Community Art:

Communal art-making to build up a sense of coherence

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Prologue

Some years ago I was asked to mediate, by means of communal art-making, a small college department that was polarized about how to go through a change in its leadership structure. It was Fall and the foliage was over; leaves tumbled and there was an early snow flurry. When I arrived at noon, I was informed that the community I would work with included the students as well as the old and new leadership. In addition, I was briefed about a preparatory meeting ,where the whole community had collectively wished to clarify the goal for the weekend with me. They also were very clear that they wanted to start in the afternoon with a community warm-up.

After the introductory routine, I started by saying something about the Fall. Later, I asked the eighty participants to walk in the large studio. The steps are one of the prime acts of dancing. They became the centre of my attention: sensitizing the feet to their grounding and the neck, shoulder, and arm to the rising force received from the ground. Letting go of the breath brought the image of the wind. The first improvisation was about changes in a drifting walk dance, coming and going on a path that "happens" without planning it and without colliding with the wall or other dancers: "Perturb this drifting; shape the dance by making conscious changes of directions, turns or halts and play between the two ways of dancing (drifting and shaping)." I played the piano and the intensity of the dance increased. Dancers began to take some of their layers of Fall gear off. In a second take, I gave them the image of falling leaves and explained through illustration how the wind is the force that makes the erratic movements of the leaves that sometimes fly skyward and chaotically change directions. "We are not literally leaves—we are dancers; we can as dancers, however, learn from the movement characteristics of leaves for our improvisational score or choreography. So let us shape all the directions, also the up and down, forward and backward, unintentionally and as if the impulse came from outside, carried out by a force similar to the wind. Lower the level more and more toward the ground where we will end." I asked some musicians to play with

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me, accompanying this "Rite of Fall."

This warm-up brought everybody together in the excitement about the unpredictability of directions. No one knew who they would meet in this flying mood which had a promised resting end on the floor. Live music resonated with the dance. This invigorating experience brought all levels of the hierarchy and parties with different opinions together and helped afterwards, in no time, to clarify the task for the weekend in a way that everybody was willing to participate.

We will see further in this paper how the session continued.

Introduction

The term "community art" is a strange construct, considering that there is no art to be thought of without communities. The word, coined by therapists and educators connected to the arts and creativity, stresses the setting "community" as something special and different than what is usually done 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 happened with scores similar to folkloristic dancing, singing, drumming, free movement 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: gatherings such as conferences, educational settings, festivals, reunions and cruises.

I want to focus in this paper on the "community art" that is commissioned as an event in task-oriented communities and therefore is shaped according to certain criteria. This kind of community art has the objective to strengthen the resilience of the community, to establish and retain its well-being. Resilience is understood as the ability to activate resources and mobilize coherence (Schiffer, 2003 p. 11)[1]. One could also say, metaphorically, that community art is designed to strengthen the immune system of the community, so that members or member clusters can respond early to conflicts before they escalate.

Schiffer (S. 49) also demonstrates that "affective-sensorimotoric" experi-

ences (as they are present in the arts and play) are of primary importance for a sense of coherence and therefore for mobilizing resilience. This supports the use of the arts in activities that are expected to strengthen the resilience of communities. We need, however, to understand more about the structure of communal art-making in order to find useful ways in scoring community art projects that serve the envisioned purpose in question.

We will look from two perspectives at communal art-making as it is practiced in community art. The following distinctions are gained from observation of communal art-making in a variety of communities from thirty to three hundred members and of transient and permanent characteristics, e.g: task-oriented symposia, educational institutions and the private sector.

Community Art as an Alternative Experience of Worlding

All art-making creates an imaginary space that is distinct from everyday reality with its situational restrictions and rigid routines—the *habitual experience of worlding*. Art-making is, however, still part of the same world; therefore, we distinguish the difference with the term *alternative experience of worlding*. Although this experience has constraints as well (posed by the artistic frame, by restrictions of material and by the structures of the art discipline), these challenges act like openings to increase the *range of play* beyond the usual one, even "beyond imagination" (Knill et al, 2005, p. 81-88)[2].

In the imaginary space of communal art-making, things are surprising, unpredictable and unexpected, yet describable in their particular logic. These things happen differently than in the everyday routine. People communicate with those they usually have little contact with. Somebody may play a leading role by contributing a new turn in an improvisation. This person may not have much influence in the usual organization of the community. People will receive opportunities to act, move and speak in ways that they have not previously experienced with each other. This difference expands the "range of play" of the rigid routine, often experienced as distress in everyday life.

> *One dance improvisation follows a score that asks dancers to connect with at least one other dancer in such a way that they can dance together for one round along a circle before separating or connecting with another cluster of dancers. This goes on until the whole ensemble becomes one connected company. During this improvisation, new connections are made between the dancers. The criteria of connections focus on a choreographic solution that makes aesthetic sense. Therefore it will have to be repeated. Decisions about the music, usually improvised by members of the community, as well as changes to the choreography are in the foreground. This is an alternative focus than the one in the everyday work situation and facilitates new relational explorations.*

There is a convincing logic and stringency experienced when a communal work of art is completed. Therefore, reflections about alternative experiences of worlding through art do not offend the necessary logic of the habitual experience within the community.

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

> • With *decentering*, we name the move away from the restricted thinking posed by tasks, resulting often in rigid reasoning and stressful acting that marks the pressure around unavoidable conflicts or even dead-end situations in everyday work settings. Decentering is a move into the opening for the surprising, the unpredictable, the unexpected, provided by the artistic experience within the logic of imagination. A centring follows the decentering, guided by the change agent, relating the two in an effort to find ease. It is helpful to validate first the artistic work resulting in the decentering phase, as well as how that work was achieved, before experiences are compared and/or consequences discussed.
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> • In providing a *range of play*, we contrast the situational restrictions experienced in the art-making and in everyday life. The phenomenon of play is the "doing as if," the "open-endedness" in the circularity of the here and now which results in a freeing up from the pressure to achieve a specific defined result, which lies in the attitude of games. This distinction has proven to be helpful in the design of community art scores. If game-like scores are chosen, the everyday habitual competitive attitude may be called into action and decentering becomes difficult. Certainly, art projects also pose a challenge toward their completion. These challenges, however, create enough openness and options for surprising unexpected turns which give a sense of freedom when directed with aesthetic responsibility.

Community Art: A Decentering Method—Providing a Range of Play

The complexity of the imaginary space in community art presents itself concretely and "thingly." During the shaping process, material interventions are concrete and very particularly 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, to listen to the music or to ask the musicians to add voice 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 process of becoming and completion as a "thing." In its graspable presence, it offers many options to help distinguish between the different realities. The distinction of stage, studio space, the audience space and the habitual experience of worlding is concrete and sensorimotorically explicit.

The idea of widening the range of play by engaging imagination is a common concept in the practice of *conflict resolution*. In such a practice, conflicts are seen as situations that lack choices and that give participants a sense of being locked into the matter of conflict. Community art therefore 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 perturbing and widening the range of play may be effective for a surprising auto-poetic process of improvement of a system. The impetus for discovery and fear is in balance in such a play. Communal art-making can be seen as a discipline of play where the probing of the participants is a kind of perturbation and where self-organization happens within the range of play defined by the frame's and the discipline's restrictions (material, space, time, and means). The community art leader is a player in the system who does not play the habitual game of the everyday community.

The limits that define the frame of an art discipline with respect to space, time, material and method of shaping belong to the tradition of art-making. Therefore, interventions with respect to limits and frame are easily accepted and understood. These interventions and those during the process of the 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, these interventions help to distinguish between the realities of the habitual and the alternative worlding as it occurs during the decentering.

The accomplishment in art-making is literally enabling and has the merit of beauty with the "Aha" of an aesthetic response. In consequence, communal art-making is also a learning experience which provides an individual, as well as a social, enabling and a situational coping. The effect of this experience is cognitive and physical. We can observe it in the change of emotion, mood and tonus of the participants. This coping process can also be seen as training, or "exercise," to cope with the situational restrictions and individual frustrations in everyday task-oriented communal life. Within a cognitive frame of reference, the coping experience in the communal learning process of community art confronts beliefs within the scope of: "We are not able to accomplish anything," "We have too little resources," etc. A community art process, however, includes more levels than solely the level of cognitive argumentation:

It is a rich exercise with repetitive experiences of accomplishment.
In a typical work-oriented practice of community art, a blues improvisation with a chorus might be worked on. With each repetition under a competent leader, participants become increasingly excited to get into the groove of it. It is a true repetitive 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 also eventually have an improvised text that links to this experience. The discourse between the repetitions, under expert leadership, is cognitive even though it is focused on the communal art-making.

The communal artwork can touch or move the community members. All the senses are engaged and therefore the artwork makes sense in its beauty.
The work resulting, e.g., the blues mentioned above, does not solely make sense in terms of cognitive learning; it also makes sense in its beauty. It can be remembered as a touching, moving, regenerating, nourishing experience—a kind of "soul food."

It is an experiential field of discovery that motivates curiosity. Discovery in this way is one of the fundamental sensorimotor and cognitive learning experiences.
The method of community art, in its improvisational characteristic, 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 inspires the community to create a dance all have many fundamental sensorimotor steps that will be cognitively reflected upon later.

In the traditional understanding of coping, exercise has a fundamental position. In the practice of community art, however, the process is guided with an attentive, supportive, open attitude. This openness gives the hidden a chance to be met and to be utilized as a resource. With this option comes new perspectives, fantasies, ideas, and images or alternative ways to act or respond (Knill 2000, pp. 9-14)[3].

Communal Art-Making as a Contribution to the Culture of Communities

When we look at how task-oriented communities try to release some of the individual and social stresses created by workloads, we can usually find two offerings designed for that purpose:

- Entertaining Events
- Opportunities for Relational Reflection

In the following section I will sketch the specific needs addressed in these two activities; later I will elucidate the standpoint that understands community art as a culture, bridging these two isolated attempts of copings with the everyday task. Community art, then, is understood as a culture that fosters innovative thought and action by mobilizing resources and activating imagination.

Entertaining Events

Task-oriented communities, like companies and institutions, have traditionally used entertaining events to ease habitual hierarchy and protocol and sometimes also to blend the boundary between workplace and private life. Such events range from bowling and soccer games to extended parties (New Years, etc) and company trips. These events are founded in game-like social traditions: they offer some expected 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, however, is an opportunity for members of the community to reflect on their relationships within their task. To facilitate such reflection, in the second half of the last century companies and institutions have hired consultants who have been trained in one of the group encounter or counseling techniques that became popular at that time.

Opportunities for Relational Reflection

In the beginning, confrontive models that had been developed for therapeutic or encounter group settings, like group dynamics, Gestalt therapy and related styles, turned the focus onto conflicts and their roots in the individual, personal biography. These confrontive models worked for groups with the task of doing therapy; however, they lowered the performance of the group toward other tasks. Later, systems-oriented, person-centred, theme-centred and other similar approaches were favoured because of their focus on the social aspect of coping in groups (Nellessen, 1997, p. 66-72)[4].

Toward the end of the last century, the systems-oriented approach prevailed and often was modified with resource- and solution-focused methods. These approaches support the activation of resources as well as aspects of resilience. Therefore they strengthen the system's coping mechanisms in fulfilling its mission.

When we consider the size of communities, it becomes evident that these methods of

reflection are limited to small clusters, groups or teams within the communities. In addition, the exclusive focus on words makes the process lengthy and cumbersome, having the taste of "more of the same": more of the verbal communication that goes with being "on the job." This is especially true for big groups. We need to recognize, however, that the format of the resource- and solution-focused methods of reflection, in the tradition of systems theory, can have great merits within the community art projects of bigger communities. This merit becomes evident during the evaluation of the experience, when we organize the feedback and reflection in smaller groups and then report back to the full community.

Community Art as a Bridge

The need for a bridge

Communities soon recognized that traditional entertainment and separated opportunities for reflection stay isolated from each other and are not very helpful in the attempt to create new innovative and resourceful behavior. The tension in everyday work increases because of the fact that the fun of the event is over. Often issues become more serious in an atmosphere that does not provide a space to work on communication and relationships.

Attempts at Bridging

In an attempt to connect an experiential event with reflection and a counseling opportunity, it became fashionable to offer "new games," "outdoor-bound/extreme sport" activities, etc, combined with counseling, reflection and coaching. Soon, however, the limits of these activities also became evident. Although these attempts truly gave an alternative challenge, they didn't offer much of a surprise in the outcome. The game-like characteristics are close to the problematic issue at hand. Even though they are different from the everyday activity, they have a predictable strategy for solutions. Therefore they create a reality similar to the stress—producing a work process that needs innovative, renewed strategies as well as structures and products. It is like having to win a game without having a chance to invent it.

The Bridge: Community Art

The art projects undertaken by a community need spatial and temporal frames, selected materials and envisioned directions of forming. However, the act of creative shaping in the arts includes innovative strategies, shaping techniques that follow the surprising developments of the emerging product and therefore lead to a constant revision of the planned outcome. Each process becomes an innovative endeavor to find the optimal response to a complex dynamic

between resources, objectives and actions taken, leading to emerging patterns within a defined frame and a feedback loop with shaping strategies and changing structure of material and environment. All of this takes place in the frame of a discipline of artistic play that includes an audience that witnesses and evaluates the work according to certain standards:

> –The resulting artistic product works as a whole and 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 has surprises that belong to the sense-making logic of the work.

When we consider this in the context of decentering as explained above, we recognize the parallels to the experience of the task-oriented challenge of a community. The complexity we are confronted with in everyday processes calls for innovative solutions that consider the dynamic interdependence of frame, material, structure, strategies, visions, emerging patterns such as environmental patterns, etc. The problems are unique in their characteristics, and although the way to solve them needs to be congruent with this uniqueness, working styles may be similar.

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

Community art therefore bridges the uniqueness of the complex reality of a community in its challenges to reach objectives connected to its tasks with the uniqueness of an artistic "time-out" experience. Community art also offers pleasurable innovative explorations which are close to the pleasure of "entertaining events." In addition, the community, with its striving for a unique artistic result, combines the everyday experience of having to achieve satisfying results with an innovative, playful attitude. An artistic "work" that can be examined, reflected upon and evaluated with respect to the community's tasks and relations can result.

Community art in its decentering characteristic, similar to brainstorming, circumvents the deadlock created by "more of the same" thinking which focuses on the problematic issues and is patterned around "more of the same" strategies and approaches. The didactics of community art follow the potential for surprises in intermodal decentering, which brings a play range similar to brainstorming, yet steps out of the ordinary grammar and logic of conversational language. However, artistic shaping is "language" as well, a kind of language that also needs words and ends in surprising new conversations.

Example of Community Art

Here we continue the description of the community art project begun in the prologue of this paper:

In the task for the weekend, to which everybody was committed, we agreed to entrust ourselves to a learning process that would lead, in the end, to the election of a mixed taskforce, representing all parts of the community and providing a clear guiding vision for the future of the department. The learning process has four parts. First, we collect an inventory of concerns and resources about the issue at hand. In the second phase, we concentrate and work intensely on a piece of community art that brings us away from our habitual reasoning and position to a place of shaping and attending to an emerging work of art, of which we do not know the final form or outcome. We will, however, make it work to our satisfaction. In a third part, we look at the work and see what we did to make it work, how we did it and where and how we overcame obstacles. Finally, the work might open different discourses in response to it: in the last part, we harvest reflections from this process to formulate a guideline for the taskforce and create a guiding vision. In this case, we organized the community into three dance/theatre ensembles, all three composed of members of the different student cohorts and hierarchical levels.

The community art score furthered the imagery of the wind and the Fall, already explored in the warm-up at the opening of the weekend. This time, however, we explored the birds in the preparation. The choreographic idea was drawn from the movement of the birds and their gathering for migration. The first explorative improvisations served the search for shapes that show the birds' mastery in keeping the flight on course, while the disturbing erratic wind was utilized as a force to stay aloft. How can the dancer's body, which does not literally move like a bird, create an experience for everybody sensing exactly this "mastery of keeping the course lightly"? The answers were explored through improvisations.

After these explorations, I noticed an increasing ensemble of musicians gathering around the piano. Before the design of the next take was started, I made the score of music the first item. In the end, we had four ensembles: one of them responsible for the music of all the three "migra-

tion-dance-ensembles." In the next take, the dance ensembles wanted something that would allow the dancer to gain expertise in shaping the landing and take-off experience in the dance. Finally, we had three clusters of chairs on the stage which, when used by the dancers, brought the image of a bare tree in Fall that fell prey to a flock of birds. The dancers wished for music that was more contrasting instead of music that acoustically illustrated the birds. The more takes that were made, the more the choreographic changes brought the dance theatre performance of the community to a convincing form. After the musicians found their music idiom as an ensemble, several members of the dance ensembles and one member of the music ensemble were selected to serve as coaches to give audience expert feedback. The result of the intensified coaching was astonishing. Soon we saw dance choirs moving in formation that seemed similar to flocks of birds swarming up from their place of gathering. In the final takes, a new dance choir came into existence: that of the winter birds who stay over. They had to find a choreography that clearly shows their difference through "the shaping of the space"—the phrase we would use as dancers. Finally, the coaches suggested using the lights, so that toward the end, the dancers disappeared in the dark like birds fading on the horizon. The last take received passionate applause from the ensembles and coaches. The question "Are we onto something now that might go on the road later?" was positively responded to by all the participants.

The three original ensembles sat down separately in the studio to honour the work in its dance theatre manifestations. The community art-work was considered outstanding because of the complexity in the choreography and the dynamic structure of the different ensembles, with the music as a unifying partner and the different dance choirs developing across all the ensembles. It was important to shape a choir together that successfully gave the impression of flight in formation and of utilizing the wind to stay aloft. "It was not the speed of propulsion that allowed the dance to be seen as a flight that goes far. It was the attention to the direction and the synchrony of the movement as a whole," said one dancer. How it was achieved was reported with astonishing awareness of probing and sensing. The importance of grounding in landing and taking off, and even in the flight, was for the common support that made it possible to give an impression of air and wind as a dancer. The explorative takes—aimed at making these shapes distinct from others like landing, take-off or resting in sailing or sitting—were described in detail and appreciated. Of special interest was to hear about the resources that helped to overcome deadlocks, fatigue, boredom or other frustrations. What helped to persevere was curiosity, physical engagement, options to participate in different ensembles or choirs, loyalty to the peer ensemble, realizing that sometimes it works, sometimes not, noticing that there is something emerging, etc.

The title "Gathering for Migration" was chosen, and a conversation about the beauty of the last image took over when we all were

together. We spoke of the peace of the wintering birds, huddled together, and the four formations on the horizon, with the long stretched wings in a flow during the slow song, full of longing and directional determination. The difference of mood and physical presence was noticed when compared with the beginning, and astonishment was voiced about the unusual clustering of dancers in the final ensembles and dance choirs: "I never have worked so intensely together with these people before. Some of the members I did not know before, and others I even avoided in the past." At this point we closed for the day by making posters that highlighted the characteristics of "Gathering for Migration" and graphically ordered the statements that lead to the analyses of the artistic process mentioned above.

On the second day we started with a warm-up and then visited all the posters before sitting down to remember our opening inventory. With a speculative mindset, we began to harvest statements and images from the posters which brought us a step closer to the vision and guideline for a task-force. For the moment, the major visionary gain was summarized the following way: "It is of more importance to find a directional determination for a vision, a kind of vision for the path rather than for the goal. The guiding principle seems to be that each participating cluster of the community, regardless of its position, must have a place in that directional determination without having to participate in the same manner. In addition, the organizational structure may allow different paths and different possibilities of governance to be explored and finally installed in the institutional choreography. We might also learn from the music that a contrasting accompaniment may be of more help to get to the organization that works than imitative support."

This first outcome was drawn as a "mind map" from the main visionary words "directional determination" on a poster. After a break, we went into a second community art project.

Didactic Principles of Community Art

The above example serves as an illustration for this section of the paper and may be reread afterwards for the purpose of better understanding the principles involved in guiding community art.

A basic principle is to follow along a didactic that circumvents the fear of failure and the narrow understanding of art that results sometimes from negative experiences with the arts in education or everyday life. It is helpful, therefore, to first research the community and evaluate its resources and needs:

What is the experience the community and its members have with communal work, games, the arts, etc?

What are the goals of the community; what are you commissioned for?

What is the organizational structure and governance of the community?

What are the artistic resources of the community:

–Musicians/Drummers

–Dancers

–People with directing experience, etc?

What are the physical conditions:

–Room size and possibilities of use (equipment, lights, furniture to be arranged, etc)

–Availability of material and musical instruments?

How will you plan the leadership according to the research you have done:

–Will you be using a community member as a co-leader?

–Will you be bringing a co-facilitator?

–What will be the role of the co-facilitator/observer?

–How will you plan the event as an open sketch in terms of the scores, yet be detailed and strict in the time management?

–How will you prepare for the educational aspect that must govern the introduction of community art?

The following didactic principles assume that the boundary conditions mentioned above are established.

The Two Pillars of Attention

The two pillars of attention support the process-oriented learning with an approach that is based on systems theory. At the same time, the discourse needs to be led in the language and tradition of the art studio and performance stage, using the method of improvisational scores, scripts and choreographies or artistic concepts. This includes not only the naming of the activities but also the addressing of the participants as a company: ensemble, choir, actors, etc. The feedback culture is primarily grounded in the concreteness of structure, form and physicality of shaping, with a process-oriented learning attitude rather than on the basis of individual psychological considerations.

The First Pillar: the Here and Now

Where are we in our "coming-here"?

We want to anchor the community in the world in which we are in the here and now, looking at the time, considering the calendar or time of day:

–Season, holiday, day of the week, birthday, special event, etc
–Morning, evening, noon, beginning, ending, halftime, arrival, departure, return, etc

We also want to look at the "space" we are in, considering the culture or lifespan of the system:
–Customs, language, history, the news, birth, life and death of systems or individuals, etc

Where are we in our "going-to"?

We will take aspects of the theme that is envisioned by the community or the world it is in, e.g:
–The theme of the symposium the community has chosen, the theme of the task negotiated in advance, the theme of the institution (e.g., cooperate identity), etc
–The season, the graduation, the reorganization, the celebration, or the vacation that is approaching, etc

The Second Pillar: the I and the We

How do we provide space for the individual to get ready for communal work?

The tuning-in and warming-up needs to prepare the individuals in their body-mind continuum: we awaken the senses, focus the mind's attention on what is physically present (space, things and people), build a sensorimotor awareness of the shaping capabilities that are envisioned.

How do we motivate for ensemble work?

We introduce exploratory improvisation for small self-chosen or "accidentally" created ensembles, while using strictly studio language for the motivation of shaping. Through

the leader's guidance, the envisioned artistic work has to take preference over individual concerns not connected to the here and now of the improvisation. Therefore, the preparation of the individual mentioned above is of primary importance. Use the words for traditional formats of improvisational ensembles that stress a cooperative attitude:

> Use "ensemble" for music improvisations, "company" for dance or theatre, etc.
>
> The imagined format may be an ensemble or company production, wherein everybody has an equal input into the improvisation. The facilitator is like a director from outside, hired to help the community get there.
>
> The ensemble or company may want a soloist, a protagonist or solo ensemble. If so, then those performers get special attention from the director and the ensemble.
>
> There may be a person or team from the ensemble who wants to be the arranger or choreographer for a particular piece. Then the director assists these persons and the ensemble will follow their lead.

The two levels of readiness

While we guide the community with the attention on both pillars discussed above, we need to always consider two levels of readiness. These considerations influence our didactics of leading the community.

The first level: The readiness of body and mind

–Grounding through the senses
–Kinesthetic awareness connects watching and seeing, hearing and listening, moving and being moved: in short, sensing and making sense
–The shaping of the ordinary material, sensitized in a way that it becomes special and interesting

The second level: The psychic readiness

–Be aware of negative experiences with the arts in the biography of individuals or past experiences of the community. Avoid

sophisticated formalistic jargon and refrain from judgmental remarks. Avoid group pressure and address the individual within the common project.

–Consider the method of "low-skill/high-sensitivity": introduce structures that ask for low manual skills but that require a high degree of aesthetic challenge, e.g., making a sophisticated installation or minimal music improvisation while referring to the art world of today. Childish remarks will then be less likely.

The guidance of the process

The basic concept of resource-oriented consulting considers the client as the expert of the field where the problem occurs. What then is the expertise of the leader of a community art project? Besides being an excellent facilitator and counselor, the guide needs to act out of what we call an "aesthetic responsibility." This expertise is related to the methodology of "low-skill/high-sensitivity." It focuses more on the sensory awareness in the making and perception of the artistic process and less on the formalism of certain styles. The leader is attentive in seeing and hearing whatever presents itself; the leading is always close to the sensory experience: on the surface and concrete ("sense the pressure of the earth on the soles of your feet, listen to the sound of the breath, see the other dancer moving," etc). We must be the experts of the challenging process. If we are not the experts of the professional domain of the community in their workplace, then we need to guide the challenging community art process to a satisfactory result in empowering the community and intervening for the emerging work, the artistic solution. What we do is offer an alternative challenge that we help solve by enabling the members of the community to engage all their resources, focusing on the process. Here are some guidelines:

–Always guide in a manner in which you feel comfortable.

–Intervene or suggest without too much deliberation; rather, act with sensitivity, like an artist, in the moment. Do not plan for a solution of the problem at hand, otherwise you will be in a "dire straits" situation yourself. Be attentive to what emerges in the forming, and probe when you see an option in the moment of the process.

–Basic principle: always give a window of opportunity. This entails a frame and a task that is challenging but manageable, because it opens to exploratory play, at the same time restricting the material to be shaped and framing time and space to experience greater comfort. This has to be done in such a manner that curiosity is motivated and anxiety, like the horror vacui gives way to the respect of the work that emerges.

–Rules for the frame and structure: Less is M.O.R.E.: **M**aterial that is easily manageable, simple shaping **O**rganization, **R**estricted frame, give simple and clear directions for playful **E**xploration.

–Rules for the process: low-skill/high sensitivity. Participants need to experience an aes-

thetic satisfaction and success that is more connected to the sensory experience of the emerging form than to the virtuosity of manual skill. Anthropologically, these traditions are to be found in the art of making a flower arrangement, installation art, art brut, poetry slam, "sound sculptures," "washboard" rhythms, etc. It is advantageous to start with what the participants are familiar with and expand from there by sensitizing the familiar thing through motivating their curiosity (walking is a ground material of dance, the voice is the base of vocal music, etc).

–In the performing arts, we offer short time frames and work toward an improvisational piece of art. These time-frames are called "takes." If a structure begins to emerge, we have to stay with it.

–The language we use in guiding the process must stay in the tradition of the chosen discipline of art (in theatre, for instance, we talk about roles, characters, props, backdrops, scenes and plots or scripts, etc).

–In the process of probing, you may like to follow the **EESS** rule: give options to **E**xplore, give permission to **E**xperiment, stay in **S**imple language that is **S**pecific and concrete (on the surface).

–The communal artwork results from the acts, ideas and explorations of the community. The facilitators' tasks are to be alert and to observe attentively and in detail so they can give descriptive feedback as an aesthetic response.

–Staying in close contact with the participants and explicitly demonstrating what you verbally explain is helpful.

–Discussion should be avoided; rather, take up one of the suggestions and make a fast decision, explaining that we can look at it later and try other suggestions too and see what works by doing it. Art is done in the act and not in the discourse before it.

–The motivational forces are *curiosity* in the phase of exploration and functional satisfaction in the repetitive act connected to the mastery of an improvisation. Curiosity needs a framed play-range in order to explore within it, and *functional satisfaction* requires a frame to repeat and get feedback about the "takes."

–As a leader, you need to understand that you can only guide communal art-making with the necessary enthusiasm when you yourself are alert and extremely curious about what will emerge and how you will

be surprised. You are the one who has to create the atmosphere of hope for the success of the work. Remember that one does not have the hope; it needs to be created.

Joining community art with music

The music is in a dialogue with the dance or text; it is an equal partner. To achieve improvisational skills, one has to observe the following:

–Be attentive to movements, gestures, architecture, choreography, light, shadow, etc. Stay on the surface of the things you perceive. Do not go behind things, explain them, or guess at their meaning. Be a partner to the thing, the dance, the theatre, the performance happening. Remember, silence is part of music.

–The music improvised is not there to lead or illustrate. It goes with the emergent; it nourishes, goes with or against; it is just another creation in the ensemble working together for one performance.

–A good way to start on an instrument (e.g. piano, flute, kalimba, marimbaphone, etc) is to use a pattern and allow it to develop or spin off or change, similarly to the way in which a dancer develops a step or movement pattern.

–The music may well be without a beat, ametric, like a sound painting. This gives maximum freedom to the dancers. When you use a beat, stay first with a simple beat ("mother beat"), unless you have a drummer supporting it. Give freedom for the ornamentation to the others. Remember that a beat is not mechanical; it is alive; it has a lag and a drive that keep it dynamic.

The feedback culture

We always stay at the surface in giving feedback, say concretely what we have observed and do not categorize it or make interpretations about what could be "behind" it. We make sure the one to whom it is addressed knows exactly what we are talking about. We need to find out if we are understood before we go on talking too long. It is all right to use illustrative imagery to clarify our observation; however, be careful that it does not explain the observed in a reductive way.

–Speak from your own perspective: "I have seen or heard..." Stick to the material, structure or form.

–Try to formulate positively and from a position of aesthetic responsibility toward the emerging work.

–Do not judge or focus on the things that failed; rather, anchor what works.

–The leader needs to model the feedback culture for the participants.

Epilogue

Over the years, some community scores come up again and again—they become like available friends. You will notice that they grow

into their own particular character, so that when you call on them for help, they surprise you enormously. May you have the grace to allow them to hatch unexpected and sometimes strange works to open your sense-making anew.

Notes

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