed on the doctor, makes it difficult to, for example, refuse an operation and meet the need for autonomy. This was the cause of some feelings of powerlessness and regret.

Conclusively, many of the conflicts we face are not out in the open (or, speaking at the societal level, on the streets), but can instead be felt in the air. Marta Skorczynska mentioned in her interview on 20.02.2023, a Forum Theatre play that she was part of making, where the protagonist was oppressed by society’s silence around a topic. To generalise, one could perhaps say that we, in this society, are missing a culture where we are allowed to express ourselves fully and where we learn to deal with our emotions and reactions healthily and effectively, as well as those of others. We assimilate the violent

tendencies from our culture, and being unaware of this, or the other options we have, we impose them on others. Silence and silencing structures are also a form of oppression.

Word is a powerful tool/instrument

It can be as sharp as a sword

Or as soft as cotton candy

It could change the world

Or can be used to oppress

Words can be weaved and linked to create beautiful works

But sometimes the strongest word is the one not said at all

One thing my grandfather said that I could share

Make your words soft and sweet

Because you never know when you have to swallow them again

Fig. 3. Text by Participant B, 2022.

5.2 Drama, Human and the Body

Drama and theatre practices, in general, have many benefits that are in line with NVC. They enhance creativity and cooperation, and quickly enable the creation of empathetic bonds between the participants. In the book *Pedagogisk drama* (1978), the authors bring up the importance of drama, especially in a society without strong social bonds, where we are used to competition and are under big social and economic pressure (Janzon & Sjöberg, 1978, p.6). A society that fits this description has many “violent” elements. According to the authors, when spontaneity, openness and honest feelings are not encouraged, drama can come to help and let us get in touch with our emotions. Drama can meet many of the universal human needs, like the need to belong in a group with others (Janzon & Sjöberg, 1978 p.6). All this is valuable when we want to explore human relationships and create well-being. This is expressed in the text by a participant below.

*There is a joy in being together in this way - the openness, the curiosity,
the expression*

My body soul loves play and loves meaning.

This is meaningful play.

The laughter, the creativity, the vulnerability of sharing.

The potential of seeing, discovering, opening up more.

*I feel relaxed in the field as of the compassionate space has been opened
we are all sharing ourselves and there is appreciation of each person,
each story, each posture.*

Fig. 4. Text by participant C, 2022.

Drama also holistically engages the human: “The learning moments that transpire through drama are all at once ephemeral, affective, social, aesthetic and cognitive.” (Björnsson & Ragnarsdottir, 2020, p. xv). In my experience, a lot of insight can grow from this possibility to move between the intellectual/cognitive and the physical, emotional etc. Boal says that the human being, first and foremost, is a body and that this body has five main properties: 1. It is sensitive, 2. It is emotive, 3. It is rational, 4. It has a sex, 5. It can move (Boal, 1995, p. 29-30). Whatever is chosen to categorise as the five main properties, surely working with only the cognitive aspects dismisses a lot of the other things that create the full experience of a human.

When I interviewed Marta Skorczynska (20.1.2023), a graduate of Psychology and Social Animation studies and more, she pointed out that we move and have emotions before we even learn to speak, and so through the body, we can access something profound. She reminds us that there is more and more research about how our mind and body are immediately connected, how the neurons are placed not only in the brain, how the body remembers, and how we experience the world with every cell of our bodies. The more different aspects of ourselves we involve, the better we learn. She points out also that even when something is understood on a cognitive level, the corporeal experience brings still a different level into the play, “We are so much focused, as a European society, on thoughts. The more I think it is important to give space to listen to the body and the non-verbal messages and nonverbal language”. This was also acknowledged by the participants in my workshop. One of them put it this way: “Using the body was like an invitation to be there with your whole self”.

In this light, theatre seemed like a beneficial way to practise NVC. Even though NVC is a language, what we want to express through it is much more than words. To practise NVC, we need to be in touch with our emotions, and to be in touch with our emotions, we

need to interpret and feel the sensations in our bodies. The more we are aware of this, the more accurately we can understand and express ourselves. Of course, Theatre of the Oppressed is not the only form of theatre that could be used, and Rosenberg (2015) already used role play when teaching NVC. There are still reasons why I chose to work specifically with these methods.

5.3 Theatre of the Oppressed in Action

Theatre of the Oppressed interested me in connection with Nonviolent Communication because of the reasons for its creation. The therapeutic aspect of TO came in only later with the Rainbow of Desire, and the roots are in the desire to create change in society and help social movements to emerge. There is energy directed towards creating action outwards, to figure out concrete strategies for change at the level of communities. I find this inspiring as NVC also aspires to create change, not only in ourselves, our immediate environment and our relationships, but also at the macro level of society. It feels meaningful to hold all these perspectives at once.

Besides this original intent that TO carries, it also has a very rich and interesting set of exercises providing many possibilities, and it lets us move between the realistic and the symbolic realms. These are the reasons that initially inspired me to work with TO. Now I will

look at the techniques from the Theatre of the Oppressed that I used in the workshop and discuss how they can be used when practising Nonviolent Communication. Moreover, I will share thoughts about how using NVC can affect the Theatre of the Oppressed, which I will continue to discuss also in chapter 5.4. Philosophical viewpoints.

5.3.1 The Stories We Construct – Image Theatre and Observation

Augusto Boal (2021) says that words are like trucks, they carry the meanings we put on them, and they might not be the same for everyone. They are human constructions, and some are born in social situations that no longer exist. Boal wanted to get hold of the different connotations the words held for each person, to get to what is behind the word, and started asking his students to make images of words, i.e. your family, your boss etc., using their own bodies or sculpting others, that resulted in vastly different images depending on the person constructing them. The images don't replace words, but the words cannot either replace these images, as it is its own language (Boal, 2021, p.174-175). Using images, we can also bypass some of the censorship of our brain and access the deeper parts of ourselves.

In Image Theatre, an image is first created as an interpretation of reality, after which we work with the reality of this new image, which is already different from the original situation. This image can,

in its turn, again be interpreted and a new image created. We observe and we interpret and create new understanding on the way. This got reflected in one of the participant's texts.

Speak peace, hear kindly

*Mark the words with intention,
untangle the body language and let it flow,*

*In a river of image, make sure that one
understands the reflection and let it grow,*

*From a seed to a seedling,
to a flower and a fruit, let it nurture,*

*The child and the elder, connected
in the same fertile soil of joy and sorrow,*

let it be seen,

*That the difference lies in the nature,
but the ecosystem still needs light,
let it shine,*

*Your voice through the chant of a whale,
singing "I need and I know you need it too"*

Fig. 5. Text by participant D, 2022.

Boal writes in *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995) about theatre as the first human invention, born of the discovery of human's ability to observe itself. "Observing itself, the human being perceives what it is, discovers what it is not, and imagines what it could become. It perceives where it is, where it is not and where it could go (...). Therein resides the essence of theatre: in the human being observing itself." (Boal, 1995, p.13). Separating between the concrete observations of what we actually see and the interpretations we derive from it, is an important aspect when discussing the images. This separation is essential for awareness, the possibility for critical thinking, and it gives clarity to the discussion around the images.

Observation is also the first component of the NVC process. According to Rosenberg (2015), this is important in NVC because it is usually difficult for us to make observations that are free of judgement, criticism, or other forms of analysis. Especially when it is about people and their behaviour, we easily blend in our judgement and fail to make clear observations. When people hear judgement or

criticism, they are less likely to want to meet us in that compassionate space. This doesn't mean we must entirely refrain from making evaluations, but separating those two is important. Practically, the idea is first to state a specific observation and then state your evaluation. If we mix those two, we can quickly end up in arguments that serve to cover up the primary issue, but if we do keep to the specific observation, it helps to keep the focus on what was actually said or done in the first place (Rosenberg, 2015, p.26).

Working with images, it is possible to listen to them with your body and your being. "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." (Boal, 2021. p.175). Besides observing the images from the outside and feeling what they evoke in us, we can also feel them when we are inside of them. Being in the images evokes emotions. Just placing ourselves in a position and perhaps also in a relationship with someone else, makes us feel something. When we take our feelings seriously, I think that feeling the images can be filled with possibilities for creating awareness. One of the participants describes becoming more aware of the violence that can be present merely in

body language, through feeling the uncomfortable feelings present in an image where they were placed. We can explore how we are affected by different attitudes presented, and question why. If we use the terminology of David Hawkins (2012), we could also attempt to feel the difference between something being life-supportive or life-destructive. "The human central nervous system clearly has an exquisite capacity to differentiate between life-supportive and life-destructive patterns. High-power attractor energy fields, which make the body go strong, release brain endorphins and have a tonic effect on all the organs, whereas adverse stimuli release adrenaline, which suppresses immune response and instantaneously causes both weakness and enervation of specific organs depending on the nature of stimulus." (Hawkins, 2012, p. 229-230). When we focus on feeling this difference, we can learn to become sensitive to what our body communicates to us, to hear our bodies and understand, for example, that some of our needs are not being met and then ask which needs, why is that and what could be done to change that.

Image theatre sparked curiosity and creativity in the participants in the workshop. We discovered how fast we make our own stories of what is happening and how different the stories can be. It also reminded the participants of body language and its big effect

in communication. As the workshop leaders, we hadn't planned to bring up anything specific about body language, since that was not at the centre of our focus this time but used more as a tool for thinking and revealing. Still, by having the body active in everything we did, the reflections and awareness around the body language naturally surfaced, which was positive as communication, in the end, is a holistic phenomenon involving the whole human.

Through Image theatre, we involved our bodies into the practice of NVC of separating observations from evaluations. We could also analyse and explore our ideas around chosen topics with the unique language of images and become sensitive to the messages of our bodies. From TO's perspective, it created further understanding of why separating observation from interpretation is so crucial. The Image Theatre could also make use of Nonviolent Communication to explore the stories we tell around the images. We could stay conscious of and reflect on what, in the stories or images themselves, are life-enriching or violent.

5.3.2 At the Core of Conflict - Rainbow of Desire and Need

Augusto Boal (1995) quotes Lope de Vega, who says, "*theatre is the passionate combat of two human beings on a platform.*". Two beings, because theatre studies the multiple interrelations between people in

a society. Even in a monologue, the presence of an 'antagonist' is implied, albeit physically absent. It is a combat since "Theatre denotes conflict, contradiction, confrontation, defiance." (Boal, 1995, p.16). The 'passion' is vital as we deal with what engages us and creates investment, and the 'platform' refers to the separated space, the aesthetic space where anything is possible (Boal, 1995, p.16)

The very exercise called Rainbow of Desire is a tool for understanding the dynamics of this passionate combat. This technique readily take advantage of the possibilities of the aesthetic space, the 'platform', as it pulls on stage abstract properties and gives them a physical body. In the Rainbow of Desire, we operate in a symbolic space. This technique is used to examine a conflict between two people, where the different aspects of us are in the spotlight. David Diamond (2020) from Theatre for Living summarises Rainbow of Desire in a YouTube video. He points out that it is different from psychodrama as it works within the new reality created. It recognises that already when the situation is played on stage in a new time with a different person, it is not the original one. The person sharing their story, gives it as a gift to the collective. The idea is that the story and the desires that are worked with should be identifiable by another participant, and the insights gained are relevant to many of the people

present (Theatre for Living, 2020, 2:00). The different aspects brought up in this work are all the desires and fears that play in a human being at once. The Rainbow of Desire separates these different “rainbow fragments” so that we can clarify and understand the nature of the various forces that play in a situation and their relational dynamics. “The director asks the protagonist to create images of her desires, states of mind, fears and fortitudes, in short of all the forces she feels are at work and of importance in the scene we are to study” (Boal, 1995, p.151). Other participants then embody these different aspects in an image representing this desire/fear. Once they are put to play and improvise on the stage, they can move around in the space but never lose their shape! The shape informs the actor in play and reveals information about the dynamics through aesthetic representation.

The revealing that Rainbow of Desire entails, thanks to the possibilities of the aesthetic space that theatre provides, is useful for NVC practice as well, as we can better understand ourselves and the conflict explored through it. With NVC in mind, we can also add a perspective of *needs* to the Rainbow of Desire. This us allows us to work on an even deeper level that leads us to the core of a conflict.

In the workshop I followed this idea of “Rainbow of Need”, originally from Marta Skorczynska. NVC is concerned with the universal needs, which, like desires, are many in play at once in a human. When we replace the desires with the needs, we work in the same way as the Rainbow of Desire suggests, except that now we try to identify the needs present, not the desires or fears. When asking Skorczynska (interview 20.01.2013) what she thinks is the difference between the Rainbow of Desire and the Rainbow of Need, she says that desire is more focused on the action and the behaviour a,s in “what I want to achieve”, and the need is a level deeper, it is “what is driving me”. She says this is a perspective she was missing in the original Rainbow of Desire. Desires, translated to NVC language, are the strategies we wish to take in an attempt to fulfil a need, and there is always a need behind all the strategies. For example, the need for connection, love, or to be seen. This universal need takes us closer to understanding what is happening at a deeper level. According to Rosenberg (2015), focusing on our needs is important to solve conflicts and find a resolution. By connecting with them, the conflict can become a fertile ground for compassionate connection.

While this was a new technique for me, I realised how effectively the Rainbow of Need worked in both workshops. We

experienced how much different the scenario was when a single need replaced the players. There was more honesty and transparency in play, and less violence. The participants also mentioned how it revealed “more of the truth” and how “seeing the needs interacting, gave both disidentification and ownership over the needs.” I think what is meant by this, is that when recognising the need alive in us, we can now observe it, which creates a possibility for being in dialogue with this part of oneself. A participant also mentioned discovering a need they hadn’t realised having until someone else suggested it, and so gaining more self-awareness. Playing out the scene twice with different needs was experienced to be insightful, as it showed another side of ourselves in the situation, and how the different combinations of needs changed the scene. It showed light on how we have different needs alive simultaneously and how those different needs created a specific dynamic and actions in the situation. Having the body in the shape of the need (for example: “belonging” or “freedom”) makes what is hidden become visible and tangible. These absurd bodies, together in an improvisation, also gave some lightness and comedy to the scenes. This joy that theatre often brings, provides a healthy balance when dealing with conflict and trying to understand this new language of nonviolence.

Ocean of needs

Need needs needy

Needy me

Full of parts, cogwheels, hats and little people

Shouting to be heard

And all of them valuable, precious

When they come up out of the deep ocean

That’s me

I say hello

I can greet them

Acknowledge them

Transform them into words

Something tangible

It’s strange how letting them be known

By another

Somehow, they sink back

Down

They are satisfied

They calm the ocean

The ocean wants to flow

From me to you

So, I need to be needy

Flowing, fishing, finding

Fig. 6. Text by participant E, 2022.

Conclusively, NVC can bring the level of needs into the Rainbow of Desire, which leads us closer to the core of the conflict. The Rainbow of Desire (or Need) technique, in turn, can reveal the unseen in a way that lets us get a deeper insight into the dynamics between the different parts present in a conflict. At the end of the workshop, the participants mentioned different challenges and questions alive in them concerning NVC, and the most prominent was that the needs were challenging to identify. While the needs presented a challenge, simultaneously, the participants had realised their importance, which I think the Rainbow of Need contributed to significantly. The soft needs were considered difficult to state because of their vulnerable nature. Recognising needs and cultivating the capacity to be vulnerable in front of others requires practice.

5.3.3 The Platform for Experimentations – Forum Theatre

Forum theatre is an artistic and intellectual game played between actors and spect-actors. A show is first performed as if it was a conventional play, where the oppressed face their oppression without being able to overcome it. If the spect-actors (audience) have agreed

to not being in accord with the original solutions, the play is then played again a second time. This time spect-actors can come and replace the protagonist (the oppressed) at any moment, they feel that they want to see another proposition and try to change the outcome of the play. The spect-actors are put against a challenge: if no one comes and changes the reality, it will not change. The other actors, or actors, try to guide the play to the original end, as long as possible, and even intensify the oppression to show how difficult it is to break it. Eventually, the spect-actor might be able to break the oppression and the others in the play need to give in one after another or all together (Boal, 2021, p.241-242)

Forum theatre has been changing and morphing since its birth, what remains unchanged are the two fundamental, linked principles of the theatre of the Oppressed: it aims (a) to help the spect-actor transform himself into a protagonist of the dramatic action and rehearse alternatives to his situation, so that he may then be able (b) to extrapolate into his real life the actions he has rehearsed in the practice of theatre. “It aims to change society rather than just interpret it.” (Boal, 2021, p.253).

I realise from this work that social situations are a little bit more complicated than we might think in the first place.

-That there are layers of feelings, needs and strategies, and misunderstandings!

And here we looked at conflicts involving only two people.

Imagine a family dinner, maybe in Christmas

- all the problems, feelings, needs, strategies to fulfil the needs.

Imagine the street full of people, full of needs.

Complex.

Fig. 7. Text by participant F, 2022.

As in NVC, we attempt not to get attached to our stories, but to connect with what is alive in us in relation to the concrete observations, Forum Theatre is effective in bypassing the stories we create around a situation, as the focus is on what is truly happening and working on stage, in action, instead of in discussion. This helps to navigate all the complexity the participant's text above reflects upon. In Forum theatre, we are again using the aesthetic space's properties, including the free play of past and future (Boal, 1995, p.28). In the workshop, to play the scene many times over, was also mentioned by the participants to be insightful and interesting. The real situation is always different from thinking about the theory, and in forum theatre, we get to practise that. We can feel what is going on in

a situation that is quite close to a real one and go back and forth with different propositions. Some of the participants in the workshop expressed that they experienced theatre as a safe place to practise, and one participant, for whom theatre exercises were a new thing completely, thought it to be an obvious way to practise NVC. What I think is not generally done in Forum Theatre, since it is not the focus, is changing the players so that the one playing the protagonist plays the antagonist. We spontaneously tried this twice in the workshop, and we received the feedback of it being insightful to experience the situation from both perspectives.

How I used forum theatre in the workshop was a rapid version of it due to the time limits. We used it to continue working with the Rainbow of Desire scenes to see if we could change the outcome. Still, it gave valuable insight into how it could be used inside of NVC practice, and now in retrospect, I would change some things. In some moments, the Forum Theatre worked well, and at other moments it was more challenging. I think this is where the Joker needs to make the task especially clear when combining in NVC. I was asking myself how to use it with NVC and at the same time detach it from it enough to actually stay true to its form and have the spect-actors come up with their own spontaneous suggestions.

In the interview with Marta Skorczynska (20.1.2023), I asked for her opinion about this.

“I would say that after each intervention, there is a moment of learning. We can stop and analyse: How did this person act? Is it coming from NVC? What was in focus? Or even when a person comes out and tries a different [non-NVC] solution. What did we observe? What kind of feelings and needs could we see in *this* protagonist. So not forcing people to repeat the different parts of NVC, as you said, but to treat it as a life experience. What happens when we try different ways, and does it bring us closer or further from NVC? Discussing it.”

She talked further about the importance of it being spontaneous and that the audience needs to be motivated to try *their* ideas and see what comes out of them. She even suggests that the Joker can provoke the audience to experiment really outside of NVC, and explore the automatic reaction, the reaction that comes out of the guts, the reaction from the body. Then, she says, questions can be asked about what happened, why the reaction was what it was, and what is the driving force behind it? Is it anger? And if it is, for example, fear, what do I fear?

This sort of approach described here can be a functioning way to approach NVC and stay true to the form of Forum Theatre. One can even explore not only what happens, but how the different approaches *felt* for the spect-actors. And perhaps if something feels strong/life-supporting or weak/life-destructive and why? Or, in other

terms, ask if we are creating more connection and compassion or disconnection, and why is that? We can experiment and verify the principles of NVC. Skorczynska reflects in the interview on 20.1.2023:

“This is the most beautiful thing for me, to rehearse life and then have a frozen moment when I can take a closer look at it. I don’t have this time in my daily life. I don’t do this pause. When I am arguing with somebody it is difficult to take this pause and think, how am I doing this? Why am I doing this etc.? But here [working with theatre], we can do whatever we want with it. And I can have a quick check with myself, am I going towards NVC? Or towards something else?”

Here lies also the potential for how NVC can complement TO. It can help the spect-actors reflect on effective and compassionate ways to solve conflicts and create more connection.

5.3.4 Conclusive Results

The techniques of Boal can be used for practising NVC, experimenting with it and getting a profound experience and knowledge that goes beyond the intellectual. Besides this, it provides, at least for some, a safe place for trial and error. The methods were generally experienced positively by the participants despite some nervousness in the air at times. Most expressed a sense of meaningfulness and awakened curiosity. One participant said afterwards that they had thought role-play to be childish, but now

wished to explore it more. The ability of theatre to bring the theory more alive was appreciated.

The result I feel is lightness.

Things that seemed stuck got lifted and aired out - played with - made new.

Fig. 8. Text by participant G, 2022

While some of the exercises were somewhat challenging and the principles of NVC were new to many of the participants, there was learning and discovery happening. Discussions that spurred out of the exercises led to participants often stating insights that corresponded clearly with what Rosenberg (2015) would say in his books. The insight presented an understanding of the principles and effects of Nonviolent Communication, even about topics that we hadn't verbally discussed. One of these insights from the participants was, as an example, that conflict can be a gift where we can get closer and find out more about the other. That there is friction where you can "meet each other". This inspired me, in turn, to continue the research with these tools. At the end of the workshop, I asked the participants what their desires at this stage were. Most participants felt motivated to practise implementing NVC and to learn more. For example, on their mind was a wish to work on taking space and stating one's needs,

as well as keeping empathy alive and not getting caught on being right but staying curious of the other.

When interviewing the participants three months later about how, and if, they have implemented the tools after the workshop, one participant described that some days after the workshop, they had been able to help their friend identify the needs and feelings related to a conflict this friend had going on in their life. They had also managed to figure out new strategies together. This was experienced as empowering. Despite a heightened consciousness around these topics, they said they hadn't had the opportunity to actively practise NVC in immediate situations. Another participant said that the workshop had changed their perspective somewhat; they mentioned a new way of phrasing what they experienced and recognising better where the reason for the conflict lies. Even though they felt they hadn't yet internalised the tools, they were able to make use of NVC. Not directly in a situation, but when thinking about it afterwards, trying to figure out how they could have phrased themselves in NVC. While identifying all four components of NVC in a situation had not been easy, it helped them sort the situation for themselves and feel more satisfied. The third informant had invested in and reflected on NVC afterwards and actively used some of the principles in their

work and private life. They also reported a heightened ability to recognise subtle violence.

In the case study (Ashughry, 2018) on the applicability of NVC within the Syrian refugee context, and the usefulness of TO techniques in practising NVC, the research followed up the changes in participants' self-compassion and compassion and communication towards others from before to after the intervention. On average, the participants reported slight progress in these capacities, but interestingly the participants also thought afterwards that they had initially overestimated their capabilities in the pre-training survey. They commented that they gained deeper insight into these aspects of relationships with others through the training. I think this might also point towards a heightened capability of recognising violence in communication; thus, they later evaluated themselves with a different understanding. The results of this research also indicate that participants, through the activities, changed their view of conflict towards perceiving it as an opportunity to improve relationships, which was considered the most significant progress. They had also started implementing NVC in their lives (Ashughry, 2018). These results correspond with the impressions I received from the interviews.

It seems that TO can complement and serve NVC by embodying it and lending it its own platform of experimentation, which can improve our understanding of the dynamics in relationships and practice actions. NVC can provide TO with the layer of the universal needs to work with, which can help get to the core of the conflict and further improve our understanding of the dynamics. TO can create a heightened awareness of violence and oppression through its aesthetic techniques, while NVC can do the same by showing where we perpetuate violent patterns in our language and how to transcend them. Together I think they can strengthen each other to create a deep complementary set of methods that can address violence and oppression in a way that activates the participants. But to go deeper yet, to see where these methods come from and where they can go, let's attempt to have a look under the surface.

5.4 Philosophical Viewpoints

At one moment, when preparing the workshop, I started wondering if this can anymore be called Theatre of the Oppressed? Is it just adapting the methods bringing it to another direction, or could it still stand in line with the tradition of TO? To attempt to answer this I will look into the principles and the philosophical background of both

Nonviolent Communication and Theatre of the Oppressed to see where it potentially clashes and how it finally can come together.

5.4.1 A Look Behind Nonviolent Communication

The philosophy of Nonviolence can be traced to some of the old Eastern teachings, present, for example, in Buddhism. As Deepak Chopra notes in the forewords to the third edition of *Nonviolent Communication - A Language of life* (2015), “In India, there is an ancient model for nonviolent living known as Ahimsa, which is central to the nonviolent life ... ‘Do no harm’ would be the first axiom of Ahimsa” (Chopra, 2015, p.xiv). Chopra mentions how Rosenberg grasped both levels of Ahimsa, the action and the consciousness. I believe that one of the strengths of NVC is that it brings “Ahimsa consciousness” down into the practical steps proposed. The language becomes a sort of bridge, that we can use. As we know, the body affects the mind and vice versa (i.e. if I smile, it makes me happier and thinking depressive thoughts, in turn, can make my whole body slouch), I think the same happens between language and consciousness. Shifting our language to match NVC can help us embody it and move our consciousness in that direction.

This does not mean that words are enough. Skorzcynska points out in the interview I conducted on 20.1.2023, how she is

against using NVC to put words on something to embellish it. In his blog post, Nonviolent Communication teacher Oren Jay Sofer (2017) goes into this topic and maps out three of the common pitfalls of NVC that we can fall into when not having the proper substance or alignment inside of us. The first one is the “obnoxious phase”, where we feel empowered over being able to identify and express our needs, but fail to attend to the needs of others. “Without the skills to identify and speak up for their own needs, others may perceive us as self-centred, controlling or manipulative: longing for more balance, care and inclusion in the way we express ourselves.” Secondly, when learning to use NVC, it quickly becomes robotic as we stick rigidly to the form, and it becomes difficult for others to connect with us authentically. The last obstacle is using the communication process without examining or transforming our underlying intentions, which can even occur as self-deception about our motives (Sofer, 2017).

Without the perspective of the consciousness, NVC would be empty and stiff. With this in mind, the process guides us through our language’s common pitfalls and helps guide our focus on what creates connection. “I find that my cultural conditioning leads me to focus attention on places where I am unlikely to get what I want. I developed NVC as a way to train my attention - to shine the light of

consciousness- on places where I am likely to yield what I am seeking” (Rosenberg, 2015, p.4). Learning the NVC process can help us eventually arrive at a compassionate state of awareness. Nevertheless, language is constantly changing and so NVC is not a set formula of speech, but adapts accordingly to situations and personalities. The four components of NVC (observation, feeling, need & request) can be experienced without uttering a word.

An essential principle within this NVC consciousness is responsibility, that we are all responsible for our thoughts, feelings and actions. According to Rosenberg (2015), the common expression “have to” illustrates how personal activity for our efforts can be obscured in speech. The other example is “makes one feel”, as in “You make me feel guilty”, which facilitates the denial of personal responsibility for our feelings and thoughts. Rosenberg lifts a fatal example of this, from the book by Hannah Arendt called *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (as cited in Rosenberg 2015), which documents the war crimes trial of Nazi officer Adolf Eichmann. The officers had their own responsibility denying language called *Amtssprache*, loosely translated into English as “office talk” or “bureaucratese”. If asked why they took certain actions, the response would be, “I had to”, and if asked why they had to, the answer would be, “Superiors’ orders.”

“Company policy.” “It was the law.” (Rosenberg, 2015, p.21). To keep in touch with responsibility (and finally our autonomy and freedom), we can enter into an inquiry with ourselves, “I choose to do this because...”, and then we can either remind ourselves of the reasons we choose to do something, or realise there is no good enough reason to do it and perhaps open our eyes for other options. When we think in terms of “should” and “have to”, it is a road towards oppression and slavery, proof of ‘cops in the head’.

Secondly, in NVC, we wish that others have this choice too, and that we contribute to each other’s well-being out of a place of joy. Marshall Rosenberg believes that it is in human nature to enjoy giving and receiving in a compassionate manner, and that we will do so as long as we stay connected to this important aspect (Rosenberg, 2015, p.1). We don’t want anyone to do anything because they feel that they have to, or out of guilt or fear of punishment, as it will eventually come with costs. David Hawkins (2012) agrees with this view of Rosenberg and says that punishment is a form of violence and attacking the artificially created “problem” is always expensive. On the other hand, supporting the solution of human needs creates a no-cost resolution that brings serenity (Hawkins, 2012, p.189-190). When both sides in a dispute have fully expressed themselves and

both parties have been empathised with, an agreement that meets everyone's needs can usually be reached. As an exception, there are times when there is no opportunity for such dialogue, or the other person refuses to enter it, and the use of force might be necessary. This Rosenberg calls the protective use of force that can be used, when necessary, to protect life or individual rights. The difference that he calls for, is to differentiate it from the punitive use of force (Rosenberg, 2015, p.185). This requires again a capacity to examine our intentions.

5.4.2 The Oppressor and the Oppressed

From the NVC perspective, it becomes challenging to talk about the oppressor and the oppressed, at least without clearly defining what we mean by these labels in every situation. Otherwise, these labels contain moral judgement and can strengthen the story that keeps the conflict ongoing—both the story of the oppressor, and the story of the oppressed. Labelling oneself as the oppressed can be perceived as letting the oppression define your position and placing yourself in polarity with the oppressor, which hinders breaking free from the oppression.

Freire (2014) states, “It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors.” (Freire, 2014, p.56). He believes that even the oppressors cannot be free as long as this dynamic exists, but because they are seemingly profiting from the situation, they are unable to pursue liberation. So even though the oppressors are not seen as evil or bad, but as people who are disconnected, also unfree, and even oppressed in some way, it still made me question how to fit this terminology together with NVC and how to approach it from that perspective.

In her interview, 20.1.2013, I asked Skorczynska what happens in her opinion with the oppressed/oppressor when you work with TO, adding the perspective of NVC. She also recognises it to be difficult to talk about the ‘oppressor’ and the ‘oppressed’, since, from the perspective of NVC, we are all humans, and we are looking for connections, rather than blaming or labelling somebody. Besides this, we have to take a look at ourselves. She mentions a moment in NVC, where one acknowledges that one is harming other people, and then there is a moment of reconciliation.

“I think it is empowering for the oppressed to realise that we are equals. If they are human as much as I am, then we can be equals. The game of an “oppressor” and the “oppressed” is still the game, you need two to play it.

NVC offers to leave the game and look at how they are playing it. It's like a perspective 'from a distance', it shows me that I don't have to play the game. (...) So I would say adding NVC to the Theatre of the Oppressed is a bit like going to a different level of the game.", Skorczynska, 20.01.2023.

She still sees the imbalance of power and how there are people who are oppressed and who are oppressing, and that we oppress ourselves because we internalise the processes in the society. And mentions that these processes are somehow the projection of how the inner world functions. At the same time, she considers the NVC perspective supporting going out from this old story of the dichotomy of the 'oppressor' and the 'oppressed' and finds this perspective to be of importance. She also believes that TO is developing and moving into this direction.

Indeed there has been this sort of development in the Theatre of the Oppressed. We can see, for example, that the Rainbow of Desire work has started to address situations where there is not one oppressor and is working with the oppressor-oppressed relation inside the participant. Soon the practitioners also became interested in, and found it useful, to investigate what might be happening in the 'antagonist', instead of just being preoccupied with the 'protagonist'. This is somewhat in contradiction with what Adrian Jackson says in his interview about TO, "It is not the Theatre of the Oppressor, it is

not interested in the oppressor in that respect. It understands that the oppressor may have his problems, but that is not what we are talking about. We are talking about the urgent matter of the oppressed, who have the larger problems." (Jackson, 2019). As I see it, it is undoubtedly useful to focus on helping the oppressed find solutions that they can themselves execute, and to be more interested in their actions and inner life. I still think that there are benefits to also considering the oppressor so that we can remain in a compassionate connection with the world around us.

The example that a participant mentioned of meeting with the doctor, where there is a power imbalance, and the protagonist feels like they have no say against the doctor's orders. In addition to looking into our own needs and desires, we could look into the doctor's needs and desires and understand what drives them. Besides revealing the hidden dynamics and how we contribute to our undesired situation, this might make it easier to see the doctor's actions from a compassionate perspective while simultaneously reminding ourselves of our need for autonomy. Then we can make a choice from an empowered position, and giving even an answer that opposes the doctor's recommendations is easier.

I think this is also a concrete way of preventing the turning tables that Freire brings up in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. “In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it) become in turn oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity in both” (Freire, 2014, p.45). When we are also curious about the other, we are attempting to stay in touch with this humanity in both and restore the connection to it. When combining NVC and TO, it might be helpful to unpack these terms, what is meant by them and bring awareness of the danger of polarisation these labels potentially cause.

5.4.3 Boal and the Subversive

Theatre of the Oppressed and the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are, in their origins, concerned with the liberation of the working class and the class struggle. Politically they are based within left-wing politics, Marxist tradition and anti-imperialism (McLaverty-Robinson, 2017).

In his article, Franz Giuseppe F. Cortex (2016) discusses Freire’s views on social transformation and violence and considers Freire’s work in its totality. He says Freire’s position has developed from reformist, to revolutionary, towards more of a critical stance. In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire, according to Cortex, approves of the violent revolution, when it is done in love and with full

consideration of the enemy’s humanity. “Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed (an act which is always, or nearly always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressors) can initiate love. Whereas the violence of the oppressor prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human.” (Freire, 2014, p.56). I would question how violence can initiate love and question the view of violence as necessary. Freire also discusses the initiation of violence, saying that it is always initiated by the oppressor, which, in my opinion, is going into an argument about who started it (Freire, 2014, p.55). Also, Freire uses time-to-time terms as ‘duty’, which Rosenberg problematises in his work with NVC. From the perspective of NVC, these attitudes are obstacles to truly accessing this love, compassionate connection and humanity which is aspired to. Later in his work, Freire expresses that his pedagogy is not meant to instigate violent revolution and states in the *Pedagogy of Freedom* (as cited in Cortex, 2016) that:

“/.../ it is not a question of inciting the exploited poor to rebellion, to mobilization, to organization, to shaking up the world. In truth, it’s a question of working in some given area, be it literacy, health, or evangelization, and doing so as to awake the conscience of each group, in a constructive, critical manner, about the violence and extreme injustice of this concrete situation. Even further, to make it clear that this situation is not the immutable will of God.” (as cited in Cortex, 2016).

According to Cortes Freire moved from the focus of changing consciousness, to focus on the action, to return later back to the emphasis on the consciousness and the location of the oppression in the smaller spaces of society (Cortez, 2016). These smaller spaces are reflected in Boal's understanding of the 'cops in the head' that permeate society at all levels.

Andy McLaverty-Robinson (2017) is a political theorist who has written an article series on Boal and his life work. In his article *Augusto Boal: Legislative Theatre and Politics*, he writes about how Boal's political views changed in his later work that came after the *Theatre of the Oppressed* from a revolutionary view, towards a more libertarian, democratic approach. What is underlying in all of his work is humanism. Still, McLaverty-Robinson finds some ambiguity in his views as they try to disconnect life force from nature: "Boal sees human beings as creative actors, with a calling to pursue freedom and happiness in an otherwise hostile world. (...) The struggle for pleasure is the source of everything extraordinary in human life. In contrast, nature is seen as a Hobbesian law of the jungle, in which the strong consume the weak. Through the struggle against oppression, ethics is to prevail over nature." (McLaverty-Robinson, 2017a) (Boal, 2021, p. 294). Boal now advocated "Civilisation" and law, against barbarism.

"The punishment of criminals, in line with judicial power, is taken to be coextensive with human rights, and the war of civilisation against barbarism. If people don't fear retribution, there is disorder." (McLaverty-Robinson, 2017a). McLaverty-Robinson finds this problematic since this kind of arguments repeat standard reactionary arguments against diversity and social struggle and are used to defend authoritarian laws and forms of state repression. "Norms and law may have earlier origins, but modern law and law enforcement arose with the rise of class society, and function to destroy horizontal relations so as to reproduce vertical power. Subordination to judicial power is an effect, not of progressive "civilisation" of a formerly evil humanity, but of the historical rise of concentrated power.". McLaverty-Robinson points out another contradiction in Boal's writing, the heavy criticism of Capitalism and simultaneously the belief that the fundamental state of the natural world is competitive. "Survival of the fittest is a capitalistic principle, far more than an indigenous or naturalistic principle (fitness relativity largely precludes Hobbesian readings in modern biology)." (McLaverty-Robinson, 2017a). I find these reflections pointing towards the underlying differences between TO and NVC.

While Boal (2021) being a strong advocate of humanistic values, the difference between the worldview of Theatre of the Oppressed and Nonviolent Communication seems to be that in NVC, the human is seen as fundamentally compassionate and of cooperative nature and embraces a consciousness that attempts to not feed into a violent paradigm at any level. Hawkins (2012), whose views seem to correspond with the practical approaches described in NVC, argues that one cannot create peace as such, but that “Peace is the natural state of affairs when that which prevents it is removed.” (Hawkins, 2012, p.241). In the philosophy of TO, on the other hand, terms like ‘struggle’ and ‘fight’ often emerge, and it seems that the natural state of nature and human society is seen to be competition, which we, as “civilised” humans have the capacity and the duty to regulate and manage.

In another article about Rainbow of Desire McLaverty-Robinson (2017) writes about Boal’s approach of warding off, of defeating the hostile parts, or the ‘cops in the head’, as opposed to the other similar therapeutic practices that attempt to integrate and reconcile with them. “Without choosing between the two approaches, it is still possible to observe that Boal arrives at this conception because of his basically social model of oppression and his attachment

to a conflict model of society which is basically Marxist in origin.” (McLaverty-Robinson, 2017). TO does not consider aspects like the needs-thinking and the language of moral judgement to the degree that NVC does and is very much occupied with. I think that there is a possible challenge that TO can face because of this, which I will discuss below.

In *The Rainbow of Desire*, Boal writes that the oppressor produces two types of reactions in the oppressed: submission and subversion. While the ‘cops in the head’ is the submissive part, there is always the subversive element. “The goal is to dynamise the latter, by making the former disappear” (Boal, 1995, p.42). Boal wants to get hold of this subversive element and empower the participants to create an autonomous world of images of their reality and to enact this liberation in the reality of the images, to extrapolate it into their own life. This is an important aspect of TO, to agitate our dissatisfaction in order to become motivated to change our reality. It helps us get past the state of passivity and apathy and focus on active change, finding solutions, and not only coping with the reality. The challenge lies in that Boal is not concerned about the nature of this subversion, only that it is directed towards the right direction, towards

the oppressor, not towards the ones even weaker (Boal, 2021, p.338). But what if this subversion stays at the level of anger and despise?

If we wish any action to succeed in the long run, we need to communicate effectively. And looking into it, it seems that as long as we derive our energy solely from anger, it will not be that. Rosenberg (2015) talks about anger having a life-serving core and supports expressing our anger fully in a nonviolent way, which he describes in his book. Anger can be valuable as an alarm clock for us to realise that we have a need that is not being met but can also be destructive.

“I strongly believe that to whatever degree I support the consciousness that there is such a thing as a ‘careless action’ or a ‘conscientious action’, a ‘greedy person’ or a ‘moral person’, I am contributing to violence on this planet. (...) I see all anger as a result of life-alienating, violence-provoking thinking. At the core of all anger is a need that is not being fulfilled.” (Roseberg, 2015, p.144).

He also writes about how anger diverts our resources. “Anger, however, co-opts our energy by directing it towards punishing people rather than meeting our needs. Instead of engaging in ‘righteous indignation’, I recommend connecting empathetically with our own needs or those of others.”. (Rosenberg, 2015, p.144). If the other party senses judgement and criticism, they are less likely to want to contribute to our well-being, and instead, it serves to aggravate the

polarisation. I think we all can recognise this from events in our personal life.

Sometimes, anger is also present in activists of different causes, as we know from the stereotype of the “angry activist”. In a recently published article in the digital magazine *Areo*, Damian Emba (2023) talks about his own experiences with this.

“Like many young adults, I was thirsty for social change. I used the rage I felt toward current attitudes surrounding bisexuality to fuel my activism. It was exciting to feel like I was part of a movement, and I found strength in being surrounded by like-minded people. It became a part of who I was. But this association also made it difficult to separate my emotions from the movement. Anger toward people with opposing views became the foundation of my position. Like so many other activists, I let it guide my efforts and sustain my commitment to the cause.” (Emba, 2023).

The educator, activist and Buddhist teacher Lama Rod Owens published 2020 a book called *Love and Rage*, which digs into this phenomenon. In this book, subtitled *The Path of Liberation through Anger*, he talks about similar concepts as Rosenberg (2015). In an interview, he answers the question of ‘how to use anger to fuel actions without burning myself or others?’ and tells us to “dig into the love”, as anger signals to us where the injustice is, and can significantly motivate us, “Love is the long term experience that keeps us connected to the well-being of the people around us.” (Action of Happiness, 2021, 40:34) He also talks about compassion, and the

importance of separating between our ‘wants’ (desires), and our ‘needs’. He points out that he sees anger as a secondary emotion, hurt being the primary one. Anger, according to him, stems from a rising tension when we don’t have the strategies to take care of our needs (Action of Happiness, 2021, 12:00). This correlates in a way with what Rosenberg (2015) thinks, without it considering the effects of our thoughts. When we don’t have the strategies to take care of our needs, we can easily reside to violent thinking, leading to anger. Though, depending on our thoughts, in the same situation, we could also be feeling, for example, activated, frustrated or desperate instead.

David Hawkins (2012) also has his theory about anger that derives from his work with kinesiological testing. According to him, anger can lead to either constructive or destructive action. “Although anger may lead to homicide and war, as an energy level within itself, it is much further removed from death than those below it”. According to his “Map of Consciousness”, below anger, you can find, for example Shame, Apathy, Fear and Desire. The origin of anger is understood by him slightly differently than by Rosenberg and Owens, as he claims it stems from Desire. Nevertheless, the message about anger that he conveys is the same. He says it can be a fulcrum by which the oppressed can achieve freedom and has created great social

movements, but includes a warning. “But Anger expresses itself most often as resentment and revenge and is, therefore, volatile and dangerous.”. Anger in his system calibrates at level 150. “A prime difficulty with thoughts and behaviours associated with the energy fields that calibrate below 200 is that they cause counter-reactions. A familiar law of the observable universe is that force results in equal and opposite counterforce.” (Hawkins, p.103-104 & 240). Understanding counterforce and its mechanism can be useful when practising effective actions both on the macro level of society, the meso level of our personal relationships, and the micro level of our inner dialogue. In NVC, instead of resisting something, the curious approach of trying to take hold of the unmet needs is preferred.

This process, from apathy (submission) to anger (subversion) to liberation, can be related to Rosenberg’s (2015) three stages of emotional liberation. The first one is Emotional Slavery, when we are not taking care of our needs, and we see ourselves as responsible for others’ feelings. The second stage is the Obnoxious State, where we feel angry as we no longer want to do that, but we refuse to admit or care for what anyone else feels or needs. The third and last stage is Emotional Liberation, where we take full responsibility for our intentions and actions, but not for the feelings of others. All while

being aware that we can never meet our needs at the expense of someone else (Rosenberg, 2015, p.61). While Lama Owens (Action of Happiness, 2021) talks about love, as Freire did, NVC can be a useful, practical tool for understanding how to access it and help us to discern which actions align with it and what blocks us from accessing our compassion.

These kinds of solutions require maturity, discipline, and patience to be brought to fruition. Meanwhile, it is not about perfection and holding ourselves to a paralysing standard, as reflected below in Fig. 9. A part of NVC is also empathetically seeing our “shortcomings”, fostering what is working and listening to the needs behind our negative thoughts. “Anything worth doing, is worth doing poorly” (Rosenberg, 2015, p.216). Finally, when we find it difficult to access our compassion fully, we can keep in mind that anger is greater than apathy and being obnoxious is healthier than emotional slavery.

To connect and feel connected
At all times
Is not possible
We are not perfect
Neither are our communication skills

But by becoming aware of our
Feelings and needs
Expressing them out loud
And reminding ourselves that we have them
We can meet other people with more empathy
See ourselves in an empathetic way
Something like: “Everyone you meet are
Going through a struggle you don’t know.”
And being able to think about that
And share yours
Is a good place to start
To make a connection

Fig. 9. Text by participant H, 2022

5.4.4 Towards Something New

Certain tendencies have been growing in our society; we can see, for example, in the prison systems that have moved from punishment, towards rehabilitation, and the educational systems have been moving towards more dialogistic and non-hierarchical systems, like Freire (2014) proposes. The consciousness and education around mental health and its impacts on physical health have been rising, and our societies have been moving towards more inclusion. At the same time,

we are realising the limits of our economic systems and becoming more aware of how we are interconnected with the earth and dependent on its ecosystems. While nature has competition, it seems that we are becoming increasingly aware of cooperative patterns in the natural world. There is a movement away from Materialism towards looking back to ancient and indigenous knowledge, revalidating its value, while quantum physics is shaking the ground under many of the former scientific beliefs of how the world functions.

Perhaps looking from this perspective, our humanistic traits would not be something opposed to nature, that we control our natural urges and raise above nature to human potential, but that this human potential is also part of our natural selves. We can work in cooperation with the world around us, where we are supported by the natural world, who also engages in cooperation with us, instead of trying to control over and compromise with a purely material world which we extract and deploy of. This approach could be more likely to yield long-lasting harmony with less resistance, and perhaps it can also be reflected in our human relations. Very simplistically, it could possibly be pictured that we are moving from a hierarchical pyramid world, towards a circle. It seems that this is the direction that Boal and Freire

boldly stepped into with their pedagogy and theatre. I argue that NVC can ultimately serve their goals by helping us avoid falling back to the old stories, and to actualise them fully at all levels, from our inner processes to society. Adding NVC to TO can propose a way to deal with our subversive energies healthily. It can help us further guide our consciousness and give us concrete tools to direct our focus on what matters, which means using our energy efficiently in a life-supporting, life-enhancing manner (reflected in Fig. 10 below). So that we can bridge that last gap left behind by the “old paradigm”, and step into the “new”.

I have been learning about how seemingly locked patterns of behaviour can be changed.

Enjoying the opening propositions for a new path.

Towards resolving conflicts in a wellbeing state.

By: seeing and vocalising the possible needs of the other person.

Asking the other person to word their needs.

Verifying that there can be different ways of acting in the situation that my habit has been till now.

Fig. 10. Text by participant I, 2022

Even with the right tools, this doesn't come free from challenges. Freire (2014) frequently mentions the "fear of freedom", which may, according to him, lead the oppressed equally to the desire for the role of the oppressor or bind them to the role of the oppressed (Freire, 2014, p.46). The oppressed who have adopted the guidelines of the oppressor are fearful of freedom which would "...require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility." (Freire, 2014, p.47). NVC presents similar challenges; it can be frightening to realise the power of our autonomy and responsibility. Besides this, expressing our needs can require courage. "In a world where we're often judged harshly for identifying and revealing our needs, doing so can be very frightening. Women, in particular, are susceptible to criticism." (Rosenberg, 2015, p.55). This fear of change, responsibility, facing the judgment of our outer and inner oppressors is a challenge that we all face and need to empathise with. The responsibility is not diminished by the fact that osmosis works both ways, the society affects us, but also how we show up will affect society in turn. On the other hand, we can look at our power from the bright side, knowing that our actions will matter.

Finally, Theatre of the Oppressed is predominantly in line with the philosophy of Nonviolent Communication, even when the terminology of the oppressed and oppressor is present. From the *Rainbow of Desire*, translator's introduction by Adrian Jackson: "Like the whole Theatre of the Oppressed, it thrives on dissatisfaction: implicitly it says, do not be satisfied with less than you need; are you satisfied? If not, why not? If you are not happy, let's do something about it. Its essential declared goal is happiness, but not happiness as a static condition, a laid-back nirvana, happiness as a business, an aliveness, a full capacity, a firing on all cylinders." (Jackson, 1995, p. xxiv). While Nonviolent Communication can't be said to thrive only on dissatisfaction in the same way as TO, the purpose of it is the same. The goals and core values of neither need to be compromised when merging the two methods, and just like the views of Freire (2014) and Boal (2021) have been evolving throughout their life, so will the philosophy of TO be reshaped in the hands of new practitioners.

6.0 Potentials for Further Applications

In this chapter, I will focus on two ideas for the future application of this work that I wish to explore: NVC in Nonviolent Activism, and NVC and the inner dialogue. This goes beyond what was investigated on the workshop but is part of the process I have been through conducting this research. The purpose of bringing these topics up, is to open to the reader some further perspectives and inspiration around the different potentials with this combination of methods. Finally, I will mention the ideas for future applications expressed by the workshop participants in their interviews.

6.1 NVC and TO in Active Nonviolence

One perhaps obvious application is the front of Active Nonviolence. To work with people already involved in Nonviolence and who have the will to create actions.

War Resisters' International describes Nonviolent action in the following way:

“...it is a form of action that affirms life, speaks out against oppression, and acknowledges the value of each person. Nonviolence can combine active resistance, including civil disobedience, with dialogue; it can combine non-cooperation — withdrawal of support from a system of oppression — with constructive work to build alternatives.” (WRI, 1997).

One could explore how and where the values mentioned above and the components of NVC show up in the practical level of Nonviolent

Activism. While need-based thinking is the most important aspect, one other interesting experiment could be, for example, relating to using positive action language. In NVC, positive action language is critical in making requests, this means proposing what actions you wish to be taken instead of focusing on what you don't. While in activism, one generally engages in both fighting *against* something and fighting *for* something, it could be interesting to test what would happen if the “fighting against” were removed entirely. What would the change of language do in the activists and the people they encounter? This could be tried out through Image Theatre or as a Forum Theatre play with a curious approach. Whatever the conclusions driven of the experiment are, I believe that it has the potential to raise awareness of the use of force at all levels.

WRI (1997) also mentions that Nonviolent action sometimes attempts to create the reconciliation of conflict by strengthening the social fabric and including people from different sides in seeking solutions. At the same time, they admit that sometimes these aims are difficult to achieve immediately (WRI, 1997). In her interview (20.01.2023), Skorczynska reflected on urgent situations requiring immediate action:

“This is the question about NVC, and I don’t have the answer yet. How does NVC work in societies where there is this big power imbalance? And at the same time, for example, Restorative Circles and Restorative Justice were created in Brazilian favelas based on the concepts of NVC and this responsibility for myself and my community and empathy towards others’ feelings and needs. So why not. NVC can also be, if we are talking about the oppressed, not only about how the oppressed turn towards the oppressors but also about how they turn towards themselves, in a group, in a community and each member of the community.”.

Skorczyńska brings up the point that it is also important to create resilient and nurtured communities, without which it is more challenging to address oppression. I think there are many benefits from staying in touch with oneself and the NVC consciousness, even in very challenging situations where the use of NVC in dialogue is momentarily impossible and power imbalances are enormous.

In the foreword of Rosenberg’s book, Deepak Chopra (2015) writes about how we tend to cling to our stories and history with a vengeance because it anchors our identity and explains Rosenberg’s approach to this. “In any conflict, he didn’t choose sides or even care primarily what their stories were. Recognizing that all stories lead to conflict, either overtly or covertly, he focused on connection as a psychological bridge. (...) The only way to resolve all violence is to give up your story.” (Chopra, 2015, p. xiv-xv). Becoming aware of the stories we tell ourselves could be another example of what to explore with people engaged in Active Nonviolence involving

methods of the Theatre of the Oppressed. This could also be an access point to many topics. We all face various conflicts in our everyday life, and the difference lies only in the intensity with which these topics bring themselves up within activism. This practice could deepen the individual understanding of nonviolence through NVC. TO could be used to try out and imagine new actions and discuss them through the lens of Nonviolence and NVC. Work with nonviolent activists could provide a fruitful experimentation ground to further work with NVC and TO.

6.2. Inner dialogue

Theatre of the Oppressed contains much potential for diving even deeper with Nonviolent Communication. During the interview with Skorczyńska on 20.01.2023, we brainstormed some ideas about the many further applications of the Rainbow of Desire, some of which connect with the inner dialogue. She reflected that:

“...maybe the interventions in TO can be not of how I approach the oppressor but how I approach myself. For me, the big part of NVC is also in how I talk with myself, how much empathy I have for myself, and how much awareness I have for my own feelings and needs because if I don’t, then it’s difficult to see it in a different person.”.

While essentially being the same thing, in a way, the ‘inner dialogue’ is the opposite of the activists’ will to communicate with the larger society. Even when being by ourselves, we are communicating and in

a relationship with the different parts of ourselves. These levels of inner dialogue and communication, at a societal level, are also complementary. Without NVC being present in the internal dialogue, it is challenging to put it entirely into play on the other levels. The ‘inner dialogue’ is basically what the Theatre (of the Oppressed) calls ‘internal monologue’. At its core, it is the thoughts that are present in your mind. When you use NVC in your ‘inner dialogue’ or ‘internal monologue’, you do the same thing as in NVC in general, showing light to observations, feelings, needs and values, and requests. As Freire talks about the oppressor consciousness transforming humans, as well as nature, into objects (Freire, 2014, p.58), Rosenberg (2015) agrees that we have been conditioned to view ourselves as objects – objects full of shortcomings and that it is no wonder that many of us are relating to ourselves violently. In NVC, we want whatever we do to lead to the enrichment of life, and so it is critical that we evaluate events and conditions in ways that help us learn and make ongoing choices that serve us. Instead of benefiting from our mistakes, many of us, according to Rosenberg, enmesh in self-hatred instead (Rosenberg, 2015, p.130).

After the workshops, I had the impression that taking up the inner dialogue would have been the important next step to take if the

workshop had had a third day. TO provides possibilities to work with this internal level, especially in the Rainbow of Desire, designed to address internalised oppression. Skorczynska, in her interview (20.01.2023), builds up on the idea of exchanging *desires* with *needs* in the exercise called ‘The image of the rainbow of desire’ and imagines how the needs could work together with the desires: “These two layers could be put to play “against” each other. One could explore what is the relation between the desire and the need and how do they interact? Do they agree or are they in conflict?”. In connection to this exercise, I think one could also, for example, use the mode “Stop! Think!” where the situation is frozen, and the internal monologue is improvised out loud, uncensored, after which it could be examined closer. Additionally, ‘Cops in the Head’ is an exercise that addresses the internal voices. In this exercise, the group identifies and embodies the external sources of oppression that have been internalised. This could be very harmoniously used together with an NVC perspective.

I started to focus more on my inner dialogue after the workshop, and for the first time, I properly paid attention to it and became increasingly aware of it. I started experimenting with my thoughts surrounding this whole process of doing my Master’s—the

fears of not having everything figured out, etc. I examined whether they were violent thoughts and listened to what was happening in my body and training myself in the process to treat myself well and communicating with myself in ways that are life-supporting. This was a part of the process of learning NVC and applying it with myself.

The inner dialogue work can drastically improve your quality of life. When discussing this in a conversation with my colleague, we discussed how our first impression about NVC was that it was something done in a relationship with *others*, and that's all, not fully realising the part about our communication with ourselves. We talked about our experiences agreeing on the inner dialogue finally being the most important part of NVC, as Rosenberg (2015) also says. This is why it seems to be essential for being able to liberate ourselves and fulfil the goals of TO and NVC.

We did not talk about the inner dialogue during the workshop besides a short mention. But I brought it up in the second interview with the participants three months after the workshop. When asked about their capacity to recognise violent communication after the workshop, one participant mentioned especially having become better at identifying the violent inner dialogue, also in others. This participant had also invested some time in NVC after the workshop

and pointed out that inner dialogue work requires metacognition, the ability to observe one's own thinking, which can be challenging for some. The other two participants were slightly aware of their inner dialogue. One mentioned NVC being somewhat accessible in the inner dialogue and that staying connected to kind thoughts in difficult periods is more difficult. When asked about the third informant's internal dialogue, they said they hadn't thought about using NVC when communicating with themselves. They then recognised having sort of done it by thinking afterwards about how to phrase their experience in a conflict with another, although still not in direct communication with themselves. Both participants, with less awareness around the inner dialogue, thought it could be a topic they would be interested in working with more. This focus could heighten even the general metacognitive awareness besides the NVC skills.

In addition to the inner dialogue, when asking in the second interview what they would like to focus on if we did a hypothetical part two of the workshop. The participants mentioned exploring situations with a more significant power imbalance and how to intervene and work as the middleman in a conflict. They expressed willingness to work with these topics by physically trying things out on stage and would have wanted to do even more acting this time.

There is room for much creativity within the framing that TO and NVC give, and there are clearly multiple options for focusing on different types of situations and phenomena or different aspects of NVC. Because of this, I can also see many possible arenas of application, from organisations to schools to different heterogeneous and homogeneous groups of people. NVC and TO can be for everyone and everywhere since we all have the oppressed and the oppressor in ourselves in different ways.

7.0 Conclusion

As the work of combining TO and NVC progressed, I realised that Theatre of the Oppressed could be an interesting way to practise and explore Nonviolent Communication and that they, at the bottom, hold shared goals and can both equally give something to the other. Consequently, my research question is: How can methods inspired by the Theatre of the Oppressed and Nonviolent communication complement each other? Both methods aim to create more equality and well-being within society. They both challenge oppressive structures, power imbalances, and communication patterns that contribute to conflict and disconnection. At the very bottom, they are concerned about freedom and happiness.

TO can offer the NVC-practise a safe place to try different approaches and gain experiential knowledge in a controlled arena, where participants are encouraged to imagine and enact alternative strategies, the actions being in focus. The process is accompanied by creative play, which is central to theatre and drama and effective in creating bonds between individuals. Having the body involved in this way provides both an aesthetic layer that works to expose social and personal issues and the dynamics involved and a kinesthetic layer that holistically enhances the awareness of the process. TO involves the

person as a whole, both the critical and the creative thinking, and the body that feels and senses.

The awareness of the feelings in the body is central in NVC, as Rosenberg (2015) came to the conclusion that sharing feelings with honesty is crucial for creating compassionate bonds between people. NVC can offer TO practical communication tools to navigate difficult conversations and promote cooperation. It can as well be a tool for facilitating open, honest conversations about the issues raised during the performance. Most importantly, NVC can make us understand the mechanics of violence and conflict and shows the ways one can either perpetuate it or create compassionate connections instead. It helps us navigate our cultural conditioning present in the language and guides our attention, our consciousness, where we can get hold of that which will help us to meet our needs, that which is life-enriching. NVC can also propose a way to deal with our subversive energies healthily and show how to harness the energy to create sustainable change and conduct more aligned actions. It brings us the consciousness of the universal needs that drive all our actions. This can eventually create a radical change in how we behave in the world and in our inner world and enhance our awareness of ourselves and others, individually and in relation to one another.

Combining these methods requires skills in both these practices. The following points are what I came across as the most important takeaways to keep in mind. One needs to beware of introducing NVC in a way that is digestible within the time frame and that one has an adequate level of understanding of NVC. The great thing about TO is that it is truly a forum where there are no ready answers, only questions to be explored together. When you add NVC into it, you give some sort of guidance on how to think. If one wants to stay true to the nature of TO, it is essential to keep a sense of freedom in the interventions so that all kinds of solutions can be explored and NVC can be the base of reflection to return to in between. The communication process of NVC can be used to suggest what direction can be helpful to explore instead of a rule that should be followed. There lies the balance that can give rise to some challenges and requires skill from the Joker to navigate. It is also good to remember that even when NVC would be fully present, there is not only one nonviolent approach; the strategies are still multiple and varied, and there is much to discover in the different exercises. NVC can be seen not as much of a rule, a ready-made proposal, but also as a tool, like the tools of the theatre of the oppressed, of revealing and giving room to explore alternatives.

Most workshop participants expressed that the combination of TO and NVC worked well and felt it compatible and relevant to their lives. Several of them hoped to do more similar practices. During the workshop, I could observe them achieving first-hand knowledge and authentic insight through the practice. In short, NVC can make TO more effective, and TO can support the understanding of NVC and bring it into action. Together they can create an experience that promotes empathy, self-awareness and social change.

To profoundly change the structures and patterns of our lives and society, we need to change our thinking, and this is probably both the greatest challenge in this work and simultaneously the greatest benefit. In the writings of Freire (2014) and Boal (2021), while being very conscious of the mechanics of oppression in the world, there are still echoes present from the kind of thinking from which Rosenberg (2015) claims violence (and oppression) to stem. Nonviolent Communication can help us reach further towards a more congruently nonviolent worldview, which I believe is beneficial for achieving the goals of the Theatre of the Oppressed. As it is a vastly different way of thinking from what many of us are historically used to, it also puts us up for the challenge of entering a process of changing ourselves, the language we use and the way we think. This is where I think TO

is a valuable arena for trying out an action of change, trying out our options, in a safe container which will hopefully encourage us to act them out in “real life”.

Finally, I want to present a suggestion, among many possibilities, of a summarised model of the steps one can follow when creating a workshop combining NVC and TO:

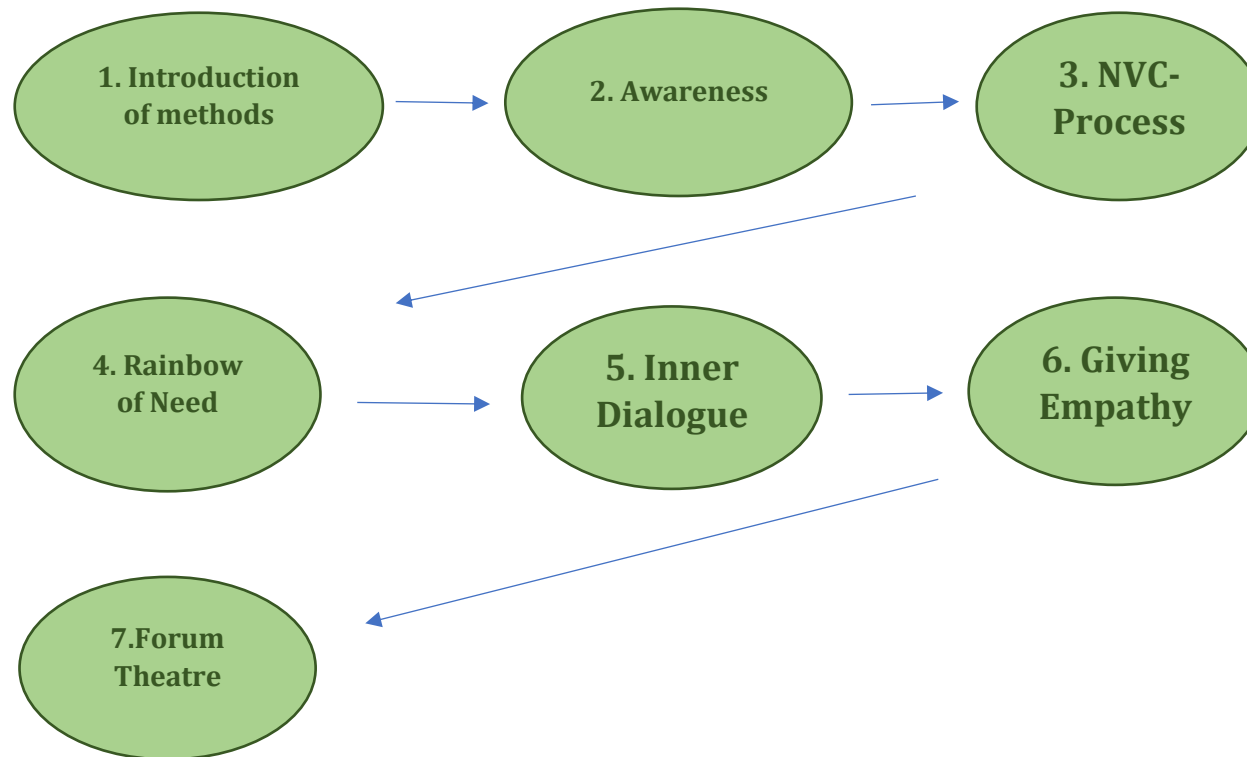


Fig. 11. Model for combining NVC and TO, by the author, 2023.

First in the model is the introduction of methods. Besides a general introduction, it can be useful to discuss the important concepts and present the traditions behind terms and techniques used. Looking into what kind of philosophical underpinnings are present and what is the worldview and view of human beings. The core terms of the *oppressed* and the *oppressor*, while being helpful to guide us to see what is happening in the world, also hold a risk for furthering polarisation and keeping us attached to our stories that perpetuate violence. When combining these two methods, I could see it as beneficial to unpack these terms and look at them closely, both from the perspective of NVC and TO.

Secondly, there is awareness. This includes exercises that bring awareness first of our bodies but also awareness of the whole group present, the space etc., to prepare the body and the mind for the work ahead. Both Boal's theatre games, as well as mindfulness exercises or similar, can be adapted. I think this step is essential and can vary in length depending on the time frame available. These exercises can also be returned to throughout the workshop.

Thirdly, the NVC process, which includes going through the four components, *observation, feeling, need* and *requests*, combining and pacing the theory with theatrical exercises. Image Theatre can

illustrate the difference between observation and evaluation while bringing up relevant topics, for example, power, compassion, etc. Cards with feelings and needs can be helpful to practice vocabulary through improvisational games. One can be creative in adapting different games, drama plays and exercises to the topic of the four components. These kinds of exercises have the potential to create insight into the four components and their use. Even though the NVC process is only a tool and not the essence of NVC, I would still choose to begin from there, as it is something concrete and simple that can be instantly approached and experimented with. The NVC theory can then be developed further throughout the other exercises.

As the fourth point, I chose to place the Rainbow of Need (Rainbow of Desire). Getting to know the needs in action and reveal dynamics by using the exercise "The image of the rainbow of desire" from *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995) and replacing the desires with needs. Through this, the participants can discover the core of the conflict presented on the 'platform'. They can gain a deep understanding of universal needs on an embodied level. Since the needs are such an important and challenging part of NVC, this practice is very useful.

The fifth point in the model is the inner dialogue. The work with the methods from *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995) can continue with the inner dialogue, where we can look at our thoughts using, for example, the mode called “Stop! Think!” where the uncensored thoughts in a scene are expressed out loud, or the exercise “Cops in the head”, where the source of internal oppression is identified in symbolic characters. In this way, we can listen to the inner dialogue, become aware of and recognise the violent thought patterns, and explore new pathways.

At this point, I would bring up giving empathy as point number six. This is to practise and become aware of the other side of NVC. Exercising giving empathy makes us sensitive to the other person's needs which is vital in a conflict and can train us out of the “Obnoxious Stage”, where we are only concerned with expressing our own needs. It also helps us to make sure we have understood the other correctly. This could be done, for example, by personal storytelling inspired by images and reflecting back on each other's stories.

Lastly, I would introduce Forum Theatre. This includes creating a relative Forum Theatre play where spect-actors can try out different strategies to fulfil the protagonist's needs by replacing them. After each intervention, there is a moment for discussion based on

questions like the following examples. What needs does the protagonist/antagonist have? What is our request, to whom, and how was it presented? Is the solution life-enriching? Is it in line with NVC or not? What reactions did the intervention evoke? What challenges do we face and why? What worked, and why?

This is a comprehensive 7-step process that would take at least three days to complement fully, or longer, depending on how one wishes to proceed with the steps. Those three days would provide participants with a basic knowledge of the most critical aspects of NVC, an understanding and awareness of the violence in our everyday existence, and practice in facing them. This model can be a base that can then be modified according to the focus group, time frame and possible focus themes. To shorten this model, I can, for example, see possibilities of skipping parts 4, 5 & 6, going from the NVC process directly to the Forum Theatre. Alternatively, to not do the Forum Theatre part and concentrate on the Rainbow of Desire techniques, depending on the context and themes of focus.

In short, combining methods of Theatre of the Oppressed with Nonviolent Communication can create a comprehensive method that can generate awareness around violence and oppression as well as strategies of liberation. As further research on this topic, the use of

NVC with a professional group working with the Theatre of the Oppressed could be researched. Perhaps how NVC affects their way of working and how it changes the experience for the involved? What efforts does it take to implement? And what ways of doing it are perceived as most effective and practical?

Through this research, I have understood to some degree how these two methodological traditions can work together, and I believe further experimentation would bring into sight some new questions and possibilities, yet unconceived.

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Appendix

Appendix#1 - Consent Form Interview

Appendix #2 – Interview Guide Professional

Appendix #3 – Interview Guide Participants

Appendix #4 – NSD Evaluation

Appendix #1 – Consent Form Interview

Are you interested in taking part in the research project:

“Drama With Compassion”?

Purpose of the project

You are invited to participate in a research project where the main purpose is to research the use of aesthetic methods inspired by the Theater of the Oppressed and Rainbow of Desire to learn and practice (Nonviolent) Compassionate Communication.

This project is part of my research for a master’s theses.

Which institution is responsible for the research project?

Oslo Metropolitan University

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are asked to participate because your professional affiliations to these themes and/or methods. You are part of a selection of a few professionals.

What does participation involve for you?

If you choose to take part in the project, this will involve that you are present for an interview that takes approximately 1 hour and will be recorded electronically. The questions in this interview will be about your professional work and experiences with themes about compassionate communication and theatre.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All

information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified here and we will process your personal data in accordance with data protection legislation (the GDPR).

The information will be saved on an encrypted server and this consent contract will be locked away.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The planned end date of the project is 31.5.2023. All raw data will be deleted then. Participants will be recognizable in the thesis through their professional background, as long as they give their consent to it.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

access the personal data that is being processed about you

request that your personal data is deleted

request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified

receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and

send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Oslo Metropolitan University, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project meets requirements in data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

Oslo Metropolitan University via Sini Moilanen email: s366944@oslomet.no, or by phone +358504625408, or via supervisor Rikke Gørgens Gjørum email: rikke.g.gjarum@uit.no

Our Data Protection Officer: Ingrid Jacobsen ingrid.jacobsen@oslomet.no

If you have questions about how data protection has been assessed in this project, contact:

Data Protection Services, by email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 53 21 15 00.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader
(Researcher/supervisor)

Student (if applicable)

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project Drama With Compassion and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

to participate in an interview

for information about me to be published in a way that I can be recognised (name, professional background)

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end of the project.

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix #2 – Interview Guide Professional

Interview guide

- If we practice NonViolent Communication with the Theater of the Oppressed, what happens with the 'oppressed' and the 'oppressor'?
- In an interview with Adrian Jackson he mentions that they also work with internalised oppression, how does NVC relate to this?
- Would you be willing to describe your experiences using Rainbow of Desire and Forum Theater to practice NVC?
- What do you think in general about using TO to practice NVC?
What prospects can you see? Where are how can it be used?

Interview Guide workshop:

Questions:

How was this workshop for you?

How was it to work with the theatrical methods?

What were the most insightful moments and why?

What were the most challenging moments and why?

Going in a circle: 1-3 feelings or desires that are alive in you right now that are in relation to the workshop?

Interview guide post-workshop:

-We worked with two methods, one was Nonviolent Communication and the other Theater of the Oppressed. So if we look at so called “violent communication” and “oppression”, what does those evoke in you? What kind of experiences of these have you had in your life?

-Has something happened in your ability to notice and identify so-called “violent communication” in daily life since the workshop?

-What happens when you notice doing ‘violent communication to others, out spoken or silently?

-What happens when you notice someone else doing ‘violent communication to others, out spoken or silently?

-How do you deal with internal violent communication towards *yourself*?

-Did the workshop give you any tools to be able to think or react in new ways?

-In retrospective: What effects do you think the artistic & aesthetic methods used had?

-If we would do this kind of a workshop again, what would you like to focus on?

Appendix #4 – NSD Evaluation

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

09.01.2023

Referansenummer

175266

Vurderingstype

Standard

Dato

09.01.2023

Prosjekttittel

Drama with compassion

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet / Fakultet for teknologi, kunst og design /
Institutt for estetiske fag

Prosjektansvarlig

Rikke Gürgens Gjærum

Student

Sini Moilanen

Prosjektperiode

08.10.2022 - 31.05.2023

Kategorier personopplysninger

Alminnelige

Lovlig grunnlag

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 31.05.2023.

Kommentar

ABOUT OUR ASSESSMENT Data Protection Services has an agreement with the institution where you are carrying out research or studying. As part of this agreement, we provide guidance so that the processing of personal data in your project is lawful and complies with data protection legislation. We have now assessed the planned processing of personal data. Our assessment is that the processing is lawful, so long as it is carried out as described in the Notification Form with dialogue and attachments. IMPORTANT INFORMATION You must store, send and secure the collected data in accordance with your institution's guidelines. This means that you must use online survey, cloud storage, and video conferencing providers (and the like) that your institution has an agreement with. We provide general advice on this, but it is your institution's own guidelines for information security that apply. SHARE THE NOTIFICATION FORM It is mandatory for students to share the Notification Form with their supervisor (the project leader). You do this by clicking on "Share project" in the upper-left corner of the form. If your supervisor doesn't accept the invitation within a week then the invitation must be sent again. TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION The project will be processing general categories of personal data until the date documented in the Notification form. LEGAL BASIS The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous statement or action,

which will be documented and can be withdrawn. The legal basis for processing general categories of personal data is therefore consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 a).

PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA We find that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding: lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and will give their consent purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose

THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS As long as the data subjects can be identified in the data material, they will have the following rights: access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), data portability (art. 20). We find that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal data will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13. We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES We presuppose that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data. If you use a data processor (online survey tool, cloud storage or video interviewing platform) the processing must meet requirements under arts. 28 and 29. Use a data processor that your institution has an agreement with. To ensure that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project).

NOTIFY CHANGES If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify us. This is done by updating the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified: <https://www.nsd.no/en/data-protection->

[services/notification-form-for-personal-data/notify-changes-in-the-notification-form](#) Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes. **FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT** We will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded. Good luck with the project!