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thoughts on structure and process

by alessandra ogren



One of the things that drew me to Wise Fool and continues to inspire me is the mission of using art for social change. Having worked as an activist for years, I was thrilled to find people who were bringing theatre, puppetry and stilt walking into the streets as means of building community. Bringing people together in this way is one of the most powerful uses of the arts. Art can be a bridge across language, culture, religion, race and class. Through imagery, movement and theatre, people are able to share ideas and visions, grieve, celebrate and laugh together. In using art as a way to create community, it is important to give as much attention to how we work together as we give to the art we are coming together to create. The way a project is initiated, organized and structured has a large effect on the result of the project.

One of the challenges of working with any group of people is finding a way of working together that allows every one involved to feel inspired, creative and invested in the project. What feels like the most empowering structure for one might feel completely oppressive to another. So what can we do? We could choose to work with people who work similarly. This is easy and comfortable. It often, though not always, means that people work with others from a similar, class, race and cultural background.

There is a strength that comes from working with one's own people. It is affirming, empowering and sometimes more efficient. Everyone shares common references and similar ways of communicating. It is important to take pride in one's culture and strengths. Many artists and activists have grouped themselves in this way, choosing specifically to work, create, and perform with others from their cultural background. This work has been and continues to be important for those involved, as well as for the larger society.

But just as it is important to know where you come from and be proud of your heritage and culture, it is also important to understand, respect and learn from other people's experiences. Everyone can benefit from sharing ideas, values and visions. By working with people whose life experiences are completely different than our own, we can learn tolerance, compassion and respect for others. We grow from being challenged, from confronting our prejudices, assumptions and values about ourselves and others. Artistically, there is tremendous beauty in the mixing and sharing of different styles, skills and forms of art from different cultures and traditions.

Working with a diverse group of people means working with people with different needs. It requires us to look at the priorities of the people involved in the project and to discover and decide together which ways of working are most creative, fun, empowering and efficient. This varies from person to person and is affected by our upbringing, personality, sex, race, class, age and culture.

Another possibility in organizing your project would be to choose a loose structure or "no structure," as many progressive organizations do in an attempt to create an alternative to the hierarchical structure of the dominant society. This anarchistic "non-structure" requires that each person in the group take personal responsibility. Whoever has the desire, motivation and drive to instigate an idea can. The theory of this is beautiful, but unfortunately, not everyone has the same self-empowerment, confidence, resources and motivation to realize their dreams within this kind of structure. The reality is that often whoever is the loudest, most stubborn and determined gets what they want. Within this way of working I have witnessed people who were quieter, who work at a slower pace or have less confidence, feel unheard and become frustrated within the larger group.

There are many different methods of organizing projects, each with its advantages and disadvantages. It is important to try different things until you figure out what works best for your group or your specific project. The best structure for the project should take into consideration the needs of those involved, the goals of the project and the time allotted for it. The structure should be tailored to meet the need of the majority of people working on the project while still meeting the project goals. While there are strengths and weaknesses to every structure, basic human needs should always be considered. Every person deserves to be heard, supported, encouraged and respected. Abusive behavior should not be tolerated. Working on a creative project should be, for the most part, enjoyable.

I encourage you to examine how you work and why you are more comfortable in a certain structure. I also challenge you to try something different. Educate yourself about the cultures and values of the people you are working with. Take the time to examine your own prejudices, as well as the racism, classism, ageism and heterosexism of "society at large." Ask for help, forgiveness and understanding. Make mistakes and learn from them. Know when to take things personally and when to let things roll off.

Some Things to Address Before You Begin Your Project



How do you, as a group, want to structure your project?

Is there a director, leader or facilitator?

If so, what are their rights and responsibilities?

Does the group want to direct collectively?

Could there be several directors: one for movement, one for puppetry, one for logistics etc.?

Who has the final decision-making power?

Does the director help realize everyone's visions and ideas, or make decisions based on their own artistic opinion?

One possibility would be to create a collective structure, in which every one is involved in all decisions being made. Another would be to define clear roles, responsibilities and areas of decision-making and still work in a non-hierarchical process. Projects could be visioned by a large group of people and then be organized or carried out by a smaller group; or there could be projects within the projects, in which one or more people take charge of a specific event or action that the whole group is participating in. You could have auditions to decide who is involved, or be open to anyone who wants to participate. You can make separate times for group processing, or incorporate this into regular meeting times.

There are limitless possibilities and resources available to help you figure out the details of how to run your meetings, make decisions and create a long term vision (see the sections on "Consensus Decision-Making" and "Puppet Resources"). However the group chooses to work, everyone involved should be clear about the different roles and responsibilities. There should be a clear process for feedback and communication and all should feel empowered and respected, whether they are directing or being directed.

What are the goals of the project, for the group and individually?

Is the purpose to tell a story, gain visibility for a specific cause, make a statement, bring people together or all of the above?

Everyone will have their own personal goals for the project which might be very different, but as a group there should be general agreement on why the project is happening.

What do you, as an individual, want out of the project?

Are you willing to work with people who work at a different pace than you? who have different artistic styles? who have little or no experience in areas where you have a lot of experience?

Do you want to work in a diverse group of people?

How much control do you need?

How important is the outcome to you?

How much time do you have?

How much responsibility do you want to take on?

Be honest about what you need at the time of the project. For most people, there is a big difference between process and product. Some people are involved in a project for the experience, learning, fun or challenge. It might not be as important to them how the final product looks. They might not even choose to finish the project. Others are more concerned with creating a polished product. They might not care how they get to the end, just so long as they get there. Some people are trying to get a point across, some people are just making something beautiful and some people are more invested in what other people think about the project (critics, granters etc.). Seek out the values and feelings of your fellow workers at the time of the project. People change, evolve and have different needs and limitations and desires at different times of their life

How do you communicate within the group?

To avoid offending any one, ask your co-workers if they want feedback, assistance or advice before offering it. Some people want help and can't ask, some people don't want any feedback and some people don't care. Let people make their own mistakes, invent new technology and try their own ideas. Offer your assistance and ideas in a way that does not assume superiority, but instead opens channels for all involved to learn. It is equally important to respect and learn from the experience of those who have gone before you as it is to be able to make your own explorations and discoveries.



"Sprout"

What are people's responsibilities and privileges?
 Who are they accountable to?
 What happens when some people consistently take on more work than other people?
 Do they want to? do they feel they have to? do they think that no one else would do it if they don't?
 Does this give them more decision-making power?
 What keeps others from taking on more responsibility?
 What is the level of commitment of the different people involved in the project?
 Does a higher level of commitment mean more responsibility or decision-making power?

In general, the more responsibility you take on, the more control you have, simply by the fact that you are doing the work. This is an important issue in a collective working process. I have seen many examples where unequal levels of responsibility in the group has spiraled into a situation where every one involved feels badly. Taken to the extreme, the people who are doing the most work feel unappreciated, overwhelmed and resentful; people doing less work feel intimidated, undermined, and unappreciated. If you have a drastically different level of investment or responsibility, either more or less than the majority of others involved, maybe reconsider why you want to be involved in this project, or seek the means to balance out this inequity.



Giant shadow puppets from "The Story of Stories" 1998

Some people need more encouragement, and others need to know when to slow down. Acknowledge what kind of person you are and try to take responsibility for your habits. If you want to be more involved but feel insecure or unsure what to do, try asking for more direction. Let it be known that you welcome suggestions of what needs to be done or how to do something. If you have a habit of doing more than you feel good about, try asking for help with slowing down, delegating responsibility, or even being less invested. Taking a step back may be just the invitation someone else has been waiting for.

Why do some people have less time and energy to put into a project?
 Do they want to be putting in more but can't?
 Do they have a full time job? children or a family? health issues? school? less confidence in their skills and abilities?

There are ways that the group can support these people so that they can be involved to the capacity that they desire. They can, for example, provide child care, raise money for people with less resources and/or rotate rehearsals and meetings to meet all people's needs. Perhaps addressing some of these issues can help even things out.

...

A creative project should be a fulfilling and enriching part of your life. It should not feel like a chore or responsibility (for the most part!). Monitor yourself and others for burnout, helping people keep a healthy balance between other parts of their lives and the project being worked on.

The point here is to COMMUNICATE, LISTEN and SPEAK. Clarity and honesty are a good bottom line. You do not have to agree, just so long as you know why you are disagreeing. A project can meet many people's needs and visions. Know your limits, and go beyond them. Know your habits, and break them. If you talk a lot, learn to be quiet. If you are quiet, learn to speak. Know when you can't bend or how much you can compromise. Learn how to support other people in getting what they need, and how to ask for support yourself. Community theatre is about paying attention to the community as well as the theatre. Folk art means it's about the folks as well as the art. The beauty of this kind of theatre and art comes from the strength, vision and heart of the folks who are making it.

consensus decision-making

by David Solnit, Art & Revolution Street Theatre Collective



Consensus is a way of making decisions in a group by the mutual consent of all participants, rather than by majority vote. The goal is to reach democratic decisions that everyone can live with. Using consensus, the group takes no action that is not consented to by all members. This doesn't mean that everyone is always in perfect agreement, but that the decision doesn't violate anyone's principles, and that those who disagree don't disagree enough to stop the group from taking action. Good use of the consensus process produces intelligent and creative decisions by incorporating the best thinking of everyone involved. Everyone then has an interest in implementing a group decision because all have participated in its formation. Consensus, used properly, relies on synthesis and cooperation for reaching group unity.

CONSENSUS PROCESS

The facilitator should listen and synthesize, seeing each item through to conclusion.

1. Gather information and ideas.
2. Discuss options.
3. Ask for proposals.
4. For each proposal separately, ask for clarifying questions.
5. Ask for concerns, reservations, objections and amendments.
6. Restate the (modified) proposal clearly and exactly.
7. Check for consensus. Do all agree? If not, go back to step #3. If so, congratulate yourself and repeat what you have agreed upon one more time.
8. Record and implement the decision. Designate tasks and responsibilities associated with the decision.



"Community Needs over Corporate Greed" action after the 1st official A & R training weekend

on the next person to speak; breaking into discussion groups which report back to the larger group; delegating research or decision-making to a smaller group.

OPTIONS IF YOU DON'T AGREE

- Non-support: "I don't see the need for this, but I'll go along."
- Reservations: "I think this may be a mistake, but I can live with it."
- Standing aside: "I personally can't agree to this, but I won't stop others from doing it."
- Blocking: "I can't support this or allow the group to support it. It's *immoral*."
- Withdrawing from the group: "I feel that this disagreement shows that there is no longer a basis of cooperation between this group and me."
- Fall Backs: The group doesn't change what it has agreed on previously or take a new course of action until there is agreement. If a new consensus can't be reached, the group can "fall back" to the last consensus agreement. Falling back guarantees that the group will be able to act together even when it cannot reach a new agreement.

ROLES IN CONSENSUS PROCESS

The **facilitator** helps the group move through the agenda by taking the group step by step through the consensus process, keeping the group focused on the topic at hand. S/he calls on members of the group in turn, leaves time for those to speak who have not yet spoken and works with the group and the timekeeper to set an appropriate amount of time for each issue. Facilitators should not use their role to influence decisions and should step down if they are invested in a decision.

The **vibeswatcher** watches the emotional state of the group and individuals within the group. S/he might make comments or suggestions on how the process might run more smoothly with these feelings in consideration.

The **timekeeper** keeps the group on track by watching the time, giving half-way warnings.

The **notetaker** takes notes on key points of discussions and notes the decisions made by the group.

Note: In creative projects, you may want to work with consensus for some parts of your process and not for others. For example, you may use consensus to decide the message and key images for your project, but leave design and aesthetic decisions up to the individual artist; or you might want to make all organizational decisions by consensus and leave creative decisions to a director. Whatever you choose, do try to state your process clearly and simply, so that all involved know what they are agreeing to.



The Brainstorm & Design Process

for image based actions, processions & street theatre



Over the years, Wise Fool has developed a brainstorm process to involve large groups of people in generating effective visual metaphors for issue-oriented street theatre actions. The process, as outlined here, assumes that you have already chosen your overall theme, designated by the event or action you are working towards. If you are starting from scratch, use the brainstorm process as outlined in the section on visual metaphors to find your theme, then return to the beginning.

Our brainstorm process is a two part process. First, you will identify your abstract ideas: "I want to say something about freedom and justice." Then you develop images to communicate these ideas visually: "walls coming down and birds flying out," "a group of people deconstructing a corporate tower." Although our culture is visually dominant, most people are not used to thinking in images. This skill can be practiced with the following exercise.

Visual Metaphor Practice Exercise:

As a group, make a list of issues or concepts you care about, and then pick any one. Close your eyes. Look for the pictures that come to you when you think about the issue. Actively visualize images that describe the issue. Each person then shares one or two of the images they came up with with the group. You will be amazed at the variety of "visual solutions" and all the different ways that people think and create.

I. PREPARATION

1. Put two large sheets of butcher paper or newsprint on the wall. Have several markers ready.
2. Assign a facilitator to call on people and a transcriber to write down your ideas.
3. Split up the time for each part of the process and assign a timekeeper.

II. THEME & CONTENT

This part of the process is about concepts and ideas.

1. Introduce the Theme

Start with fact-sharing about the issue, including the history, recent background and present situation. If there are differences of opinion about the facts, hear out all sides. This may be a rich place to develop your piece from. If you don't know much about the issue, use the library and the web to get information.

2. Explore the Issue

Explore different aspects, feelings and perspectives on the issue in a brainstorm or go-around (in a brainstorm people speak at random, in a go-around each person is given time to say what is significant to them about the issue). List the different ideas on your first sheet of paper.

In a recent brainstorm with youth on violence some of the topics that came up were cycles of family violence, the need for education, what it's like growing up with violence, the connection between violence and power, the contradiction of state-supported violence, the "right to bear arms." Sometimes during this process, images and ideas for theatre arise automatically. List these ideas on your second sheet of paper as they come up so as not to lose them. Conversely, once you get into brainstorming images, people may come up with more aspects to the theme. These can be added to this initial list at any time.

3. Focus the Scope of the Project

If your project is broad enough to address all of the themes generated, go on to Visual Metaphors. If you want to narrow the themes down, read the list aloud from the beginning. Then get a show of hands to see which areas are most compelling or ask the group to speak at random about which ideas are most compelling, and why. At this point, you probably don't need to make a decision. As you move into the creative part of the process, certain themes will show up most strongly. These are usually the themes that people in the group care about most or that best lend themselves to visual imagery. Either way, they will be the themes that people are most excited about and invested in.



"Flat Cops" Art & Revolution at Headwaters Forest, October 1997

III. VISUAL METAPHORS

This part of the process is about visioning imagery and theatre that communicates your theme to an audience. In order to do this, you must be thinking visually rather than conceptually. If the group is new to this sort of thing, grease the wheels by sharing some of the more effective street theatre and puppet images you have each seen. Here are a few from the Wise Fool portfolio:

- A 20-foot-tall headless corporate tower puppet with puppet strings on its hands that operate opposing political candidates. The whole contraption is pulled by people dressed as sweatshop workers. At the end of the procession, the workers tear down the corporate walls and replace them with all the things a community needs.

- In a piece on living with AIDS, two gigantic puppets reach across a park to embrace. When one puppet is labeled “positive,” its arms lengthen towards the embrace as the other puppet shrinks back.

- Another street theatre piece, “Human Needs over Corporate Greed,” ends in silence as the entire cast of 100 people thumps out a heartbeat on their chests.

1. Open Brainstorm, Anything Goes

With a big piece of paper and the ideas fresh in your minds, the group calls out images and theatrical ideas that portray the issues. Each and every idea, no matter how big or small, is jotted down. Don’t think practically or logistically at this point. It should not be a dialogue unless people are building on an idea that has just been suggested. The facilitator should ward off comments like “no, that wouldn’t work” or “that’s so cliché!” Comments such as “yes, and the corporate monster should have dollar bill signs in its eyes!” are fine.

The brainstorm may start slowly at first. As people’s minds get warmed up to this kind of thinking, the ideas will start to ping-pong off of each other. Ideas get elaborated upon; connections evolve. The maximum length of time for this process should be about 45 minutes. You could also choose to brainstorm on several narrow themes for 5 -10 minutes each. Some people are more shy than others about speaking up in a group, but everyone has great ideas. So be sure to leave a few minutes at the end to solicit ideas from people who have not yet spoken.

If you get stuck during the brainstorm process:

- Review your initial list of themes and topics relating to the issue.
- Check to see that you are thinking visually, rather than conceptually.
- Stop for a minute and actively visualize.
- Remember things that others have done that inspire you and adapt them to the present theme.
- Take a break to do some research—look for information on the issue and at books on art and theatre for possible starting points.

2. Honing In

a) Read through all the ideas generated and give yourselves a round of applause.

b) Ask people to build on the ideas already generated or to identify connections, ways the images can be merged or linked.

b) See which ideas are the strongest by a show of hands or a general query to the group. The things that will read best to the general public are also those which have the strongest appeal to the group. An effective visual metaphor will register with a click of recognition when we imagine it in our minds. We *know* what is effective. Out of all the ideas generated there will usually be 3 or 4 that a large part of the group is excited about.

3. Storyboard

For a more tightly scripted procession or theatre sequence, it is most practical to work in a small group to script and refine your piece. If you want to script and your group is small, continue here. If you want to script and your group is large, delegate a scripting core of no more than 6 people to create the script and storyboard. If script or sequence is not important to your piece, go on to “Splitting into Work Groups.”

a) As the scripting core, look for connections between the images. Look for overlap and redundancy of content. Streamline the piece, picking those images that are strongest and simplest to construct, while remaining true to the work already done by the group. It is your job to develop the overall vision, thinking thematically and logistically, while leaving plenty of room for creativity and empowerment. Include all the major ideas that the group was excited about. Create opportunities for people to work alone or in groups.

b) Create a sequence of images that supports the overall theme. You might develop a way for the images to fit together into a story, create a sequence based on time, or respond to the different environments that you pass through. If there are many parts to the script, write them out on index cards or small pieces of paper to shuffle them around and try different orders.

c) Address key logistical elements. What are the strengths and limitations of the site? Who is your audience, and how will they be situated in relation to you (seated in the round, frontally, passersby, antagonistic)? Will you travel and how will this happen? Is the site appropriate for spoken word (remember that only very strong voices can be heard well outside, and even then, only with little conflicting street noise)? For more information on

logistical concerns see "Tips & Tricks" p.63.

d) Create a storyboard with pictures and words. It can be large to hang on the wall (useful for explaining the project in large groups and workshops), or small for easy photocopying. We often make both and use the smaller one as a script when we go into big community rehearsals.

IV. GETTING STARTED

1. Split Into Work Groups

Let's say your event is a parade, demonstration or procession that allows for a number of related but distinct images. After the brainstorm, let each person say briefly which image they want to work on, then get into groups of 3-5 people based on interest. If any one group is too big, break the image into smaller components, ask who is willing to move to another group or just go for it: that's going to be a fantastic image! If an individual or small group wants to work on a complex image, ask for volunteers to join in or find a way to simplify the image.

In another scenario, the scripting core has just finished the storyboard and comes back to show it to the group. Depending on the group, you may want to get feedback and go into another round of scripting before splitting up. If not, split into groups by asking for volunteers for the various images. "OK, who wants to work on the toxic waste monster?" Designate a "bottom line" puppeteer for each central image. This person ropes people in as they arrive at the workshop, calls on friends and works their butt off to get the image done.

2. Develop & Design

Once you are in building groups, you get down to the nitty gritty of designing the image and making it work. Images change and evolve through the construction process, which is exciting, but you might want to think about a few things before getting started:

Who is your audience? What do you want to communicate to them? How would you like them to feel when they see your piece (receptive, disgusted, elated, hopeful, put off)? Think about someone seeing your image for the first time, is the image clear? How will people *know* what you are trying to communicate? What are the gaps? Say, for example, you want to raise a 20-foot puppet that represents hope. How will people know what the puppet represents? Solutions: hang a sign around its neck that says "HOPE"; have four people come out holding cards that spell out H-O-P-E; sing a song about hope while it is raised; make a statement about hope, or as we did, run a tape of inter-

views of people talking about hope.

If you are not sure, get feedback from someone not involved in the project. What does the puppet need to do? Will it need to be carried for a long time? Make it light. Does it need to be transported? Make it disassemble. Does it have a particular gesture, facial expression or movement? Design your puppet with these things in mind.

TIPS & GUIDELINES

1. Don't throw away the good work you did brainstorming. Start where you left off.
2. Look at your resources (building materials) before designing the puppet.
3. Design the image for the amount of time you have. Streamline and simplify.
4. Know who your audience is, and if you can't know, design for the unexpected.
5. Don't assume the audience knows *anything* about the issue or your perspective.
6. Offer ways to engage and dialogue with the public, even if your message is antagonistic to their beliefs.
7. Try to offer solutions, rather than just portraying the problem.
8. Don't get stuck in the idea realm, especially if you have a limited amount of time. The details of the images often change as you build. Identify major concerns and **START BUILDING!**



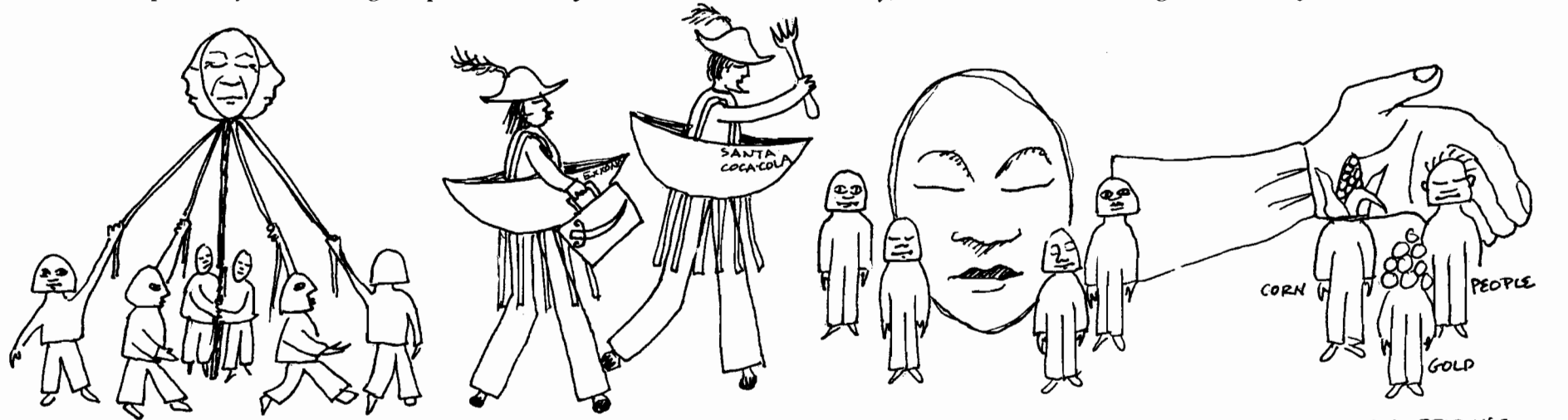
Gaia & Nuclear Dragon Puppets. Made for Nevada Test Site Action, 1990

SUMMARY OUTLINE

- I. Preparation
- II. Theme & Content
 1. Introduce theme: past & present
 2. Explore aspects of the theme
 3. Focus the theme
- III. Visual Metaphors
 1. Open brainstorm, anything goes
 2. Review list
 3. Develop ideas & read for group interest
 4. Create a storyboard
- IV. Getting Started
 1. Split into workgroups
 2. Develop, design & start building!

Rise Up! Wake Up! Stand Up! 1992

Sample Storyboard. Original piece created for the San Francisco Chasky, a street event celebrating 500 Years of Resistance



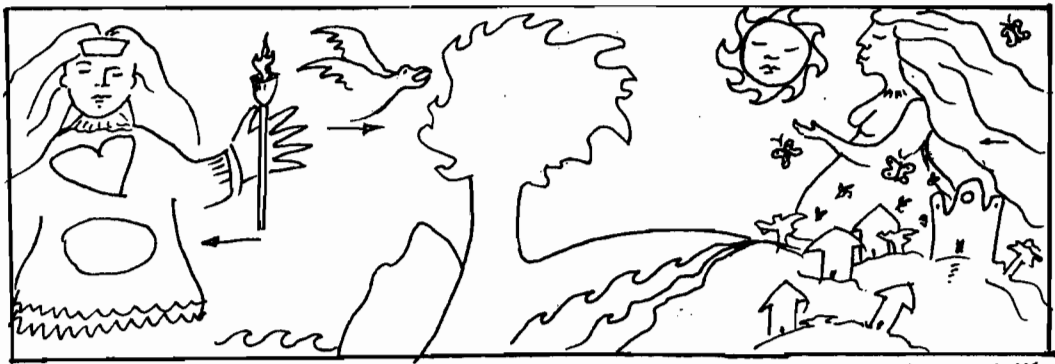
THE PEOPLE DANCE AROUND WORLD POLE — STILTWALKING CONQ VISTADORS — FACE + HAND OF THE PEOPLE — THE PEOPLE MAKE OFFERINGS



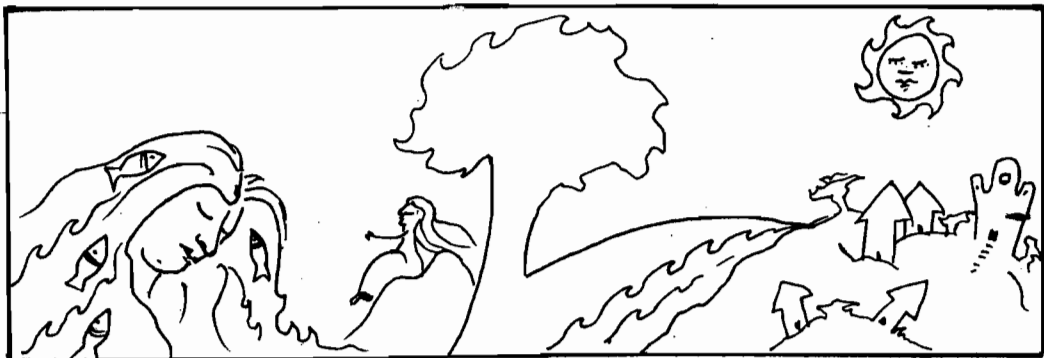
CHURCH → SKELETONS + TRILOGY OF PRIEST, TAXMAN + MILITARY — CHAINING THE HAND ANNIHILATION OF THE PEOPLE — THE PEOPLE RISE UP + RESIST — THE ANCESTORS RETURN

The People (in commoner head masks, wearing red, yellow, black or white) dance around the World Pole (representing the four directions, the four stages of life and the four tribes). Conquistador-businessmen arrive shouting "Land Ho!" The People leave the World Pole and raise the giant Head and Hand. As gifts, they offer the spirit of corn, gold and people (masked characters). Conquistadors take the masks, leaving the spirits behind. They whistle for the churches. Churches enter. Three of the People are taken into the churches and transformed into henchmen for the conquerors: a priest, a tax man and a soldier (representing the trilogy of church, state and military). They shout "give us your souls...money...lives!" Cloaks are ripped away to reveal skeletons. The People run and hide near the giant Head and Hand. Henchmen chain hand and conquistadors drag it away. People, World Pole and Head collapse to the ground. Henchmen collect commoner masks in plastic garbage bags and exit with skeletons laughing. Kids arrive with totems and sing a chant of resurrection. The People stand one by one calling out the names of resisters and resistance movements. Black, Red, Yellow and White Flying Ancestor puppets fly down the hill and lead a procession into the streets.

Storyboard for "Lucia Zenteno (The Woman Who Outshone the Sun)"
From the Wise Fool shadow puppet play *The Story of Stories*
drawings by Amy Christian



LUCIA ARRIVES



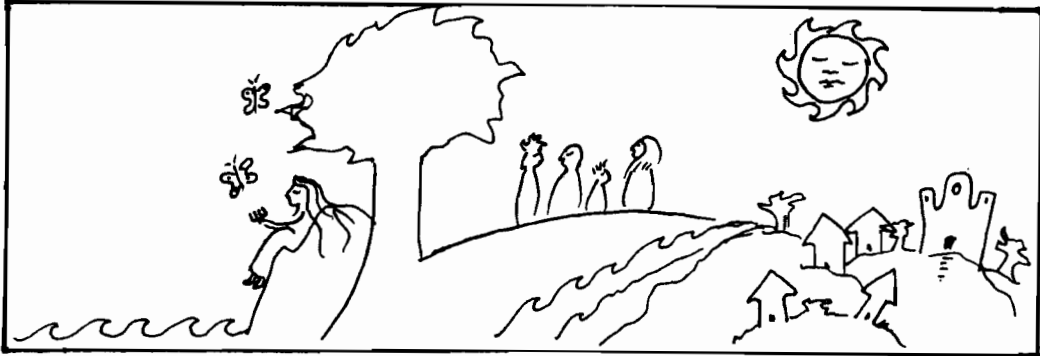
THE RIVER FALLS IN LOVE

FROM THE STORY:

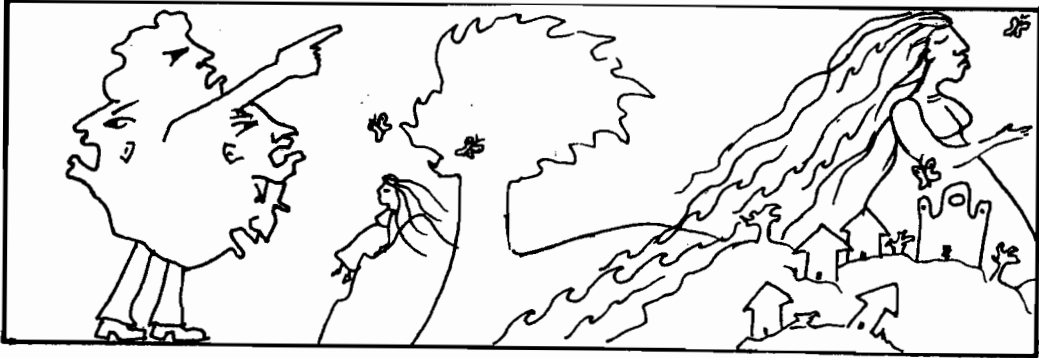
"The day Lucia Zenteno arrived, everyone in the village was astonished. She was a woman of no origin who brought thousands of butterflies and infinite flowers. Lucia Zenteno walked softly with dignity, behind her long unbraided hair.

"Nothing shone brightly as Lucia Zenteno. As she entered the village day became dark. Some people said she outshone the sun, others said her hair blocked out the light.....The river fell in love with Lucia Zenteno, its otters and fish gone crazy, its torrent growling with pleasure.

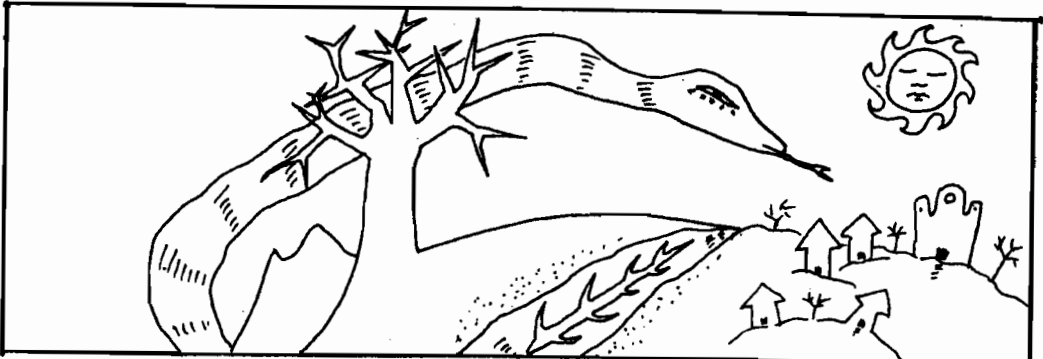
"The voice of Lucia speaks, 'That one day you will learn from the river, who gives water to all who thirst.'"



THE VILLAGERS FEAR HER.



LUCIA IS BANISHED & THE RIVER FOLLOWS HER.



THE RIVER IS AN EMPTY SNAKE OF SAND.



LUCIA WATCHES OVER THE DRY TOWN.

THEATRE GAMES FOR EVERYONE

Whether you will be building puppets, operating puppets or creating movement-based street theatre, warming up and playing theatre games can be integral to creating strong bonds and a sense of community in your group. Here is a short list of games and warm-ups to get you started. Each game strengthens a particular aspect of the individual or group voice. As you introduce these, people will remember other favorites or make up variations. We are indebted to the brilliant minds of directors Augusto Boal and Keith Johnstone; many of these games come to us directly and indirectly through their genius. See our radical theatre bibliography (p.94) for their books.

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

The Name Game

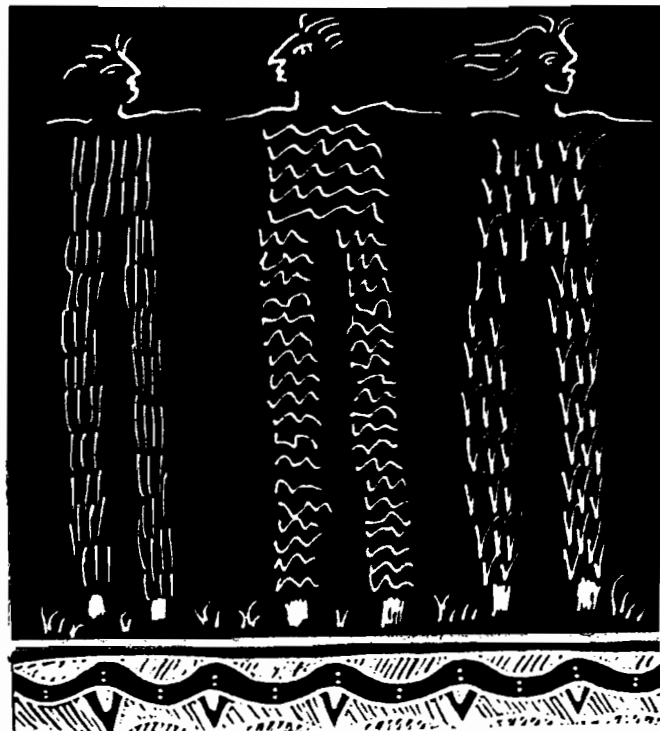
Standing in a circle, each person, one at a time, says their name and makes a gesture. The group replies by repeating the name and doing the gesture in unison. This continues as call and response around the circle. The name and gesture can be an expression of how you are feeling at the moment, something you want to express about who you are, or it can just be as wild and silly as possible. Everyone remembers their gesture. On the second round, go for a faster call and response. Third time around, everybody does the names and gestures in unison, linking the movement together, so it becomes a dance. Finally, leave the names out and just do the dance (series of gestures). Now, for a challenge, have everyone move to a different place in the circle and see how the dance changes!

Bombs & Shields

Everyone walks around the room. Silently, each person picks someone as their "bomb" and someone else as their "shield." At a cue from the facilitator, everyone attempts to keep their shield person between them and their bomb. Watch what happens! Then have them trade: their bomb becomes their shield and their shield becomes their bomb.

Person-to-Person

Get into pairs to start, leaving one person out to act as the caller. The caller calls instructions such as "nose to shin," "ear to bellybutton," etc. and the pairs try to execute the directions. The first person to fall over shouts "person-to-person!" Everyone runs to get another partner, including the caller. Whoever is left without a partner after regrouping is the new caller.



Pat Downs

A great ice breaker and a great sensation tool! In pairs, each person takes a couple of minutes to pat and slap down their partner's entire body, starting at the head, and slapping down the entire body, including arms, legs, butt and feet, little pats on the face etc. Try different speeds and intensities. Then lightly brush down the entire body, and switch roles.

Blind Guessing Game

Another great ice-breaker. Works best with 10 or more people. Split the group in half evenly, and have them stand across the room from each other, facing each other. Group 1 closes their eyes, and the people from group 2 mix themselves up. Each of them then stands directly in front of someone from group 1. Group 1, with their eyes closed, touches the faces of the people in front of them and tries to guess who it is! After switching roles, you can go on to several variations: trying to guess just by touching the hands or the feet.

TRUST GAMES

Car & Driver

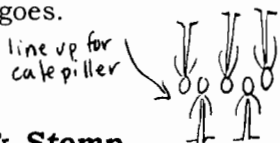
A trust exercise. In pairs, one person is the "driver", the other is the "car." The car closes their eyes. The driver taps them on the back to go forward, on either shoulder to turn right or left and on the head to stop. Be sure each partner gets a turn at each role. Variation #1: Have the person follow their partners voice with their eyes closed. Variation #2: Have the driver use their hands to lead the person around with eyes closed (no talking!), seeing how much they can guide them--how fast, how slow, can they get them to go down to the ground, to jump, leap or spin? Variation #3: Same as the last, only using any body part except the hands to guide. Be careful!

Catch a Falling Star

In groups of three taking turns, have one person stand in the middle, eyes closed. They can fall any direction and the other two must catch them! If you are the person falling, help your partners by leaning slowly in the direction you are going to fall, before falling. This is a game of collaboration and communication, so don't try to trick your partners, or you may end up on the floor! Other trust falls can be done by standing on someone's shoulders, on a table or a stool. Fall backwards or forwards into a group of 6 or more people standing in rows to either side of where you will fall.

Caterpillar

Works best in a group of 15 or more. People lie in a line on the floor, with their shoulders next to each other, alternating the direction of their feet. They put their arms up. The person at the very end gets up and lies down carefully on the arms of the first people in the line. They are then passed down the line by many hands. At the end they take their place on the floor and the next person goes.



Clap & Stomp

Standing in a circle, the first person turns to the person next to them. Getting eye contact, they clap once in unison. The second person turns to the third, getting eye contact and clapping once in unison, and so on around the circle. The idea is to get a good rhythm going and then speed it up. You can also try it with stomping and then with the clap and stomp together.

Mirror Games

Everyone has done mirror games, but these variations take the game a bit further. With each variation give each partner a chance to lead, then let them try without a specified leader. Set up in pairs facing along a center line. It is helpful to mark the line with a rope. The pairs start mirroring each other, standing in place. Then they can add moving forward and back within their own plane. Be sure they maintain the same distance from the center line. Next they may move anywhere in the room, maintaining their relationship to the center line at all times. Then add contact with the other partners. Finally (but slowly!) they can add sound or speech. The goal is to really stay together! Work slowly or repetitively, building speed as you get to know your partner.

Unison Movement/Amoebae

Start in pairs with one person leading. The score is to run, walk or stand still. The partners stay together. They can also try without a specified leader. Then have each pair join another group and do the same exercise (with and without specified leader) in quartets. Next invite them to explore the room together, always in unison. You can also keep adding the groups together until you have one big clump moving together through the space. This leads nicely into a sort of amoebae exercise, where everyone closes their eyes and imagines they are one organism. They can reach out and touch, pinch or stroke other parts of their "body," move together with eyes closed, or move from standing to sitting and back to standing as one organism.



BUILDING GROUP MIND

BUILDING PHYSICAL & VOCAL SKILLS

Pass the Object

Start with any object: a shoe, a shirt or a stick, for example. Passing the object around the circle, each person "transforms" it, using mime and gesture to show what it is without words. They continue until someone shouts out what the object is. The first transformations may be obvious, such as the shoe becoming a banana or hairbrush, but encourage people to go further and further out with their imagination.

Pass the Gesture

Standing in a circle, one person comes into the center, moving with a repetitive gesture and/or sound. They then stand in front of another person in the circle, continuing the gesture so that this person can copy it exactly. This person takes the movement and goes into the circle, slowly transforming it into their own movement or gesture. They then approach someone to pass off the gesture and so on.

Transform & Intensify

The goal of this game is to practice clarity of movement and body shape. The freezes should be sharp and the transitions simple and clean without a lot of excess movement. People walk casually through the room. A caller calls out a quality, object or concept (winter, anger, liberty, President Clinton, still life--it can be anything at all). Everyone freezes, taking a shape that represents what was called. The caller then calls "intensify" and everyone intensifies the poses. The caller may also call "transform" and everyone moves directly into an opposing dynamic pose. Finally, the caller calls "move" and people begin to walk until the next phrase is called out.

Slow Motion Race

Have a race where the slowest person wins. See how slowly and intentionally you can move your body parts.

Least Possible Contact Dance

Have a dance first alone and then in pairs where you try to have the least possible contact with the ground. In pairs you can choose to have one person just act as support person for the other's "least possible contact."

Vocal Warm-Ups

Voice training is too extensive to go into here, but if your group will be speaking, especially in the street, it is good to warm up the voice. Some simple exercises: A tone sliding from low to high and high to low; stretching and "squinching" the face; sticking out the tongue and making chewing motions; rapidfire speaking of consonants; long gliding through the vowels; long tones at different levels (high, low, soft, loud) lasting the length of one breath; saying a nursery rhyme together with exaggerated enunciation, then speeding it up; tongue-twisters; singing a folk song.

PREPARING THE MIND

As performers on the street and stage, and especially as improvisers it is important that the mind is awake and alert. Here are a few games to jump-start your brain.

Yes, and...

Everyone in pairs or one pair in front of the rest of the group. The first person starts a story. An easy place to start is by describing a person or a place. "I met a woman with green hair and big purple eyes..." The next person takes up the story with "Yes, and..." "Yes, and she had 19 dogs with little pink sweaters..." They volley back and forth saying "Yes, and..." until one person "blocks" (negates part of the story) or the story naturally comes to an end.

Exquisite Corpse

Here are a few of the many variations of this additive game. Variation 1: Sit in a circle and tell a story one word at a time around the circle. Each person gets one word. Say the first word that comes to you and watch the story develop. Variation 2: The same, but each person gets a sentence or two before passing to the next person. Variation 3: In small groups, people tell each other stories from their lives on a particular subject (my favorite Halloween, the first time I saw a giant puppet, or something else in this vein). When it is time to go around the circle to tell a collective story on that topic, each person picks a phrase from their story, or from the story of someone in their small group.

You

Standing in a circle, one person starts by pointing at another and saying "You!" That person puts their hand on their head to show they have been chosen. The second person then chooses the third person by pointing at them and saying "You!" This continues until everyone has been chosen (the first person must also be the last person). Now that you have established an order, practice send the "you" around, always pointing at the same person when the "you" comes back to you. Remembering that sequence, create a second sequence calling out items from a category, rather than "you." In the category of vegetables, for example, the first person might point to the next and say "Carrot!" then that person points to another across the circle and says "Beet" until each person has been chosen and an order is established. Practice this second pattern until you feel you have it. Now try both patterns ("you" and vegetables) at the same time. If you get good at this one, try adding a third category.

Bizz Buzz

This well-known children's game is a great wake-up exercise. Counting off from 1 in a circle, every time you come to a 3 or a multiple of 3 say "bizz." anytime you come to a number that is both a multiple and has a three in it, or has two 3s in it say "bizz bizz." 9 and 33 would both be "bizz bizz" numbers. So, for example, the counting off starts: "One, two, bizz, four, five, bizz, seven, eight, bizz bizz, etc." When you get good at this, add in seven and multiples of seven as "buzz" and "buzz buzz."

BUILDING IMPROV, CHARACTER & STORYTELLING SKILLS

Copy the Walk

This game builds noticing skills and teaches us to use what we see around us as a starting point for building characters. People get into pairs and begin walking together, A in front of B. A tries to walk as naturally as possible. B observes A carefully, looking at how they hold their body, the rhythm and pace of their walk and so forth. B then starts to try to copy the walk exactly. When they feel they have it, they tell A, and A drops out to watch. After a moment, B begins to intensify and exaggerate one aspect of the walk. If you like, you can then continue on to create a character from that walk before switching places. Be sure to give people a chance to share with their partners and the group what the experience was like for them, what they learned about themselves or others.

Newspaper Reading Game

Each person is given a piece of newspaper and slip of paper which designates a vocal style such as librarian reading a fairy tale, British news announcer, auctioneer, sports announcer, radio drama, rock star, etc. Have fun coming up with a diverse range of styles. Everyone takes a few minutes to practice reading a random clip of their newspaper in that style. The goal is to bring across the style in spite of the non-related content of the newspaper. Each person then has a moment to present what they have come up with to the rest, who guess at the style.

Characters

Start by having people walk around the room, exaggerating particular qualities in their walk or in the way they hold their bodies (shoulders high, chest out, shoulders caved, knock-kneed etc.). Allow people to feel what type of character or quality comes out of each posture. Then let people walk around trying several postures on their own until they find a character. As they roam, the caller may ask them to think about their characters: what is his/her name?, where does s/he live? what is s/he doing today? what kind of mood is s/he in? how old is s/he? etc. Then let them experiment with finding a voice for that character--not yet interacting with others, but building the voice by speaking to themselves. Have everyone freeze. Then the caller briefly interviews each character, or allows them to monologue. Try this several times, with different characters each time, then let the participants choose one of their characters. Give them a moment to solidify the character, then pair characters together and let them interact. Some basic things to watch for in the improvisation: Give attention to listening to each other and allowing the dialogue to unfold rather than speaking at the same time. Say "yes" to each other. This means that if the last person said, "What are you doing in St. Louis?" you respond with whatever you are doing in St. Louis, rather than saying--"No-we're in Florida at the beach."



Snapshots

Get people into groups of two or three. They work together to come up with a story with a beginning, a middle and an end which can be told in three to four "snapshots" or still pictures (tableaux). Give them 10 - 15 minutes to plan their story and come up with specific, concise tableaux. When it is time to show the stories, the audience closes their eyes at the beginning and between each snapshot. Afterwards, the audience guesses the story. This is an excellent way for people to learn how to create concise physical pictures to convey specific meanings. If their story wasn't clear the first time, people from the audience can give suggestions about what might work better, and the snapshots can be reworked for clarity.

The Stepping In Game

One of our favorites games. Two people begin an interaction, setting up very quickly who they are, what their relationship is and what they are doing. People in the audience watch the improv and look for physical shapes that suggest an entirely different relationship or situation. When they see a possibility, they call "freeze." They then step into the exact shape of one of the people on stage, replacing them, and initiate a completely new scenario. The idea is that no one scene goes on much longer than it takes to set up and establish what's going on before the next "freeze." For those people who have a difficult time seeing the new possibility, I encourage them to just say "freeze," step in and let their body suggest the new relationship once they are there. This is a quick, on your feet, physical exercise where you go through a whole series of situations and stories in a very short time. Have fun!


One Gesture Performance

This is an exercise that can be used to build stage presence. Each person spends a moment to choose a word and a gesture that goes with it. They practice it as a small "performance." Because it is such a small performance, they are instructed to perform it with great intention and passion, as if it were the greatest and perhaps only performance of their life. One at a time, either in a circle or on the playing area, each person performs their "piece." You must give great attention to the beginning and ending of your moment, because these comprise over half of the piece. Make sure you wait to begin until you have the audience's attention. Make eye contact! Hold the stage for a moment before stepping down--don't throw away that moment!

Masks

All of the character games above can be done with masks. Since full mask is traditionally performed in silence (it breaks the illusion to hear the muffled voice from behind the mask), this adds the additional challenge of being very clear in the use of the body. A few pointers about working with masks:

- Work with mirrors to start, so that people can get an idea how different body shapes and movements work with each mask.
- Begin by breaking down the postures: How is the head held? the shoulders? the chest and belly? the pelvis, legs and feet? the arms and hands?
- Generally speaking, with masks, more is less. Well-placed minimal movement will allow a mask to "live" more than an excess of movement. Try small movements of the head and shoulders with slow pans of the head.
- When working towards a presentation, remember to "cheat" the masks towards the audience. Only very few masks will work in profile. It is also impossible to know from inside the mask if the mask appears to be looking at the audience or the sky. Thus, an outside eye will be crucial for feedback about how to place the head and body for the best effect.




WISE FOOL PUPPET INTERVENTION
TOUCH & PRAYER

*A Public Honoring of Those Living with HIV/AIDS
an alchemical journey with giant puppets, stilt dancing,
masks, fire, poetry and song*

SATURDAYS & SUNDAYS at 7:30 PM

APRIL 23 AND 24	APRIL 30 AND MAY 1
DOLORES PARK	LAKE MERRIT PARK
GATHER AT 19TH AND DOLORES	GATHER AT BELVUE AND GRAND (NEAR FAIRYLAND)
SAN FRANCISCO	OAKLAND



ADDITIVE SCORES

Song-Making Score

Variation 1. Walk around the room, talking quietly and "automatically" to yourselves. If you are making a piece about a particular issue, talk about that. Otherwise, choose a topic at random. At a certain point, pick a phrase and repeat it to yourself, exploring the intonation and inflection. Then sit by yourself and sing the phrase until you find a tune you like. Then, in groups of four, each person sings their phrase to the others and teaches it to them. Next you work together to string the phrases together in an order that makes sense to you as a group. It is up to the group how much or how little they change the original phrases to fit together as a song.

Variation 2: Automatic writing. Everyone has a pencil and a pen. Pick one to three words, randomly or from your theme. Everyone writes them at the top of their page. Write in free association for about three minutes. Pass your page to someone else who underlines a few phrases that appeal to them. Pass the page again. The next person picks a phrase and sets it to a tune. Proceed as in Variation 1.

Variation 3: The same as in variation 2, but during the writing, people pass their pages to the left every 30 seconds or so.

Variation 4: Instead of using words, people start by sitting with a musical instrument or noisemaker and creating a musical phrase. Then, when they get in groups, rather than teaching their phrase (because people have different instruments, and probably some are not musicians) they work together to create three other "parts" that go with that phrase before stringing them together.

Choreography Score.

Variation 1. Each person in the room works by themselves to create a short movement sequence. It does not have to look like "dance." If people feel stuck because they are not dancers, tell them they can string *any* three movements together--like a hop, a sneeze and a shuffle. Get into pairs and teach each other the movement sequence, then link them and practice them together. Join another group of two and teach your movement sequences to each other. Link them and practice the sequence as a whole. Continue to join with other groups until the whole room has created a piece together.

Variation 2. One person starts by making a movement. Everybody does it and practices it in unison. At the end of the movement, the whole group freezes, and another person does a movement, starting from the last position of the first movement. The group learns the second movement, does the first and second movements in sequence, and then freezes. Then a third person links a third movement to the dance, and so on....

Variation 3. Once you have created your dance and everyone knows it, you can develop the choreography by: a) Working with canon. Everyone does the whole sequence, starting at different times. b) Stopping and starting. Everyone starts at the same time and does the dance in sequence, but they can stop and start whenever they want. The first person who reaches the end, ends the dance. c) Adding text or sound. d) Splitting up sections of the dance and moving them around.

Physical Theatre Scores

Variation 1: Music Machine. This is a common theatre game. One person starts by making a repetitive sound and movement. Then another joins, layering another rhythm and movement over the first. Each person joins until the whole group is linked in a group rhythm and movement. This game can be made more interesting if you demand that the different parts of the machine really fit together neatly. Be sure to use different levels (sitting standing, lying down), body parts and sound qualities. You can also intensify the game by giving the machine a certain theme such as "corporate death machine," "new age healing machine," or "house meeting machine."

Variation 2: Split your group in half, so that each group gets a chance to watch. One person takes a dynamic position on the stage and freezes. Then one by one each person in her group joins her taking a position in relation to what they already see in the picture. The last person to join starts a physical and verbal improvisation that defines and creates the scene. It is important that they let the group know where they are and what is happening. The entire group then snaps into action and improvises that scene.

