

Armchair Potentials

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An armchair revolutionary is one who merely dreams of changes, but does not make them happen. Metaphors can get turned into stereotypes. I am sure most revolutionaries sat in their armchairs for the time necessary to think things through. And it is clear that using action methods does not by itself guarantee creativity and

truth (Administrator: “BPA members are often unaware of my work and sometimes even disrespectful”; FEPTO: “We're genuinely interested in the BPA”), or needs (BPA website: “I need to be updated, modernized, and put to better use”).

Having armchairs at hand, instead of chairs, opened up interesting aspects for me: Their size and shape symbolized soundness as well as clumsiness. In contrast with foldable picnic chairs, an



Photo: Clark Baim

non-armchair action. At the June 2015 sociodrama workshop about the future of the BPA, facilitated by Ron Wiener, we turned the passive connotation of armchairs upside down. They represented elements, roles, and sub-units of the BPA and important factors in its surroundings. We moved them into positions that represented current relations among these elements and later into ones believed to be better. We spoke in their name (and our own), asking questions (TELE-tronic: “Does any one read me?”), expressing wishes (Trainers: “We do a lot of work with a personal input, we 'grow people', and need to be better supported”), an unknown

armchair demands its own space, saying “take me seriously”. They couldn't have been stacked one upon the other, as acrobatics is not in armchairs' nature. Perhaps they were unmistakably saying: “*Not* everything is possible. Find realistic ways. This is life, not a Tetris game.” If the Exec takes centre space, the training schools cannot. If TOAS is in-between the two, the pressures from the latter might get in the way of a constructive and mutually supportive relationship. The three outside organizations cannot all be equally close to BPA – which one is getting more attention and which one should?

For a moment, the armchairs seemed to me like dodgems. Many of them in a limited area, bumping into each other, for the fun of action, rivalry, or expression of aggression. Was this an image of unspoken rivalry amongst the elements due to shortages (of time, staff, will, clarity, and communication)? When Ron told us to reflect on the scene and make changes for the better, the deprived elements got more voice: The schools, the source of growth and knowledge, are on the periphery. The BPA members are silent and under-involved. The elements on the bridge with the outside (the PR, the journal, and the website) seem neglected. The future itself is at the side, instead of acknowledged in the present. Energy is taken up by meeting criteria, and is lacking for proactively strengthening the organization's voice. Certain ventures need more people (annual conferences are too challenging).

Jumping into the future, the BPA was exposed to government financial decisions, and the market. New elements seemed necessary: media skills, research, and stronger connections with the field of psychotherapy.

It seemed that armchairs do have potentials. I am not saying that there was or should be a revolution at the BPA. However, two hours before the workshop, it got a new Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasury, and half of the Exec. In the air were words, like "a new generation", "badly needed new strength", "unburdened by the past", as well as "support and shadowing by experienced members". At the workshop, I certainly felt mutual respect between the older and the younger generation. I also sensed caution of scary aspects. The "psychotherapists' shadow" was left untouched. The previous day, in the same room in Lancaster, a group with a slightly different membership, did a sociodrama facilitated by Rollo Browne,

venturing into the wounds, uncertainties, and passions in the BPA. The next day, the new hopes were probably being protected from getting nipped in the bud.

I live in Slovenia, a country that celebrated the 25th anniversary of independence this year. It seems that those years ago we were more competent. Does an awareness of the past, a new birth, and the feeling of responsibility for it, make people unusually capable of wise action? In those delicate transition moments, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek encouraged the voters to take the elections seriously, adding that:

"... at the same time, paradoxically, people should not expect too much, as in taking democracy for the new dream. I am most of all concerned about the moment of sobering-up when people will notice that this does not bring salvation. It is then when the hard work for us will truly begin, at the time when we experience the limits of democracy."

In my training, I've had the privilege of comparing the British and Slovenian cultures. Quite possibly, the quote could not apply to the British character. However, the workshop atmosphere, with its mixture of realism, awareness of the importance of the moment, the community, member activation, and limitations, along with wishful thinking, reminded me of this precarious developmental stage.

The sociodrama was about encouraging exploration, and it seemed that everyone did the holding while exploring, whereas the facilitator's almost unnoticeable presence transmitted trust and held space which allowed us that. It was as though everyone knew the unspoken: Not everything can be done, but let us do today what we can.