4. Communal Art-making and Conflict Transformation

Paolo J. Knill

PREAMBLE

The magic underworld as a communal creative play

They lived on Swiss territory on the German side of the Rhine during World War 2. The neighborhood was a mixture of German NSPD members working on the German "Reichsbahn" (Hitler's Railway) under the Swastika, and Swiss citizens partially organized underground, preparing for a possible guerilla activity in an occupation by Nazi Germany. The Swiss Army has given up on this undefendable small territory. The tension and anxiety were high, and neither side dared to act out the conflict, fearing a later retribution. The kids we will focus on were between 7 and 13 years old. As the oldest of them, I remember that the relationships between those kids under the swastika were ominous. Restrictions had not been explained to us, and when we had some fun together, it was "talked away" by parents. The confusion reached its peak when the bombardments by the Allied forces started. The humming silver flocks of bombers crossed the blue sky, suddenly planting "Silver Christmas Trees" in the blue, and each time shortly after the earth shook like an earthquake. We rejoiced and they panicked, until they hit us for the first time, still with almost no damage. From that moment on, strong air-raid alarm rules were put in effect, and more and more time was spent in the improvised air-raid shelters,

which every household had to build. In the public shelter, the kids were all huddling together wondering if we had been hit when the earth shook—or else just bored by the long waiting times and wondering how we could change this. A few of us, mainly under the leadership of my brother and myself, explored the fantasy of an underground world as a play space. Regardless of the political alliances of our parents, we started to construct furniture together, painting the walls and carpeting the ugly cellar floor of our private air-raid shelters. We assisted each other in building toys and selecting puppets or vehicles to go permanently into this underworld. After the first of the three devastating bombardments of our city and neighborhood, we had to spend more time in our "underworld" than above. When the alarm howled, we tried to arrange it so that we reached a shelter where we could all play out our stories. We had long-running stories with puppet protagonists, featuring ourselves in well-defined roles. Interestingly enough, the mothers did not interfere: they seemed to be relieved that the kids were taken care of, while they had to cope with gardening and civil service, maintaining the infrastructure of the city without husbands, who by that time they all were in the army. By 1944 our "Magic Underworld" was so fascinating that we spent more time playing together there than outside; most of our toys, pastels and papers joined us there. The kids of the two sides never enacted the political rift, even though we knew about the fate of the Reich and awaited the GIs with eagerness. Our great personal experience was our play in the magic underworld, and our sadness when it was over. My brother and I ended up having a good friendship with the German kids, and we went on using the password we invented to begin the play for many years more.

Communal Art-Making or Community Art

The term "community art" is a strange construct, considering that art cannot be thought of without communities. The word, coined by therapists and educators connected to the arts and creativity, stresses the "community" setting as something special and different from the usual one with individuals and groups. In the beginning, community art was done more or less in the tradition of "warm up exercises," to tune in or engage the audience. This happens with "scores" that are similar to folkloristic dancing, singing, or ethno-drumming, free dance and voice improvisation. This style of community art is still used for communities that are put together for a short period of time, like audiences or transient communities in gatherings such as conferences, educational settings, festivals, reunions and cruises.

I want to focus in this paper on "community art" that is commissioned for conflict transformation or rehabilitation after catastrophic events, and therefore is shaped according to certain criteria. This kind of community art has as its objective to strengthen the resilience of the community to establish and regain well-being. Resilience is understood as the ability to activate resources and mobilize coherence (Schiffer 2003, p.11)

Inasmuch as every act of art-making or creative play sets up an imaginary space which is distinct from the reality with its conflicts, restrictions and inevitabilities, art-making and play is, so to speak, still part of the same world. Therefore we distinguish the difference by calling it an "alternative experience of worlding". Although this experience also has constraints posed by the

artistic frame, the inevitable restrictions of material and the structures of the art discipline, these challenges can be overcome and act like openings to create a greater *range of play* beyond restrictions, even "beyond imagination" (Knill et al. 2005, p.81-88).

In the imaginary space of communal art-making, things are often surprising, unpredictable and unexpected; yet after they are completed they are accessible in their genuine logic. Things happen differently than in the disturbing reality. For instance, people communicate with those with whom they may have little contact or shy away from.

A participant might play a leading role by contributing a new turn in a dance, while this person may be from a group with little influence in the community. People will get opportunities to act, move and speak that they have not experienced with each other before. This difference expands the "range of play" of the dire straight situation, which in difficult times is experienced with distress.

There is usually something convincing and logical about the completion of a communal work of art, play or ritual. Therefore reflections about alternative experiences of worlding through art do not offend the necessary logical and argumentative reasoning about experiences within the community.

To guide a community into an alternative experience of worlding and later back into the reality of a difficult life must be part of the score of community art. A characteristic of all the "ins and outs" of the alternative experience are aspects of "decentering" ("intermodal decentering") and "range of play" (Knill et al. 2005, p.88-91).

- By "decentering" we name the move away from the restricted experience posed by conflict and crisis, which had resulted in rigid reasoning and stressful, often destructive acting, marking the pressure around the "dead end" situations in a conflict. Decentering is a move into the opening of the surprising-unpredictable-unexpected, provided by the artistic experience within the logic of imagination. A centering follows the decentering, guided by the facilitator, who relates the two in an effort to find ease. It is helpful to validate first the artistic work resulting from the decentering phase, and the achievement of that work, before experiences are compared and/or consequences discussed.

- By providing a "range of play," we contrast the situational restrictions experienced. The phenomenon of *play* is the "doing as if," the "open-endedness" in the timeless circularity in the here and now, that results in a freeing up from the pressure to achieve immediate solution under impossible circumstances.

> *Melinda Meyer, who worked with Bosnian refugees and also conducted a longitudinal study over 13 years, reports how in early interventions the decentering into playful bodily experiences brought a basic relief – whether through communal imitation of culturally specific movement patterns, like the dance-like picking of apples, and other theatrical play like imitating animals or making faces. This freeing-up led to further steps to regain the physical shaping capacity necessary for the repatriation process, including documentary filmmaking and testimony. (Meyer, M. 2007)*

Community Art a Decentering Method providing a Range of Play

The complexity of the imaginary space in community art presents itself as concrete and "thingly." During the shaping process material interventions are concrete and very explicitly placed "on the surface." These interventions can serve the purpose of grounding, bringing participants closer to the here and now of the alternative experience of worlding. We may suggest to "dancers" to use more space and listen to the music, or ask the "musicians" to add their voices to the instruments.

The "in and out" to and from the decentering experience and the reality posed by it is discernible through the here and now of the artistic work, its initiation, its process of becoming and its completion as a "thing." In its graspable presence it offers many options in helping to distinguish between the different realities. The distinction of stage, studio space, audience space and the habitual experience of worlding is concrete and explicitly based in the body and the senses.

The idea of widening the range of play by engaging the imagination is a common concept in the practice of conflict resolution. Conflicts are seen in these practices as situations that lack choices, giving participants a sense of being locked into the matter of conflict. Community art gives a community an opportunity to leave the zone of conflict, with an opening to options for new actions and thoughts.

Systems theory argues that an intervention simultaneously perturbs the structure of interaction and widens the range of play. Even though this challenge may evoke some uncertainty, it is necessary to create a surprising autopoetic process of transformation. When we use the arts as a mode of interaction, the impetus for discovery balances the fear of uncertainty if we provide an adequate motivating space. Communal art-making can be seen as a discipline of play, where the

probing of the participants is a kind of perturbation; self-organization happens within the range of play defined by the restrictions of the discipline and the frame (material, space, time, and means). The community art leader is a player in the system, who plays a game that is different from the troublesome situation of the community.

The limits that define the frame of an art discipline or play vary with respect to space, time, material and method of shaping. They belong to traditions of art-making in every culture. Therefore, interventions with respect to limits and frame can be easily accepted and understood if they are sensitive to those traditions. These interventions made before or during the process of play may possibly restrict the range of play, but usually they do not restrict the act of playing and its content. On the contrary, they make the playing less threatening. Furthermore, those interventions help to distinguish between the realities of the habitual and the alternative worlding, as this develops during the decentering.

The accomplishment of art-making is literally enabling, and it has the merit of beauty, eliciting the "Aha!" of an aesthetic response. Communal art making is thus also a learning experience, providing the individual opportunities for sociability, enabling and situational coping. The effect of this experience is cognitive and physical. We can observe it in the change of behavior, emotion, mood and tone of the participants. This coping process can also be seen as training, or as "exercise,", to help cope with the situational restrictions and individual frustrations in the training of professionals doing relief work. Within a cognitive frame of reference, the coping experience in the communal learning process of community art means confronting entrenched beliefs: "We are not able to accomplish anything," "We have too few resources" etc. But community art processes go beyond the level of solely cognitive argumentation.

- It is a rich exercise with repeated experiences of accomplishment.

  In a typical work-oriented practice of community art, a blues improvisation with a chorus is undertaken. With each repetition under a competent leader, participants get more and more excited, and get into the groove of it. It is a true repeated experience of accomplishment.

- It is a psychophysical concrete experience that allows emotional and cognitive reasoning.

  All artistic experiences are concrete, and close to the psyche in their emotional resonance. In the above example, the blues will eventually have an improvised text that links to this experience. Under expert leadership, the discourse between repetitions is cognitive, even though it is focused on the communal art-making.

- In addition, the communal artwork can *touch* or *move*. All the senses are engaged and

  therefore it *makes sense* in its beauty.

  Therefore the resulting work, e.g. the blues mentioned above, does not solely make sense in terms of the cognitive learning. It also makes sense in its beauty. It can be remembered as a touching, moving, regenerating, and nourishing experience – a kind of "soul food."

- It is also an experiential field of discovery that motivates curiosity. Discovery of this kind is

  one of the fundamental sensorimotor and cognitive learning experiences.

  The method of community art, in its improvisational characteristics, is built on a leadership that engages curiosity and motivates discovery. The discovery of the blues riff, the words that work, and the rhythm that makes the community get into a dance, has many fundamental sensorimotor steps that will be reflected later in cognitive learning.

In the traditional understanding of coping, exercise has a fundamental position. The practice of repetition in community art is additionally guided by an attentive, supportive attitude toward a sensory acuity and openness to an aesthetic response. This openness gives what is hidden a

chance to be met and to be utilized as resource. With these options come new perspectives,

fantasies, ideas, and imaginations for alternative ways to act or respond (Knill 2000, pp.9-14).

Communal art making as a contribution to the culture of communities

When we look how Western task-oriented communities try to release some of individual and

social stress, we can usually find two offerings designed for that purpose.

- Entertaining that is somehow distracting, or "airing out" events

- Opportunities for counseling and reflection

In the following section I will sketch the specific needs addressed in these two activities. Later I

will elucidate the understanding of community art as a necessary part of culture, bridging these

two isolated attempts at coping in everyday communal work. Community art then can be

understood as a cultural necessity that fosters innovative thought and action by mobilizing

resources and activating imagination across cultures.

Entertaining Events

Task-oriented communities like companies and institutions have traditionally used

entertaining events to ease the habitual hierarchy and protocol, and sometimes also to blur the

boundary between workplace and private life. Such events range from bowling and soccer games

to extended parties (New Year's, etc.) and company trips. These events are based in game-like

social traditions. Therefore, they offer the expectation of fun and distraction. They do not,

however, provide an opening to an imaginative space that has a potential for new alternative

experiences. The positive effect of such events in the life of a community should not be underestimated. What has proven to be lacking over and over again in these events is an opportunity for members of the community to reflect on their participation in their shared situation. To facilitate such reflection, in the second half of the last century companies and institutions hired consultants who have been trained in one of the group encounter or counseling techniques that became popular at that time. With their focus on "uncovering the pathological," they had little success in structural situations evoking crisis or conflict that needed more resourceful solution-focused methods.

Opportunities for Reflection

In the beginning, confrontational models that had been developed for therapeutic or encounter group settings, such as group dynamics, gestalt therapy and related styles, focused on conflicts and their root in the individual, personal biography. These confrontational models worked for groups oriented towards therapy, but they lowered the performance of the group in other tasks. Later, systems-oriented, person-centered, theme-centered and similar approaches have been favored because of their focus on the social, cultural and organizational aspect of coping in groups (Nellessen 1997, p.66-72).

Toward the end of the last century the systems-oriented approach prevailed, often modified with a resource and solution-focused method. These approaches support the activation of resources as well as aspects of resilience. Therefore, they strengthened the system's coping mechanisms necessary to fulfill its mission.

When we consider the size of communities it becomes evident that these methods of reflection are limited to well-organized small clusters, groups or teams within relatively stable communities. In addition, the sole focus on words makes the process lengthy and cumbersome, especially with foreign languages, having the taste of "more of the same" and creating more misunderstanding then there already is. This is especially true for big, not very well-organized communities in conflict. We need to recognize, however, that the format of the resource and solution-focused method of reflection in the tradition of systems theory can have great merits when we reflect on community art projects. This has to be considered when we organize feedback in smaller groups and report back to the full community.

Community Art as a Bridge

The need for a bridge

It was soon recognized in work with communities that entertainment and distraction with opportunities for reflection, isolated from each other, are not very helpful in the attempt to create innovative solutions and resourceful behavior. Tension in the difficult situation increases: the fun of the event is over, and often issues become more severe in the tense atmosphere outside of the event, which does not provide space to work for a transformation of the conflict.

Attempts at bridging

In an attempt to connect an experiential event with a reflective opportunity, it became fashionable in the business world to offer "new games," "outward-bound," extreme sports and similar activities combined with counseling, reflection and coaching. Soon, however, the limits of these activities became evident. Although these attempts truly presented an alternative

challenge, the outcome was never much of a surprise, and they were often out of cultural context. The game-like characteristics are often close to the problematic conflicting positions at hand. Even though games are different from everyday activity they have a predictable strategy for solutions. However, the complex characteristics of difficult situations around conflicts call for innovative strategies, rather than having to "win a game, without having a chance to invent it."

The bridge: community art

In contrast to games, each individual art project undertaken by a community needs an appropriate spatial and temporal frame, selected materials and envisioned directions of shaping. The act of creative forming in the arts includes innovative strategies and techniques of shaping, pursuing developments of the emerging, often surprising unforeseen product, and therefore necessitating a constant revision of the planned outcome. Each process becomes an innovative attempt to find the optimal response to a complex dynamic between resources, objectives, actions taken, and emerging patterns within a defined frame. This creates a feedback loop with shaping strategies, changing the structure of the material and the environment. All of this occurs in the frame of the discipline of artistic play, which includes the community as an audience, who witnesses and evaluates with feedback how the resulting artistic product works as a whole. The artistic product can be evaluated in various ways:

- It can be considered as "being on the way."

- It can be followed in its particular way.

- It is unique in its character and has a recognizable style.

- It contains surprises that belong to the sense-making logic of the work.

- Etc.

When we consider communal art-making in the context of decentering as explained above, we can recognize the parallels with the experience of a community. The complexity communities are confronted with in difficult times calls for innovative solutions that consider the dynamic interdependence of frame, material, structure, strategies, visions, emerging patterns, environmental patterns, and so on. The problems are unique in their characteristics and the way to solve them needs to be congruent to this uniqueness, although styles may be similar.

It is therefore conducive to use the artistic process rather than games as a decentering method, because it offers a complexity that games do not offer, unless we reinvent them each time and leave the envisioned emerging goals up to the process of completion. However, we would then need criteria for evaluation that most likely would also have aesthetic connotations, which would in essence be a kind of artistic process.

Community art therefore bridges the uniqueness of the complex reality of a community in its challenges to find transforming solutions connected to their conflicts, by way of the uniqueness of an artistic "time out" experience. Community art also offers some relief in the playful attitude of innovative explorations, which may be close to the pleasure of "entertaining events."

Like brainstorming, community art with its decentering characteristics circumvents the deadlock created by "more of the same" thinking, which is focused on the troublesome issues and patterned around "more of the same dead-end" strategies and approaches. The pedagogy of community art follows the potential for surprise in the intermodal decentering, bringing a range of play that steps out of the ordinary grammar and logic of conversational language. However,

artistic shaping is also a kind of "language," a language that needs new words and ends in new conversations.

PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ART

When we want to motivate a community to engage in artistic activities, we have to consider the ever-present respect-fear continuum in people faced with an art project. One way to confront it is by awakening the curiosity for an open understanding of art as it may be found in the culture at hand.

It is helpful to research folk and contemporary art in the culture of the community and identify people engaged in folk and/or professional art, using them as helpers in preparing "scores" that have an improvisational character and offer flexible possibilities of participation. Such research should in addition address questions like:

- What experiences or traditions of gatherings, events and communal art already exist in this community?

- What is the organizational structure of the community, and what are existing formal and informal leadership patterns, especially with respect to communal events and artistic activities?

- How can I utilize these resources, within the contract I am bound to, using a process that includes community art?

- Concretely, what resources are available?

    - Space and possibilities of usage

    - Art material, musical instruments, theater props etc.

- Movable structures and technology (furniture, stage elements, lights, PA, etc.)
- Access to nature and its resources

- Who are the people who have some experience, for instance as drummers, singers, storytellers, poets, dancers, actors etc.
  - Whom could I use in a pilot group to prepare and use later as assistants?
  - Should I bring or recruit somebody as co-leader?
  - What are the roles of co-leaders or assistants in the community art process?
  - In the preparation, we aim for an open score that includes enough space for improvisation. However, the time frame has to be set clearly.
  - We also have to make sure that there is enough time to tune in, especially when we introduce community art for the first time.

The following principles are based on the assumption that the preparatory research was done carefully.

The two pillars of attention

The attention is given fully to the process-oriented learning, as it is understood in systems theory as self-organizational learning. The language used during the decentering community art, however, is purely in the tradition of the studio, the stage or the atelier. This practice includes how we address the people and their activities, and also how we give feedback. We talk to the "company," "ensemble," "orchestra" or "choir," and address a "painter," an "actor," a "drummer," etc.

We guide or give feedback solely to the "surface" of the "art work" or "process" in the way it presents itself as a sensory experience, and we abstain from superficial generalization or categories of meaning. The reflection in the artistic feedback focuses on the form and structure, the material, properties, techniques of shaping, etc. Individual psychological interpretation belongs to the personal private sphere, and space will be made for it in the so-called "harvest," the last part of the session, when everybody is free to share with whomever they need to.

The first pillar: "the here and now"

1) **Where are we in "our arrival"?**

   We intend to anchor the community in our present time. We look to the calendar and consider the time of the day:

   - Season, special holidays, day of the week, birthday, special events, etc.

   - Morning, evening, midnight, beginning, ending, half-time, arrival, etc.

   We intend also to bring into the awareness the time-space continuum of the culture we are in.

   - Customs, rituals, history, birthdays, anniversaries of the community or groups, the news, etc.

2) **Where are we going to?**

   We look for possibilities to include this aspect of the envisioned goal, or what is approaching us:

   - The theme of the desired outcome of the contract (peace, a culture of tolerance, a conference topic, a cooperative identity, etc.)

- The coming winter or spring, the coming graduation, the coming challenge, etc.

The second pillar: the "I" and the "we"

1) **How will I structure space and time to prepare the individual participant for a communal working and shaping together?**

   The "tuning-in" and the "warm up" should focus on the physical and psychological preparation of the individual:

   - The awakening of the senses, especially those that will be the primary focus in the planned community art. An effective way of doing this is by guiding the attention toward what is concrete and physically present and what will later become part of the artistic process. It includes the space, the things at hand, the tools, the material and the physical presence of the other members of the community.
     After this sensory awakening we need to guide the awareness of the possibilities of shaping planned for the actual community art score.

2) **How do we motivate for the "ensemble"?**

   It is helpful to introduce:

   - The **ensemble** for music improvisations, the **company** for dance and theatre, etc.
   - If such an ensemble or company is organized in such a way that every participant contributes equally, than the leader of the community art is in the coaching role of **a director, conductor** or **choreographer**.

- The score can also ask for a **solo** or **soloistic small group (concertino)**. In such instances those players will get additional coaching by participants and leadership.

- In situations where one player, or a team of players, takes responsibility for a improvisational score, then this role would be considered to be that of an **arranger**. In this case the leader of the community art works with the arranger, and the ensemble follows and participates in any artistic decisions.

The two levels of readiness

In addition to the two pillars of attention we have considered, the success of a piece of community art depends on keeping the participants on two levels of curious readiness.

The first level: a readiness of body and mind

- **Sensory arriving ("Grounding")**

  A kinesthetic awareness connects looking with seeing, listening with hearing, moving with being moved, in short, "sensing" with "making sense."

- **The shaping of the ordinary**

  The ordinary will become interesting when we meet it in unconventional ways, revealing new sensory experiences.

The second level: A psychological readiness

- **We need to be aware of the participants' negative experiences with the arts resulting from cultural limitations, former educational experiences or group pressure, etc.**

  We recommend staying away from formalistic jargon or abstract art specialists' language. The practice of validating activities with a concrete, simple language is helpful, especially if we are able to use it critically, though without judgment. The individual member should, whenever possible, also be addressed if the work concerns a common interaction.

- **"Low skill – high sensitivity": a principle in setting up "scores" for community art**

  What we ask for should request a low level of manual artistic skills. On the other hand, we are demanding a high level of aesthetic competence. The sense for the material object and its properties to be formed or composed are heightened. Examples of contemporary and folk art with these qualities include contemporary installation art, traditional Japanese flower arranging, minimalist music, "art brut," collage, drumming circles, rapping, improvisational folk dancing, parades, carnivalesque theatre, poetry slams, etc. Examples may be mentioned in a community to connect the work to our cultural moment and to raise the level of curiosity (Knill et al. 1993).

Leading the process

In resource-oriented therapeutic work the clients are understood to be the experts regarding the problematic situation at hand. What, then, is the expertise of the change agent in a community art

project? The trivial answer declares that it is their professional competency as a resource-oriented change agent. Yet when we consider that the resulting communal artwork is the healing agent (so to speak), then we become aware how much expertise the leader needs to lead such a process to a satisfying outcome. It is this success in the alternative contact of decentering through the arts that uncovers the hidden resources. We speak therefore of the "aesthetic responsibility" of the leader. This responsibility is also a guideline for interventions during the artistic activity. The leader ought to give utmost attendance to sensory perceptions, and give feedback that makes the experience of what presents itself concretely aware. ("Listen to the noise of your steps and sense the pressure on the soles of your feet, how it lifts you up step by step in a pulse..." etc.) The leader also needs the skill to use the principle "low skill – high sensitivity" to challenge and to give critical yet constructive feedback, always in a manner that facilitates the emergence and recognition of the work. The following guidelines can help:

- Guide always toward an opening for well-being.

- Intervene in an analogous way to the artistic process, directly in the moment and at the same time being careful toward the emerging work. Be attentive to what presents itself on the concrete surface of the forming and shaping process. Let others know when you see openings for new play ranges. Do not plan for a solution of the problem at hand, or else you are in a dire straight situation yourself.

- Always provide a challenging temporal and spatial frame as a window of opportunity. In this way, curiosity motivates exploratory play. Be aware that the challenge must be of a magnitude that can be met. The art material and/or the possibilities of shaping must

therefore be restricted in an optimal way, so that curiosity still finds an interesting play-range that serves the emerging work.

- The rule can be remembered with the acronym "less is **M.O.R.E.**" Standing for: **M**aterial that is easily manageable, simple shaping **O**rganization, **R**estricted frame, give simple and clear directions for playful **E**xploration.

- As mentioned earlier it is important to give the participant a sense of aesthetic satisfaction and success that has its origin more in the sensibility toward the emerging work than in the virtuosity of artistic manual skills. This we achieve by following the principle of "low skill – high sensitivity." It is helpful to begin with an artistic interaction of improvisational character that is more familiar to the community, and from there awaken the curiosity for more challenging forms.

- In the performing arts we offer small time-frames in order to sketch the improvisational score toward an emerging work. We know this principle from jazz and rhythm-and-blues. We call the consecutive improvisations on the way to the eventual form "takes." Between the takes, the feedback about what works and what openings may be envisioned allows us to recognize the form that wants to emerge.

- The language we use should always be **SSP**, which means **S**imple, **S**pecific, and **P**articular. It should be simple in the way we formulate, specifically naming the shaping activity or thing that is present and particularly connecting to the person. Again we stay with the surface that needs to be dealt with and refrain from generalizations.

- I also find it advantageous to stay in close contact with the participants while they work, and also demonstrate physically, sometimes illustrating my explanations or suggestions,

and also to find the right rhythm of speaking when I guide a movement. This practice also helps to find the right words for instructions using my language from my sensorimotor awareness, rather than from an abstract strategic planning stance.

* Do not engage in long discussions between "takes." Ensembles get disconnected from their interactional flow of shaping, and may slip back into their everyday problematic behavior. It is possible to find decisions in a short time when we choose one of the suggestions on the floor, after a concise feedback, and we agree to try the other suggestions after a take and see then how to go on. Art happens in the act of shaping, not in the discussion about it.

* The motivational forces in the playful exploration of improvisational work are driven by **curiosity**. It is curiosity that helps to bring surprising forms and structures into the range of play. It is as if surprise and curiosity feed on each other. Yet there is another driving force that wants to repeat the surprising new form or structure. This force is the **functional satisfaction**; it is what pushes us to repeat an improvisational score in order to master it and bring it to its fullest beauty. It makes us ready for feedback and constructive critique. To keep a balance between curiosity and functional satisfaction is one of the tasks in leading a community art process.

* An artistic process can only get going when we are aware that it is our common work that is at stake; above all, it has to be our own **enthusiasm** that sparks off the process. We keep the enthusiasm going when we ourselves remain curious and attentive to what reveals itself surprisingly in the moment. The leader must, so to speak, seduce the

community into their **yearning** for beauty or hope for an artistic work. Lets not forget, however, that we cannot just have hope: it has to be created.

An example:

Managing in difficult climates and times of change

The community: 25 managers of UN compounds for refugees in war zones. The majority are from Asian and African countries. They were called in together for briefing and support, in a week-long conference at a center on the shore of Lake Geneva. They had two highly-trained, experienced UNHCR staff members as their facilitators.

Schedule: After a day of debriefing, with the objective of finding a common theme of concern, they were offered a day of community art with us (a team of two facilitators).

The contract: A full day of community art that addresses the common theme and provides a space for individual concerns. The objective is that each member can build on an outcome, which might provide guidance through and beyond the following week in his or her difficult work.

The "research": We arrive the afternoon before. There is a small room that seats the participants in a circle, and a big room (120 square meters) furnished in conference seating, with tables of five seats each and state-of-the-art conference tools. There is some art material (paper and crayons), but the ordered piano is missing in these spaces. The

participants come all from different "non-western" cultures, are exhausted but in good spirits. We meet participants during the break and have a briefing with the staff during supper. The common concern all the members of the community shared can be summed up by the question: "How can we lead in difficult climates that do not change, while everything else is changing." Many individual issues were overwhelming numbers of refugees, not enough space, staff or funds, and seemingly permanent changes of structure. We learnt that the day ended contemplatively in the small room in a circle, and that they had their notes from the day ready on the tables in the conference room.

The preparation (late at night): We decide to meet the community on "the path" they were on, and bring a gift from our culture. We plan to meet first in the small room, in a circle, opening with a reading from Reiner Maria Rilke's "Letters to a Young Poet" (letter eight, the part about loving the difficult as something that needs our love). After the welcome, introduction and overview of the day, we will change to the conference room, first using the set up to do a guided resource-oriented look into their concerns, and then change the space into a studio stage for the decentering. The same space will be used for the validation of the artwork. After a break we will restore the conference seating for the individual "harvesting" from the experience. We will end the day, as they did the first day, in the small room in a circle for a sharing and closure. We also want to keep the meal times constant, so the community can find a spatial and temporal ground during the week.

The sketched open score: *The conference room had a full view (all-glass wall) of the mirror-still lake, with the gleaming, snowy Savoy Mountains on the other side. It was a sunny fall day, and a light mist veiled the yellow trees. This filled me with enthusiasm, and it was immediately clear to me that this must become the substance of the art project. It is elemental und universal in all cultures to respond to this. So it was decided to make the windows the upstage, and we would draw a line for downstage. Part of the preparation will be to move the furniture accordingly. While I meditated with this breathtaking view in the early morning, I was overtaken by the stillness of the water and the monumental mountains, and it came to me, how the water moves from those glaciers until it finds the stillness of the lake. I will go with the movement: the water teaches us, from quicksilver-like and gushing to flowing and resting. It will be important to remember that we are not literally water, and don't need to try to be it: we just learn as dancers from its movement. So neither do we put mountains or rocks on stage, just things that might help. In this moment, the choreography of the interculturally sensitive great late choreographer Pina Bausch came to my mind (Café Müller), and I planned to use chairs on stage. Also, I intended to use my flutes and a harmonica as musical resources.*

The actual community art session:

*During **the opening** it became obvious that the poetry was extremely well received. People wanted to hear the text again, and were very motivated after the introduction to do the process.*

In the conference room we guided the participants, who sat in sets of five, through resource-oriented questions and visions, starting from their personal concern about the general theme (managing in a difficult climate in times of change). This was done individually, in silence, while taking notes. The goal was to envision a possible outcome that is realistic about both the horrific situation and the personal and cultural resources brought to their renewed awareness. We end this phase by drawing posters about what they personally look for to create hope, without building any false hope about the situation.

*In a **tuning in**, we explained our use of space as a studio, by walking through it and marking it with masking tape. We helped each other to move the furniture to arrange for an "audience," explaining that we will always use around three ensemble members as an audience to give feedback. We would take turns in being the audience, so that finally everybody would have a chance. When everything was ready, we stood in the audience space and looked at the wonderful landscape, which was now visible like a set. We asked for thirty chairs to be randomly distributed on the stage. I announced: "We all most probably know lower back pain, especially when we sit or lift a lot, and it becomes worse under stressful conditions. So let me give you some simple exercises which you might do for five to ten minutes twice a day." I asked them to sit on a chair on stage.*

Through alternative sequencing between meditating on the view, giving attention to the landscape's water and our own breath, in order to focus the busy mind, and kinesthetic exercises with the chair, to get out of bad habits in standing up, sitting down and lifting

the chair (adopted from Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method)[1] the ensemble

gets tuned in to the water as an image and to their own bodies. I made certain that the

exercises were presented simply and concretely, using everyday language adaptable for

their everyday stressful world. We ended by testing the results in grounding through

walking. Focusing again on the view, we notice how the weight becomes a lifting force,

up to the hips and to the head, making the walk already into a swinging dance, and that it

is possible to navigate without stress between dancers and chairs on the stage.

The project *was now introduced: We want a celebratory dance dedicated to the*

landscape using the movement of the water from the peaks of the mountains to the lake.

    1. First take:

      We give the beginning and end and encourage them to use the in-between open. In

      the beginning, when the music starts, dancers enter individually, little creeks

      gushing faster and faster around the rocks.

      At the ending dancers sit on chairs, stretch out still like the lake, the music ends.

      Dancers are trying to find the movement patterns that happen on the way, and the

      musician will find the music that dances with the ensemble. Three volunteers as

      audience.

      The feedback praised the density and the whirling effect of the river-like water,

      and also the sudden stillness. As an opening they suggested instead of trying to be

      fast, to take smaller steps and improvise longer in the river stage by following

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[1] Gelb, M. (1996), Body Learning: An Introduction to the Alexander Technique, Henry Holt, New York. Rywerant, Y., Feldenkrais, M. (2003), The Feldenkrais Method: Teaching by Handling, Basic Health Publications, North Bergen NJ.

each other. Maybe the music could stay in motion, and then change into long legato much later to initiate the delta of the river. We always summarize the input the in the second take by concise demonstration. We show that small steps with sudden turns look faster, and allow some time to try. Dancers show they are having a lot of fun with this. The flowing by following also made sense. I decided to go to the harmonica when the lake phase is initiated.

2. *Second take:*

    The dance starts to take shape. Evidently it becomes a pleasurable challenge, and the harmonica was helpful in finding an ending.

    The feedback also improves, gets concise and more specific, naming dancers and situations specifically. The summary focused on the end. The surface of resting water is horizontal, it was observed. Could we reach our arms out and try to touch hands? It would be a great image with the real lake on the set behind the stage, was the suggestion.

    This time we ask half of the audience to stay and give a comparative feedback.

3. *Third take:*

    The difference is astonishing: the changes within the flow were more continuous and the ensemble produced choir-like synchronicities as well as individual extravaganzas as the water does when meeting obstacles or the wind. During the ending the ensemble moved delicately, a choir of dancers coming slowly to rest. As feedback I wanted to hear first the difference by asking: "Is work on the way, and what makes you say it is emerging?" This time the main answer was that they

find it touching, and that it is definitely on the way to becoming an improvisational dance piece. The audience had the suggestion that the ensemble could sing at the end, and that also while sitting on the chair they could reach out the arm and rest the head on the shoulder so it does not stick out of the quiet surface.

*At this point we introduced an **in-between exploration** before going to the fourth take.*

We envisioned a choir improvisation that could be used to end in a still pose. We chose a "cluster flow," because it produces a harmony that is not necessarily part of western tradition. Each singer chooses a tone and holds its pitch no matter what its interval is with the others. The result is sort of a heterophonic "Ohm." We prepare it with breath and voice exercises, then sensitizing the listening and learning to melt voices together in different ways, until we produced improvisations with the cluster and learnt to handle its intensity and color.

4. *Fourth and final take:*

   As in most of our projects, the improvisational artists are by this time accustomed to their ensemble and to the improvisational score. It results in a more enthusiastic engagement, fed by the ability to hear and see themselves in the webbing of others and the work, without preoccupying themselves with playing the right thing. This was also the case with the fourth take. The new ending was strong, but considering its potential it was not yet fully integrated in the dance.

There was too much preoccupation with doing it right.

With the feedback of the audience about the surprising "otherworldliness" of this ending, the ensemble wanted to do it again and so it came to the last take.

The final performance lasted eight minutes and held the attention of the audience and staff fully. The ensemble was engaged, and evidently gave their total attention to the embodiment of the imagery of water, coming from the wild melt to a peaceful rest in song. We saw wet eyes and waited a moment before we gave the releasing applause.

*There followed the **aesthetic analyses**, the phase where we look at the work from the artistic point of view. We asked that everybody make individual notes. Our reflection followed, in the following order:*

1. *Open discourse about what makes this dance what it is. How is the form and structure special, and what stands out? It was mentioned, for instance, that it was a dance without a musical beat yet still was very rhythmic and exciting, that it was not just ending, it was also closing musically with a standing cluster, etc.*

   We end this reflection by asking everybody to write up what they have gained in their perspective of the work through this reflective conversation, and what they did not see while being in the "production."

2. *We ask them to write up what kind of inputs helped to accomplish the dance or song. We asked them to consider the feedback of the audience and our guidance. We start with positive questions like: "What was helpful in the provided structure? What measures have you taken for yourself, to master the work?" We end with the question about what was difficult or frustrating and ask: "What made you go on and not leave the process?"*

3. *We ask: "What are the surprises in the experience of the work, or the way you experienced your fellow dancers and the ensemble?"*

4. *"What could be a metaphoric title of the dance? And where are you now, compared with the state you were in this morning?"*

All of these are individual notes. Then we offered a break to restore the room back to the conference seating. Now we were ready for what we call the "harvest." We find it helpful to return with the rich material of the aesthetic analyses back into the space of the original concern. There we sort out what notes may have an importance in connection with the personal issue of the concerns they had envisioned in the morning.

Using the notes and using the poster about hope from the beginning, the participants checked which jumped out at them, even though they might not be able to spontaneously identify the connection. Then in a second round we decide on one or two notes, to contemplate what they could offer to the original concern. Only after this individual reflection would the small groups share and help each other. Staff members circulated between the tables as moderators.

There was a rich variety of outcomes, concerning each individual relative to his or her site and workplace differently. One thing that seemed to run through all discussions was the experience that a permanent change of structure was part of the Landscape (choreography) in which the Water (dancer) had to find a way. What helped was the dancers' attitude of "flow." This was only made possible by a movement-music structure which was not on a beat or pulse (free rhythm), however flexible and improvisational, allowing conflicts to be part of its nature. Also it called for an ensemble attitude guided instantaneously by the flow rather than by the "plan." Concrete measures were discussed in small groups for steps toward a management by the choreographer in close contact with the improvisational flow of the team.

*Then came an **intermodal transfer to the closing**. As we noticed the richness of the harvest and the "down to earth" character of future steps the participants drew from the experience, we wanted to follow their original positive response to poetry. We asked them to end their harvest by choosing one of the words of their aesthetic notes that became a key to the planned steps into the future. From this word we suggested to write an acrostic, a poem that uses for each line a letter from the chosen word. We demonstrated by writing a community acrostic. After each participant had created an acrostic they shared them in the small groups around the tables. Each poem got specific feedback about what worked well and where someone could see room for further exploration. Here too, staff members circulated as moderators. Analogously to the community project, we also suggested here to write second takes and get feedback on them. We were taken by surprise by the enthusiasm of the*

community in this communal poetry art structure. We had to give additional time and postpone by thirty minutes the closing circle planned in the small room.

Closing:

We chose a ritualistic form, in which each member first read their poem, then said what concretely they would bring back to their compound from this experience if any, and then give us feedback for the day. If they would like, they could end with the poem.

We were gifted with great poetry: everybody read twice, and also took away something that would help them to create hope in a hopeless situation.

This example serves as an illustration of what we have put forward as the principles of leading the process of community art. As one may notice, music is an essential part of leading in community art. Even though we might consider music to be an accompaniment, it is definitely more than that. It is part of the leading structure. The choice of music or no music, as well as what kind of music, always has an essential influence on what is happening in a space. It is not only the mood of the music or silence, nor is it noticed as present while we give a task of shaping. It is also the rhythm, the structure, the associations with the kind of music we have chosen.

When we ourselves feel comfortable enough to play, we are able to stay in close contact with the process; this is the issue I want to discuss here in the last section. Certainly there is the possibility of using recorded music. These days, with iPods and similar devices, I may have an almost unlimited repertory of music to chose from, and be able to lead flexibly to a much greater extent. This form of music in community art follows the tradition of using music as a basic score,

as in the classical and contemporary ballet, while the synchronous improvisation of music in community art follows the idea of performance art.

The third option of using music follows the ensemble improvisational tradition in music, and guides the community to a communal musical improvisation.

In the following I will focus on providing spontaneous music while leading a community art process.

The music of community art

We need to think of music as being in a dialogue with the community art improvisation, with texts and/or visual art forms. Music is an equal partner and participates as such. To develop such improvisational skills as a musician, we might consider the following guidelines:

- Be attentive to the movement, acts, architecture, choreography, the light, the shadow, etc. Stay at the surface of what is formed and what you perceive. Do not speculate behind the things, do not explain anything and avoid giving meaning. Be a straightforward partner to the things, the dance, the theatre, the poem or the performance. Remember, silence is part of music.

- Do not illustrate, just play with what emerges, go with it, go also counter to it (*contra punctus*). Music is just another player in the ensemble. Therefore you do not consciously lead or follow. Like anybody else in the ensemble, it may happen that you lead or follow or are totally in synch. If you get stuck in one of these positions (e.g., leading) you are deserting the partnership.

- There are many ways to practice music for community art. One way is to find a musical pattern, a figure or a motif on an instrument that one feels comfortable with, as understood in the principle of "low skill – high sensitivity" (e.g. kalimba, flute, xylophone, piano, etc.) Repeat this figure, spinning it off until it develops, as a dancer explores the steps through repetition into a full movement figure, which develops into the choreographic element.

- The music may also find its form without any beat: one could speak of a "sound painting." When we use a pulse for a rhythm it is helpful to begin simply unless you can count on a good circle of drummers or a musical combo. Be careful that there is always enough space for others to offer new figures, and make sure the beat is alive, which means that it is not only driving or lagging, but breathing between the two like a communal organ.

The feedback-culture

We describe what we observe concretely as it presents itself on the surface. We respond in ways that are perceptive for the community, and we raise the awareness, while reductionistic explanations suggest what is "behind" the observed. We offer help so that everybody can follow the feedback, and clarify any confusions or speculations that enter the interpretations. We move on when everybody is ready. It is possible to use metaphors as illustration, yet we are careful with them and make sure that these associations are understood as our own.

- Speak from your own declared perspective: I have seen, or heard, etc. Stay with the observed material, with its structure and form.

- Try to formulate in a positive way, from a position of aesthetic responsibility toward the emergent work.

- Anchor what "works" and validate experiments that failed. (What made you start again even though it failed, and what was it that then finally succeeded in this exploration?)

- The leader must be a role model in a culture of this art-analogous feedback practice.

EPILOGUE

Some of my improvisation scores come up again and again. They are like old friends that come as a helping hand. Yet they grow and each time mature in their ability to open up to the ever-changing difficult situations. Each time I meet them again they surprise me.

Let's embrace these open scores, inviting them with gratitude again on stage, and awaiting with curiosity what new works they may hatch on the communal stage. With practice you might get your ensemble of open scores to come to your assistance. Consider yourself like a minstrel with a caravan repertory company, having the capacity to create spontaneously in the communities you travel through.

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