

COLLECTIVE CREATION IN HIGH SCHOOL:  
THE MYSTERY STRINGPICKER AT THE DEATH CAFÉ

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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COLLECTIVE CREATION IN HIGH SCHOOL:  
THE MYSTERY STRINGPICKER AT THE DEATH CAFÉ

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the value of using collective creation in an educational setting. A review of the literature shows how the theatre of collective creation has much in common with the goals and approaches of drama educators. The journal provides a description of its use in a particular instance, as well as the teacher's experience of this process and of the students involved.

The Mystery Stringpicker at the Death Cafe was performed at a high school Drama Festival on April 7, 1987. It is the culmination of the efforts of eight teenagers and one teacher to collectively create a high school play. The collective creation process that this group used was similar to that pioneered in Canada by Theatre Passe Muraille and in Newfoundland by the Mummers Troupe. Collective creation provided these students with the opportunity to participate in theatre that was student-centered, spontaneous, and open-ended and to evaluate the process through the performance.

The teacher's journal and the transcripts of two tape-recorded discussions held by this collective group reveals an individual approach to a process that is

characterized by cooperation, empowerment, and a sense of community. These qualities demonstrated the group not only to be learning about a particular approach to theatre, but also to be creating the opportunities for themselves to develop in accordance with the Aims of Public Education for Newfoundland and Labrador. The journal is also a description of a lived experience and so allowed the teacher to experience again her thoughts and actions and reflect upon and enrich her understanding of teaching.

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## INTRODUCTION

## Purpose

This thesis embodies a description of the collective creation of a school play by a group of high school students and teacher, and an inquiry into what happened aimed at describing a practical use of the collective creation process in an educational setting.

Collective creation is a kind of theatre that has been shown to be characterized by cooperation, empowerment, development of an individual approach, and a sense of community. These qualities are held to be valuable educational experiences. This thesis intends to show that when collective creation was used by high school students and a teacher to create a school play it was characterized by these same qualities.

Of greatest personal significance is the intention to share my experience as a teacher as I come to understand more about the collective creation process, my students, and myself.

What is a collective creation? A working definition:

The simplest definition of collective creation is a play written by a group of people. Like most definitions, it says both too much and too little. To say that collective is written does not adequately describe how it is developed; its development includes much more than the literary text of the play. Most of a collective is usually developed by acting out ideas. (In fact, to say that any play is written describes it as literature, not theatre. No part of a play has to be written down or recorded, although according to Peter Brook (1968), it has to be rehearsed.) However, its simplicity makes this definition a good point of departure and it does reliably indicate that a group of people get together and invent something that they agree to share with an audience. That event, which may not be written down, is a collective creation.

This is only a point of departure, since collective creation is a rich concept that needs development more than it needs definition. As "each collective group develops its own individual approach and methodology" (Ives, 1988, p.30), the concept of collective creation changes. The approach may be a result of the political or

social commitments and concerns of the collective group, but each collective group adds its own individual knowledge to what is already known about this kind of theatre. In the same way, the group described in this thesis adds its own knowledge, particularly to what is known about this kind of theatre in an educational setting.

#### My approach

The inquiry into what happened will be made by presenting, examining, and reflecting on a journal I kept during the collective creation process and the transcripts of two tape-recorded discussions held by the collective group. In this way, this thesis intends to take the reader through the process, allowing teachers to see how it was used and the transformative reflection that was associated with it.

I present my journal as part of my thesis, although it is quite lengthy and its presentation may be considered unorthodox. My deep interest and love of collective work follows from my vocation as a teacher and director and my belief that collective creation has provided my students

with rare opportunities for learning and development. I wish to share the journal with other teachers, other directors, and students because it tells a story. For them, the story I will relate may be the most useful part of this thesis, because it is the experience of a teacher who "has been through it" and because, as a story, it will provide them with a vicarious experience. For them, like me, the story should be a highly valuable and useful resource document.

To show how I developed my understanding of the collective creation as an educational activity and as theatre, I will review what some of the most influential drama educators say about drama and theatre in the school and what the theoreticians and practitioners whose writing has influenced me say about theatre. To show how I developed my concept of collective creation, I will review the history of collective creation, especially in Canada, and the process used by Theatre Passe Muraille and The Mummers Troupe. As I reflect on these ideas and histories again, additional themes will emerge.

I believe the four characteristics here attributed to collective creation also characterize the collective

creation process I use with high school students. I am able to identify these four characteristics, not because I could enter the setting as an observer - I was already in it - but because I realized they represented my key objectives. Even so, the problem of my inquiry is the problem of phenomenological inquiry: not "that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much" (Van Manen, 1984, p.9). I know I am carrying out an activity that has educational value; I know I am bringing about experiences that have educational value: what is it about these that is valuable? I am able to identify four qualities that I intend to show shaped this process, but there may be other even more significant educational qualities that are part of this process and this experience. If only because this is my initial documented inquiry into collective creation, I cannot limit my reflection to the four key qualities. This inquiry is intended to develop a context for further study.

I will not only examine my journal and the tapes and provide a discussion on the degree to which these key qualities (and other qualities) were a part of this

process, but I will also reflect on my role in bringing them about. I intend to let this experience present itself through my journal and the tapes, and to reflect and learn from it.

The life world that I interpret is my own, but within that life world I interpret the behaviour and experiences of my students. How else do I come to act? Since "pedagogic situations are always unique" (Van Manen, 1984a, p.17) how else do I come to exercise personal autonomy over my pedagogical actions? (Van Manen, 1984a, p. 8) So although I do not investigate the experiences of my students by carrying out formal interviews or having them keep journals of their experiences, I am conscientiously aware of them and I do talk to them. I try to respond to each of them and each situation with thoughtfulness and tact. The journal and the tapes are evidence of this and my basis for discussion and reflection. This kind of thoughtful response is the way of many classroom teachers and the one with which I approach this work.

A methodological triangular design, including carrying out formal interviews and having my students keep

journals of their experiences, would have given further information to enrich my analysis. It might confirm any insights I have in their experience. The fact that this is not part of my approach makes any biases in my journal writing all the more powerful; however, a part of my experience is represented by the tapes and they provide information that is not coloured by my biases. Not only that, the presentation of my journal makes my biases (and other short-comings) self-evident. There are also advantages to my approach. Face to face encounters of the kind that I record in my journal offer the richest data source for understanding human structures of experience (Polkinghorne, 1983, p.267). My relationship with these students was already friendly and open, so what they have said to me about their experiences is likely to be undisguised (p.268) and so as data, unbiased. Biases are also addressed through the intersubjectivity of writer and reader. The value of what I say is in the response of the teacher and in the extent to which she perceives that my experience could be her experience (Van Manen, 1984, p.14). She recognizes the truth in what I have presented, and her experience validates it.



## DRAMA OR THEATRE: WHAT EDUCATORS HAVE TO SAY:

"The school play," as Robert Landy points out in Handbook of Educational Drama and Theatre, "is undoubtedly the most widely practiced form of drama and theatre in education" (1982, p.77), yet the prevalent view of drama in education<sup>1</sup>, even where it is scheduled as a subject, is that it is "a way of teaching" (Way, 1967, p.7). It is regarded as a tool for teaching children about something or as a way of developing the whole child. The methods drama educators advocated can be used with adolescents or young adults, but are more often directed towards children. Perhaps that is why this view holds that students acting something out in the classroom or outside the classroom, whether it is curricular, co-curricular, or extra-curricular, may be regarded as developmental, creative, or educational, but it should not involve an audience or rehearsal.

Educational drama is centered in the experience of the students. Even though drama in the classroom uses the art of theatre, according to Dorothy Heathcote, theatre is "contrived" (Johnson & O'Neill, 1984, p.158) and audience centered. "She thinks we press children far too early to

grow the art form of theatre" (Wagner, 1976, p.147). Only a few, according to Brian Way, are capable of theatre (Way, 1967, p.3). Peter Slade, in An Introduction to Child Drama, describes the performance of plays before audiences by thirteen to fifteen year olds as "less harmful" (1958, p.63).

Isabel Burger almost seems to lament that "there comes a time when every drama group is called upon to produce a full length play" (1966, p.80). When the time comes she recommends, as does Landy, the combining of creative and formal techniques.

Landy comments: "It is often said that educational drama is a student centered activity, involving a learning process, whereas the school play, an experience in educational theatre, represents a product that is audience centered" (1982, p.78). The notion that the school play is a product and not a process parallels the notion that "drama is not a subject" (Way, 1967, p.7), whereas theatre is.

Landy goes on to talk about the school play as relationship between product and process "within the educational experience" (p.79). He says that "it is too

simplistic to refer to the experience of rehearsal and performance as mere product" (p.78). Just as educational drama is student-centered, spontaneous, and open-ended - intended as a learning process, so the school play should be.

Spontaneity, experimentation, and process, Landy argues, must be part of the "the school play experience" (1982, p.79), just as much as practice and a production schedule must be. Much of what drama educators like Peter Slade, Brian Way, and Dorothy Heathcote, to name three of the most influential, have contributed to drama in education is valuable to the process of producing a school play. Methods in educational drama for developing spontaneity, intuition, imagination, improvisational skills, cooperation, authenticity, and the desire to pursue knowledge are as important in the theatre. In fact, the work of drama educators has much in common with developments in theatre and performance in this century. This is especially true of the theatre of collective creation.

Even so the division in the literature between educational drama and theatre in an educational setting is

clearcut. Theatre isn't for everyone, even Landy, oddly enough, argues at the end of his discourse on drama and theatre in education (1982, p.259). Drama is. Theatre is for the talented, and for those "who have made a commitment to their art" (Landy, p.259).

Clearly, this view of theatre in an educational setting is too narrow and overlooks the value of performance. It denies the opportunities for learning that collective creation may provide to those who have not yet come to see themselves (or to be seen) as talented or committed. Theatre should not be pressed upon children, but neither would a drama educator press educational drama upon a child. Beyond that, theatre in an educational setting and educational drama seem to have much in common. The broader interpretation of the work of Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote, and Gavin Bolton that follows suggests some of the parallels (and some of the contradictions) that would exist in a comparison of educational drama and theatre. The work of Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone, also discussed, demonstrates that everyone is talented and that in the study of either drama or theatre a person can uncover his talent.

Brian Way

It is Brian Way who describes drama as "a way of teaching" (1967, p.7). In his book, Development through Drama published in 1967, he describes a philosophy and method that is concerned with the development of intuition, inner resourcefulness, and imagination. His chief concern is the development of the individuality of the individual. "Drama," he says, "provides the fullest opportunity for building a really genuine confidence in oneself" (p.227).

The teacher is a "stimulator" (Way, 1967, p.255). He describes a method in which the teacher begins with concentration and sensory exercises and directs students to an awareness of their own experience. Imagination is developed through improvisation, in an atmosphere free from failure, competition, criticism, and audience reaction. "Sharing [within the class group] should not involve a change in the approach to the activity from drama to theatre" (Way, p.280). Sharing is discouraged if it jeopardizes the opportunity of a class member to participate and develop through the uniqueness of his individual personality.

Improvisation begins with suggestions developed from sensory exercises, movement, speech, or other sources offered by the group or the teacher. Whatever the source, "drama," he says, "provides the unique opportunity for bringing immediacy to any situation . . . [it] transcends information and makes of it a living experience" (1967, p.266). Way recalls:

One primary class dramatised The Pied Piper of Hamelin, and so horrified were the citizens of Hamelin at the actual experience of the rats that when the Piper returned from drowning the rats they and a very grateful mayor and corporation paid him handsomely and cheered him on his way. (p.266)

Because, for Way, drama is a way of teaching The Pied Piper of Hamelin, not a subject (for which The Pied Piper of Hamelin is a source of inspiration), the facts must be corrected. Because the impact on the participants of enacting the drama is much stronger than hearing or reading about "the new facts," Way points out that "the new facts" must be enacted as well (p.267).

Dorothy Heathcote

Best known for her in role work, Dorothy Heathcote sees the teacher not only as a stimulator, but as a participant and even an instigator of an improvisation. She takes a role to intervene, to heighten the experience of the group, and moves out of the role to create the distance needed for reflection. Wagner (1976) describes Heathcote using this approach.

She once gave a group of six year olds a drink at a party they were dramatizing. Suddenly she said in a witch like voice, "Aha! You drank my drink . . . And now you nice . . . children are my slaves . . ." She saw that this forceful utterance had a strong effect upon them, so she quickly came out of role and said with a warm smile and her normal teacher voice, "Would you like to be my slaves just to see what happens?" They agreed, so she went back into role again." (p.128)

Heathcote moves out of role to allow these six year olds to decide what they want to do. Her witch character had a strong effect upon them, heightening their experience<sup>3</sup>, but her teacher role provides distance from the dramatic experience to allow them to decide to (or not

to) participate as slaves.

She promotes the taking of risks. If students are to make as many decisions as possible, to "watch their own choices worked out in action" (Johnson & O'Neill, 1984, p.207); the teacher must be able to take the risk of trusting the capacity of students to grow in the open-ended situations she is creating. She must be an authentic teacher. The teacher involved in collectively creating theatre with her students would also be in such an open-ended situation and called upon, in this sense, to be an authentic teacher.

Heathcote identifies interest in students, sharing, defining of tasks and the accomplishment of tasks as related to an authentic climate. The teacher must have respect for students and their abilities. She must accept and use their "offers." (This approach corresponds to Johnstone's who is discussed in this section.) She must identify herself, although she is more experienced, as a member of the group able to promote cooperation and to inspire and motivate students.

Gavin Bolton



In his book Drama as Education, Gavin Bolton points out that the work of educational drama teachers continues to be misunderstood. He indicates the atmosphere in which drama educators have drawn a clearcut division between educational drama and theatre, giving an example of an eminent educator who perceives "the informal activities of the drama lesson as a regrettable compromise falling far short of the main purpose of drama, the school play" (Bolton, 1984, p.60). In this atmosphere of misunderstanding and pressure to perform, it is not surprising that drama teachers strongly defend a chance for their students to experience and learn 'informally' by establishing their activities as a departure from the formal and traditionally narrow activities involved in the production of the school play. Bolton (1984) goes on to say, however, that the message teachers found in the work of "Brian Way and Dorothy Heathcote was that the dramatic process was all important" (p.64). This focus diminished "respect for product in the form of dramatic production" and "regrettably, those who believed in the value of drama as a community enterprise gave up the struggle"(p.64).

From there, Bolton examines playing and performance

to establish a dialectic between the two. "The actor," he says, "in attempting to subject himself spontaneously to an occurrence and at the same time communicate that occurrence to an audience, is experiencing an unresolvable tension" (1984, p.122). He refers to the endless attempts by psychologists and the like to define and redefine this tension as "inner/outer reality: I/Me, Ego/Self, subjective/objective" (p.122). He compares this tension to the struggle involved when a person tries to share his private world in a social situation. He calls it finding a public voice (p.139). Bolton makes many references to these themes in work of Stanislavski; these themes also echo the work of Meyerhold, Grotowski, Brecht, and Schechner discussed in the next section.

For Bolton (1984), the connections between drama for learning and drama as an art form are significant. On the one hand, "it is a form of experiencing that 'brackets off' an occurrence" (p.142), allowing the the deconstruction of that experience. On the other hand, it is "a way of looking at something" (p.144) that exposes its meaning. Together, these are ways in which drama can transform a personal and social understanding of the

world. He mentions learning to do drama, learning about drama, learning social skills, learning language skills and learning about oneself (p.148) as legitimate purposes of drama, but its main purpose, he says, is "the development of common understanding through the exercise of basic mental powers" ( p.151). In this way, he also points to the view of drama as a "celebration of a communal identity" (p.164). A collective creation characterized by cooperation and a sense of community would then fulfill the main purpose of educational drama, and this is what I am exploring.

#### Viola Spolin

Trained as a recreational director under Neva Boyd in Chicago in the mid-1920s, Viola Spolin provided methodology for "making play the catalyst for self-expression and self-realization" ( Sweet, 1978, p.xvii). For Spolin, "the basis of creativity is personal freedom" (Carlson, 1984, p.421). Self-discovery is inhibited by the need for approval or disapproval from an "authoritarianism that has changed its face over the years from that of the parent to teacher and ultimately the

whole social structure" (Spolin, 1963, p.7-8).

Improvisation, for Spolin, is a way of liberating the self. "Since life and theatre constantly place crises and choices before us, theatre can train us in a spontaneous, natural choice of alternatives, a constant re-creation of self in response to the world, which Spolin calls transformation" (Carlson, p.421). Through Spolin's ideas, collective creation, with its transformative process and theatre product, can be connected to educational drama.

Furthering this connection, her work ignores any division between drama as a way of teaching and theatre as the subject that ought not to be taught. Sharing with audience is "an organic part of the theatre experience" (Spolin, 1963, p.13). During rehearsals, Spolin has the teacher and students become the audience for a given improvisation, so they can learn to evaluate what they see, to share their interpretation of the problem and the solution offered. This promotes the ability of the group to communicate (Spolin, 26-28).

According to Spolin (1963), "Everyone can act. Everyone can improvise. Anyone who wishes to can play in the theatre and learn to become 'stage-worthy'" (p.3).

Experience teaches. She emphasizes the learning environment and hypothesizes that what is called talent is simply a greater capacity for experiencing. Activities that promote spontaneity in that environment liberate intuitive knowledge and "talent."

This environment is one where the teacher or director does not limit herself by making judgements, where equality between teacher and student is permitted, and where close group relationships are promoted by agreement (Spolin, 1963, p.8-10). Agreement eliminates competitiveness and promotes openness. The right of the performer to choose is part of group agreement. Spolin sets out individual freedom through community responsibility as a goal (p.44).

In her use of the word talent, Spolin brings together self-discovery, the individual freedom necessary to that, and community responsibility. Although this meaning is unusual, some of the same ideas are suggested by the Biblical story of talents. The servants who used their talents gained more talents. The servant who did not use his talent did not, because he was afraid. Instead, he kept his talent hidden, and eventually lost it. His fear

of losing his talent prevented him from taking any risks, and in this way, he reneged on his responsibility to increase his talents and realized his own fear. In this story, risk-taking is necessary to multiplying talents, to self-discovery. The servants who took risks also entered the realm of social interaction, if not community responsibility. Aims of Public Education for Newfoundland and Labrador also draws a connection between self and social development.

Keith Johnstone

Keith Johnstone (1979) <sup>5</sup> began to investigate improvisation when he was invited to give classes at the Royal Court Theatre Studio in the late 1950's. He had already begun in his earlier work with the Royal Court Writer's group to operate under the principle that anything that could be acted out "should be acted, rather than discussed" (p.27). Johnstone believes that imagination is the true self and that school teaches students to suppress their imaginations, to reflect endlessly and thus to stymie any spontaneous act or even consciousness of any spontaneous thought. Students are

afraid to speak or to act spontaneously because their action may result in disapproval or failure. Because they want to give the right answer and to do the right thing, students are unable to take risks. They lose their talents. Many "normal" adults are "bitter, uncreative, frightened, unimaginative . . . damaged by their education and upbringing" (Johnstone, p.78).

Johnstone (1979) suggests that the teacher regard students not as untalented, but as "phobic" (p.31) and that the teacher present experiences in a way that ensures the success of her students (p.20). The teacher is not to impose on students, but to absolve students of responsibility for the content of their imagination until they are strong enough to assume responsibility again. Johnstone says that the first thing he does when he meets a new group of students is to tell them to blame him if they fail (p.29).

These ideas have much in common with the principles on which Spolin bases her work: the need for authoritarianism grows out of the desire for approval. She believes the need for approval is an obstacle to personal freedom, to spontaneity, and therefore to

experiencing and that the capacity for experiencing is related to talented behaviour. In this way, Spolin, with Johnstone, equates talent and spontaneity. From there, Johnstone's work provides a deeper understanding of the connection between improvisation which relies so heavily on spontaneity and cooperation.

Johnstone (1979) recalls an experiment in which businessmen were tested and shown to be very unimaginative, then asked to pretend to be "happy-go-lucky hippy types" (p.75), while they were retested. In the second test, the businessmen demonstrated themselves to be far more imaginative. Johnstone concludes that "it's possible to turn unimaginative people into imaginative people at a moment's notice" (p.75).

Impulses, according to Johnstone (1979), are rejected as psychotic, obscene, or unoriginal (p.82) in order to continue the pretence of ordinariness and unimaginativeness. "We destroy our talent" in order to make the ideas that occur to us acceptable to other people. Then "we go to the theatre to see [them] expressed" (Johnstone, 1979, p.84).

To re-construct "our talent," Johnstone (1979) takes



his students through three stages:

(1) that we struggle against our imaginations, especially when we try to be imaginative; (2) that we are not responsible for the content of our imaginations; and (3) that we are not as we are taught to think, our "personalities," but the imagination is our true self (p.105).

Johnstone explains that in stage 2 he encourages his students to free-associate by creating an environment in which students know they aren't going to be punished, or held responsible for what they imagine. Johnstone, echoing Heathcote's witch/teacher, says, "I protect students, encourage them and reassure them that they'll come to no harm, and then coax them or trick them into letting their imagination off its leash" (p.118). He doesn't encourage a group to be obscene, for example, but to be aware of ideas that occur to them.

Awareness of spontaneous thought allows students to abandon control while at the same time exercising it (Johnstone, 1979, p.142). Students choose a process that is associative or that is non-associative. An associative process may score lower on a creativity test, but it is a

narrative skill. (Johnstone devotes one of the four sections of his book, Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre, to narrative skills.) What is important is that students are free to choose either process and that if students refuse to participate, they understand that they are refusing to participate, not untalented (Johnstone, p.116).

Johnstone (1979) explains and gives examples of several games that promote cooperation. He identifies people as "Yes" sayers and "No" sayers and points out that one group can learn to behave like the other. Johnstone gives the following examples:

"Your name Smith?"

"No."

"Oh . . . Are you Brown, then?"

"Sorry."

"Well, have you seen either of them?"

"I'm afraid not."

Whatever the questioner had in mind has now been demolished and he feels fed up. The actors are in total conflict.

Had the answer been "Yes," then the feeling

would have been completely different.

"Your name Smith?"

"Yes."

"You're the one who's been mucking about with my wife then?"

"Very probably."

"Take that, you swine."

"Augh!" (p.92)

Johnstone has found that initially, most improvisers are "No" sayers. They seek control and maintenance of inner equilibrium. "Yes" sayers are ready to respond affirmatively, to accept and yield to inner and outer forces. Johnstone teaches that anything an actor does is an offer and that it can be accepted or blocked. An actor who learns to accept or approve of the suggestions of another actor learns, as Johnstone points out, that his most essential skill is his ability to release the imagination of his partner. The disapproval that an actor demonstrates to another actor "destroy[s] . . . talent" (Johnstone, p.93). Johnstone also points out that students often discover that what they use against others, they use against themselves (p.93).

## Conclusion

Although Way, Heathcote, Bolton, Spolin, and Johnstone dispute the value of theatre in the school, their insights provide a basis for the use of collective creation in an educational setting. Their approaches to the use of drama in education and to the function of the teacher are sometimes philosophically incompatible, but each approach is a rich exploration of ideas that have contributed valuable techniques. In practice, any and all approaches can be borrowed from.

Many of their ideas reflect the importance these teachers give to cooperation, empowerment, the development of an individual approach (creativity), and a sense of community and illustrate the ways in which they strive to develop these qualities in the groups of students that they work with. Collective creation, as a kind of theatre that offers the opportunity for students to experience these qualities would therefore have a strong educational value. Its process can be described as developmental, creative, and educational. There were also arguments presented for sharing with an audience. That this, too, is developmental and educational, as well an essential

part of creative expression in theatre and drama.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>This discussion excludes Theatre in Education (TIE).

<sup>2</sup>Dorothy Heathcote is a professor of drama at the University of Newcastle. She has lectured and led workshops throughout Europe and North America.

<sup>3</sup>Perhaps she has to return to her teacher role to avoid traumatizing the children.

<sup>4</sup>This is not to say that playwriting cannot evolve by, for example, recording the improvisation, but that playwriting within the improvisation violates the group agreement to be spontaneous and to be aware of each other.

<sup>5</sup>Keith Johnstone is well-known in Canada as the inventor of Theatresports. He founded The Theatre Machine, one of the most imaginative of the companies involved in improvisational work and theatre games in the sixties. In 1971, he left the Theatre Machine and began teaching in the Drama Department of the University of Calgary. In 1976, Johnstone (1979a) founded Loose Moose Theatre Company, a troupe which performed collectively written plays, improvised plays, and a new game which

Johnstone called Theatresports, competitive improvisation complete with teams, judges and scoring.

<sup>6</sup>Andy Jones is a Newfoundland actor, director, filmmaker, and member of the well-known comedy collective, Codco. His one man show, Out of the Bin illustrates this point. In it he does a routine called "the shitting pig." On the subway ride home from a performance of Top Girls at the Tarragon Theatre a few years ago, a friend and I started a discussion about what is funny. I commented that in Out of the Bin, Andy does a routine that I know you will think is disgusting, but most people find it hysterically funny." At the point where I mentioned "the shitting pig," my friend started laughing and continued laughing until we arrived at our subway stop. Then she giggled until we were home.

## THEATRE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: MY INFLUENCES.

This section will review the prominent influences in the twentieth century theatre: Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Grotowski, Brecht, and Schechner. These are the theorists whose writing has most influenced me and as I reflect on these ideas and histories again, themes that have educational significance will emerge.

A sense of the way in which collective creation grew out of these influences will be created by giving background to the emergence in the 1960's of a kind of theatre called collective creation. History, methodology, and analysis of collective creation as it appeared in English Canada in the 1970's will be interwoven to give a sense of the rich tradition of collective creation that exists in Canada. A discussion of the work of Theatre Passe Muraille in the 1970's and The Mummers Troupe exemplifies this tradition and provides a pattern for community collective creations from which theatre like Nresinan A Little Piece of Heaven and Inside 'en Out, a school play, deviates little. A discussion of these collectives indicates a Newfoundland community context.

This review of theatrical theory and of collective

creation in Canada, together with the ideas of Way, Heathcote, Bolton, Spolin, and Johnstone that have been mentioned, will be the basis of a discussion of the four characteristics that represent my key objectives and of the demonstration of those qualities in the experience of the collective group.

Konstantin Stanislavski and Vsevolod Meyerhold

Konstantin Sergeyvich Stanislavski is one of the most important theorists of the modern theatre. Born in 1865, this Russian director, actor, and teacher founded with Vladimir Nemrlovich-Danchenko the most influential and famous of the Russian theatres, the Moscow Art Theatre. Because Stanislavski wrote little about his life or work until near the end of his career, most of what he said about his own work was not available until after his death.

His reputation was well-established during his lifetime through the Moscow Art Theatre productions. Stanislavski "took his departure from a hatred of theatre and a love of truth" (Hoover, 1974, p.251). His productions of Tchekhov's plays, his greatest work as a



director, attended to realistic detail, rather than to the artifice of the popular well-made play of the nineteenth century – to psychological suggestion rather than the histrionic acting of so many Russian actors of the day (Taylor, 1966, p.265). "I know that scenery, make-up, costumes, and the fact that I have to perform my work in public," Magarshack quotes Stanislavski as saying, "is nothing but a barefaced lie" (Hoover, 1974, p.251).

Initially, realistic re-creation of the setting and portrayal of character were the ways in which Stanislavski attempted to overcome the "lie" of theatre, and reveal truth. Later he developed a system celebrated as "the method" and consisting in psychophysical processes to give the actor concentration and an inner creative state in which to relive the character's feelings and carry out the scenic action and super-objective authentically (Moore, 1960, chap. 2; Stanislavski, 1936). Stanislavski comments on the actor's responsibility to search for authenticity:

Never lose yourself on stage. Always act in your own person as an artist. You can never get away from yourself. The moment you lose yourself on the stage marks the departure from truly living your part and

the beginning of exaggerated false acting.

(Stanislavski, p.167)

In America Stanislavski's work was known primarily through the perspective offered by An Actor Prepares (published in 1936); this work confirmed Lee Strasberg's psychological interpretation of the Stanislavski approach that became the basis of the American method.<sup>1</sup> As a result Stanislavski has come to represent the ability of the actor to reveal the inner truth of psychological experience.

Just as Stanislavski has come to represent internal action or experience, so his pupil, Vsevolod Meyerhold, has come to represent external action. Born in 1874, a member of the Moscow Art Theatre from its inception, Meyerhold is one of the most prominent theatrical innovators of the twentieth century. He touted William James' theory, "Run and you will feel fear." He developed a system, bio-mechanics, and techniques like pre-acting, which taught acting as the actor and his movements. "Economy, accuracy, calculation, suppleness, and lightness in motion were the aims of the actor trained in bio-mechanics" (Gorchakov, 1969, p.133).

"Every movement is a hieroglyph with its own peculiar meaning" (Braun, 1969, p.200), according to Meyerhold. His was a theatre of physical actions. "Deprived of dialogue, costume, footlights, wings, and an auditorium, and left with only the actor and his mastery of movement, the theatre remains the theatre" (Braun, p.147). In the 1950's, Jerzy Grotowski further investigated this notion, advancing techniques that sought to develop the "holy" actor for the "poor" theatre.

While in the early years of the Moscow Art Theatre, Stanislavski was fascinated by realistic detail, Meyerhold was becoming more and more interested in theatricality and initially even conceived of setting up "a theatre as a reaction against naturalism" (Braun, 1979, p.34). In 1902, Meyerhold, with Kosheverov, did resign from the Moscow Art Theatre, and form a company of his own. However, his early productions owed much to Stanislavski whom Meyerhold copied despite the fact that philosophically he was already dissatisfied with much of Stanislavski's early production methods. His later productions used stage craft to heighten the ambivalence of the human situation and the contradiction in human expression. In Alexander

Sukhovo-Kobylin's Tarelkin's Death, first produced by Meyerhold in 1917:

Tarlekin, bound hand and foot in prison and frantic with thirst, tried in vain to reach a cup of water held by the warder - then suddenly he winked broadly at the audience and took a long draught from a bottle of wine that he had concealed in his pocket. (Braun, 1979, p.178)

Meyerhold, in a moment of theatricality that illustrates Brecht's alienation effect, offered the human condition in all its possibilities.

It is often supposed that while Meyerhold was telling his actors, "Run and you will feel fear," Stanislavski was instructing his actors to explore fear through techniques such as emotional memory and to discover running as an outward expression of that inner psychology; however, according to Boris Zakhava, who studied with both Stanislavski and Meyerhold and trained in both systems, Stanislavski, as well as Meyerhold, was teaching his actors to act physically. Stanislavski "never wearied of repeating to them, 'Act physically and be sure the feeling will come of itself'" (Hoover, 1974, p.75).

Jerzy Grotowski: integrating experience and expression

Jerzy Grotowski represents the integration of inner truth, psychological experience and outer expression: Stanislavski's spontaneity of daily life and Meyerholdian discipline. In 1959, Grotowski founded the Polish Laboratory Theatre in Opole, in south-west Poland. In 1965, the Theatre Laboratory moved to the university town of Wroclaw where it continued to carry out its research in theatrical art and, more specifically, in the art of the actor.

Grotowski revived Stanislavski's notion of penetrating a role. By making every aspect of the role necessary (Eugene Vakhtangov thought Stanislavski and Meyerhold had the same objective - to eliminate everything trivial), the actor justified or penetrated a role. The more we become absorbed in what is hidden inside us," Grotowski (1968) says in Towards A Poor Theatre, "in the excess, in the exposure, in the self-penetration, the more rigid must be the external discipline; that is to say the form, the artificiality, the ideogram, the sign. Here lies the whole principle of expressiveness" (p.39).

Grotowski attempts "to eliminate his [the actor's] resistance to the psychic process. The result is a freedom from the time lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse is already an outer reaction" (p.16). Thus, in the theatre "to understand is to know how" (Melik-Zakhavrov & Bogatyrev, 1963: p.14). The imagination of the brain and the imagination of the body result in organic transformation of behaviour, gesture, posture, and voice (Melik-Zakhavrov & Bogatyrev, p.14). For Grotowski (1968), the essential contradiction of theatrical process (represented by Stanislavski - inner action - and Meyerhold - external action) is exposed and resolved in "the closeness of the living organism" (Grotowski, 1968, p.41).

In the seventies, Grotowski began with the Laboratory Theatre group paratheatrical work, work that no longer delineated between actor and audience, but offered to participants experiences that had previously been the domain of the actor, such as releasing "inhibiting organic reactions" (Kumiega, 1985, p.175), reorganizing impulses or motives in yourself, and exploring forms of contacts between people (Kumiega, p.175). Grotowski's concern was

authenticity and the promotion of direct experience. "The real challenge is life" (Kumiega, p.184).

Paratheatrical work broke down metaphor and philosophy and replaced it with the tangible and practical. Of the Mountain Project, one of Grotowski's paratheatrical works, he said, "The Mountain is something we aim towards . . . [It] is a kind of test" (Kumeiga, 1985, p.187), but the project also dealt with a real mountain. Learning not to imitate or pretend (to resign from acting), but to experience, to participate, to do the simplest actions: this is the aim of the the "actor" of the Laboratory Theatre or paratheatrical project.

Stanislavski, Meyerhold, and Grotowski all point to areas of investigation for the actor. All offer systems and methods; however, as Grotowski has pointed out, systems do not inspire:

Anything that has been a general formula for everybody has already missed the point; it is a device for creating new slogans, and to make people believe that these are new truths. There remains what exists solely on the level of an appeal for an individual, a concrete appeal in the context of their

life and their experience. For another individual, it will already be something different." (Kumiega, 1985, p.238)

The conflict represented by Meyerhold and Stanislavski of inspiration and discipline, coupled with the work offered by Grotowski all point to the problem of spontaneity, of truth, of presence, of "nowness" in action. The investigation is the actor's. He investigates his own experience and looks for authenticity in his expression of his experience. Bolton (1984) writing about education also points out how the actor's art reflects a human struggle. He talks about the resolution of this struggle in the discovery of a public voice, allowing a person to share his private world in a social situation (p.122). Where theatre provides this opportunity to students, it provides them with the opportunity to develop as "both private individuals and as members of human society" (Aims of Public Education for Newfoundland and Labrador, 1959).

These areas of investigation can be explored through the collective creation process and they are actor- or performer- or student- centered. When mystical, hysterical, elliptical statements associated with art and



artists provoke, the truth is measured against human internal response: this is validation for proceeding intuitively. It is also validation for centering the theatrical process in the actor or performer or student.

The notion of an actor-centered theatre challenges Heathcote's notion of an audience-centered theatre. It aligns this kind of theatre, like collective creation, with the development of the uniqueness of the individual, with self-discovery, and with a curriculum for self-actualization. Thus it also aligns itself with Way, Spolin, and other educators.

#### Bertolt Brecht

In Bertolt Brecht's theatre, on the other hand, the society of which both the performers and spectators are a part is presented and their perceptions transformed through reason. The investigation is not resolved in the authentic expression of individual experience, but in the critical examination of social and political human interaction for the purposes of revolution. Performers and spectators are educated, empowered by the possibilities of alterable action, liberated from the

authority of a society which they have internalized.

About 1926, Brecht – a playwright, a director, and theoretician, began to develop his ideas about a new drama he called "epiches Drama" that would "be addressed to reason instead of empathy" (Carlson, 1984, p.383). While the Dramatic Form requires the spectator to suspend belief, to accept the action (script) as unalterable, the Epic Form would require the spectator to perceive the action critically (instead of empathetically) as alterable, and to "consider other possibilities and to judge between them" (Carlson, p.383).

Brecht considered the Epic theatre to be a political theatre, struggling against the suppression of change and calling on the spectator to make decisions that would transform his world. He saw theatre as the instrument of revolution.

Brecht's discussion of Verfremdung or alienation is one of his most important contributions to theatrical theory. Although he did not create the concept (Carlson, 1984, p.385), the influence his exploration of the V-Effekt or alienation effect has had has made his name synonymous with it. Brecht used the alienation of a

character or the historicizing of an everyday event to alienate the spectator from the situation represented or from his sympathy for the character. Brecht's intention was to make a character or an event that might be ordinary or familiar, strange. He wanted to produce surprise, to arouse curiosity, and promote questioning.

The action of the script was divided into opposing episodes - what is referred to in film as montage (and is often used to describe Brecht's techniques), that were intended to polemicize, to galvanize the spectators into decision-making. "By means of a certain interchangeability of circumstances and occurrences the spectator must be given the possibility (and duty) of assembling, experimenting and abstracting" (Willett, 1964, p.60).

Actors did not become their characters; instead, they presented them. The spectators encountered not only a character, but the actor's attitude towards the character. The actor was to make himself "observed standing between the spectator and the event" (Willett, 1964, p.58), creating a critical distance that allowed the spectator the freedom to see the event as one of a range of

possibilities.

Richard Schechner

After the 1970's, American theory began to describe theatre as a performed art. Richard Schechner (1977), present editor of The Drama Review, is probably the most influential of the American theatre theorists who began to investigate performance, "the upsetting idea of art as an event - an actual" (p.5). In his book, Essays on Performance Theory 1970-1976, he describes theatre as the event enacted by performers and performance as the range of human activity surrounding the performed event, affecting the event, and including the event:

The coming and going of both audience and performers guarantees (in Goffman's usage) the existence of the "theatrical frame" so the events can be experienced as *actual reactualizations*: in other words, the reality of the performance is in the performing; a spectator need not intervene in the theatre to prevent murder as he might feel compelled to do in ordinary life - this is because the violence on stage is actually a performance. That doesn't make it

"less real" but "different real." Theatre, to be effective, must maintain its double presence as a *here and now performance of there and then events*. The gap between "here and now" and "there and then" allows for an audience to contemplate the action, and to entertain alternatives, for drama is the art of enacting only one of a range of virtual alternatives. It is a luxury usually unaffordable in real life; and very educational. (p.122)

The gap between the here and now presence of the spectators that allows for their reflection on the there and then action is presented here as an assumption that is part of the spectator's understanding of theatre, while for Brecht alienation of the spectator from the there and then events by emphasizing the here and now aspects of performance such as lighting, scenery, and presentation of characters (as opposed to being characters), was an objective.

So the transformational aspect of performance, the awareness the human being has of his own incompleteness intensified in the performance of rigid or completed speech and gestures, has presumably become a part of our

understanding of contemporary theatre (as it recovers its traditional significance). Why not, since it had been, at the time of the publication of Schechner's book, about forty years since the publication of Brecht's major theoretical work? The audience has presumably escaped the authoritarianism of staged experience, acknowledging it as only one of a range of virtual alternatives.

It is evident, however, that either here and now or there and then can be emphasized to encourage empathetic identification with enacted experience or analytic deconstruction of presented event. It is also evident that the interacting contradiction between completion and incompleteness, discipline and spontaneity is not only a dynamic of performing — the principle of expressiveness; it is also a dynamic of performance, the interaction of "the spontaneous attentiveness of a spectator and the planned participation of a performer" (Schechner, 1977, p.152). For Grotowski experience in paratheatrical has provided a resolution; for Schechner the ritualization of theatre has provided a resolution. (Simplified, everyone becomes an actor/performer or everyone becomes a spectator/participant.)

Schechner's insights explain how the contradictory visions of Grotowski and Brecht exist in performance, although if neither predominates, the theatre realizes neither vision. (That does not matter; it will realize some vision.)

The principle of expressiveness requires the empathetic understanding of the spectator. It is not really "requiring," since this principle underlies all human expression through performance. Anyway, a usual state of antipathetic misunderstanding could be described as psychopathic. The spontaneous attentiveness of the spectator demonstrates that while he may be naturally empathetic, he is aware of his own spontaneous presence at an event where those that elicit his empathetic response are performing according to a plan. He escapes the authority of the experience of this plan as unalterable that his own sentimental nature may have encouraged, by acknowledging that he is a source of spontaneity in the theatre. He gives his attention to the event so that it can proceed. His experience is individual; his cooperation is social. He knows it as a ritual for reconstruction. It is a collective event in which he

chooses to participate. He experiences it. It transforms him.

"Transformation is at the heart of theatre" (Schechner, 1977, p.66). Schechner (1977) talks about the theatre workshop. It offers, like other workshops, "a way of playing around with reality" (p.60). There reality can be restructured, reordered, fragmented, and recombined, and ultimately transformed in order that the community can survive (p.60-61). This connection of the theatre workshop to the survival of the community deepens the notion of a sense of community identified as a key characteristic of collective creation and one of my own educational objectives.

When Schechner (1977) refers to the theatre workshop, he includes the rehearsal. "The theatre," he says, "is unique in that it is always undergoing the rehearsal process. Even the most traditional works...are rehearsed" (p.134). The process of rehearsal is one in which the work is re-worked until it is acceptable for showing. In the theatre, however, this re-working process continues even after the work is "complete." Schechner concludes, "rehearsals and recollections - preplay and afterplay -



converge in the theatrical event.

Transforming the work after it is complete raises the issue of evaluation. Instead of comparing the work to other works or establishing a standard, abolishing "any cultural, historical or evolutionary perspective" (Schechner, 1977, p.133), Schechner says, "one must fold the work back on itself, comparing its completed state to the process of inventing it, to its own internal procedures during that time when it was not ready for showing" (p.134). The ability to evaluate is one the most complex cognitive skills that students can acquire, yet it is one of the basic aims of education - to develop students' "abilities to think critically" (Aims of Public Education for Newfoundland and Labrador, 1959). The process of evaluation Schechner advocates is one which the participants would be the expert evaluators. This alone would make it an appealing and appropriate way of evaluating the performance of a collective creation.

#### Collective Creation: the Living Theatre

In 1968, during the student uprisings in Paris, the Avignon festival was challenged in an open letter from

young theatre radicals. "Treize questions aux organisateurs et aux participants du festival d'Avignon" condemned the idea of culture that reserved it for those that could pay. "It called for a theatre of 'collective creation' with no schism between artistic activities and 'political, social, and everyday events'" (Carlson, 1984, p.471).

These concerns reflected those of the Living Theatre who participated in the occupation of the national theatre, the Odeon, and who sought a collectively created theatre by a community of performers freed from the oppression of a director. The Living Theatre founded in 1947 by Judith Malina and Julian Beck became one of the best known experimental groups of the 1960's. By the time of the May uprising in Paris, it was already well on the way to making its "name synonymous with collective expression, strong political commitment, theatre ritual, ceremonial mystical rites . . ." (Gelber, 1986, p.20).

In the initial years, the Living Theatre had presented authored works. During these years, they were inspired by Brecht.<sup>2</sup> Later, the Becks became interested in the work of Artaud. His vision had more in common with

the political anarchism that inspired their productions. By the time of the 1964-1968 European exile, the Living Theatre had moved on to the collective creation process. In 1970, the Living Theatre collective renewed its commitment to street theatre.

Karen Malpede suggests the scope of the Living Theatre's commitment to the collective and the community:

One of the reasons that the Living Theatre had such a ritual impact on the audience, [is] because in order to have a ritual you must really speak to a community. The Living Theatre has always, I think, seen part of its work as the creation of community as well as the making of theatre events, and this community in New York and all over the world, is a wonderful web and network of diverse people who all want peace, immediately. (Smith, 1986, p.111)

The nature of theatre is collaborative whatever the theoretical or philosophical view. Yuri Zavadsky in his introduction to K. Stanislavsky 1863-1963 has Stanislavski commenting: "The theatre, 'said Stanislavsky', is collective creation" (Melik-Zakharov & Bogatyrev, p.15). Although Stanislavski was not identifying a kind of

alternative theatre, it is interesting that this term is attributed to him to indicate his concern that his actors demonstrate "a generosity of spirit," aware of themselves as more than "a collection of individuals," as a company (Melik- Zakharov & Bogatyrev, p.15).

In 1972, The Drama Review published "Collective Creation" by Theodore Shank examining the process of collective creation as "the method of conceiving and developing works in the alternative theatre" (p.3). He identifies the basis of the work (like Stanislavski) as the cooperation of a collective, although he puts strong emphasis on the role of the group leader. He names the creation of the work from inception to realization through a single process as the most significant difference between collective creation and traditional methods and says that improvisation is its "principal technique" (p.4).

Sometimes the improvisational exercises themselves become the performance. Despite the use of improvisation by nearly every group, each develops its own unique method that may change somewhat from work to work as they experiment with new conceptions

and new means of expressing them. One of the chief ways their methods differ [from traditional methods] is in the source of or the means of discovering an inventive idea for a piece - (1) from exercises (2) from a social, political, or aesthetic problem (3) from a text or painting (4) from working with an object or material; or (5) from a script by someone within the group. The groups also vary in their means of developing the piece - through discussion, research, improvisation. And they are also distinguished by the circumstances of performance, which may be completely determined in rehearsal and set before performance, may be improvised within a scenario, and may involve spectators. (Shank, p.4)

While Shank characterizes the collective creation by its techniques, the work of the Living Theatre characterizes it by its commitments. Collective creation has its roots in commitment to community "all over the world" and to world peace. These are certainly much more expansive versions of the key characteristics - a sense of community and cooperation. The Living Theatre's political anarchism of which the rejection of the authority of a

director was a part indicates the strong political roots of the key characteristic - empowerment. At least three of the four characteristics are qualities of experience to which a group commits itself, rather than techniques which it uses. So the degree to which three of these qualities characterize the collective creation process is dependent upon the value members of the collective group are able to place on these qualities. If the teacher teaches much like the one in Paulo Freire's (1988) description of "banking education," these qualities cannot be brought about. They require the commitment of the students. This implies that I would have had to reject the authoritarianism of my director and teacher role in order that the students could be free to make or reject these commitments.

#### Collective creation in Canada

Although the collective creation is not unique to Canada, what is exceptional about the collective creation process in Canada is that it has become a pervasive theatrical method rather than a method of the alternate theatre. In Canada, its methodology derived from a

commitment to nationalism.

Collective methods were introduced to Canada at a time when very little Canadian work was being produced. Producing a Canadian play was considered a political act (Wallace, 1988, p.10). This atmosphere resulted in the bizarre position of alternative theatre in Canada. It was alternative, a reaction against the prevalent colonial mentality of the time. It was nationalist, a way of articulating a Canadian voice (Filewod, 1987, 1989). Thus its subsequent widespread use as a method of creating theatre combined with its use as a method for articulating a Canadian voice has resulted in its association with what is Canadian about Canadian theatre.

Adding to the contrariness of this subject is the nature of nationalism in Canada. The Canadian policy of decentralization has resulted in a country in which nationalism is regionalism. So in 1972, the alternative theatre was a nationalist theatre. Outside of Toronto, this meant the alternative theatre was a regional theatre.

Of course, in many of the regions, especially Newfoundland, there was no established professional theatre to be alternative to. In his book, A Public

Nuisance: A History of the Mummers Troupe, Chris Brookes

(1988) explains:

Lynn and I had already approached the Canada Council theatre Section for [financial] help . . . We were, they said, clearly an "alternate" theatre. Alternate theatres were supposed to exist as an alternative to an establishment theatre, and there was, they pointed out, no establishment professional theatre in Newfoundland. Ergo, we were illegitimate. Before they could consider assisting us, they would have to create an establishment regional theatre in the province to make our existence viable. (p.69)

Brookes goes on to comment that The Mummers Troupe "was not an alternative theatre, but a real regional theatre" (p.70).

So the Canadian collective creation tradition in English Canada demonstrates a commitment to the historicizing of Canadian culture and to the documentation of Canadian history. Collective creation was used to make a kind of Epic drama, but not necessarily in Brecht's sense.



## Theatre Passe Muraille and The Mummers Troupe

Many interesting Canadian collectives and collective creations could be mentioned. This short explication of the Canadian collective creation tradition in English Canada looks at only Theatre Passe Muraille and The Mummers Troupe, focusing on the tradition established in the seventies when the collective process was so widely used that, as has been pointed out, it seemed that it was what was Canadian about Canadian theatre. At that time, Theatre Passe Muraille and The Mummers Troupe were chief among the companies that pioneered the collective techniques that Canadian theatre companies continue to work with.

Much of the early collective work in English Canada was created by Paul Thompson at Theatre Passe Muraille. Paul Thompson thought that Canada could be described as "culturally imperialized" (Johns, 1973, P.30-32), and that American and English heroes were no longer good enough. It was time for Canadians to create their "own mythology" (Michael Ondaatje's film, The Clinton Special, 1974).

The quintessential collective creation of the 1970's, The Farm Show, was produced by Theatre Passe Muraille in

1972. It introduced a process that seemed to be, as Mary Walsh puts it, "the perfect Canadian form" (personal communication, March 15, 1989). Actors moved to Clinton, Ontario, 120 miles outside of Toronto, and lived there for six weeks, attempting to integrate themselves into the community, and built the show out of their experiences.

When Mary Walsh - a member of The Farm Show cast that toured the show to Dublin - calls collective creation "the perfect Canadian form," it is because she is defining collective creation as a "composite of documentary forms and journalism, that falls down on the drama" (personal communication, March 15, 1989). By doing so she identifies a peculiarity of the Canadian collective documentaries of the seventies. It emphasized here and now, forcing the audience to perceive the action critically, rather than empathetically (See pp. 43-45).

There is a connection between this Brechtian characteristic and Paul Thompson's training. Thompson's collective techniques - the techniques that were responsible for much of the early collective work in English Canada, were a result of his training with the director, Roger Planchon (Goffin, 1982, p.84; Usmiani,

1983, p.45). According to Carlson, Planchon was "one of Brecht's strongest supporters" (1984, p.471) in a post-1960's era in which Brecht's influence seemed about to be obscured. Planchon stood against the erosion of text, dialogue, and rationality that he perceived in the theories of Artaud and in the work of Grotowski.

Paul Thompson was certainly committed to the historicizing of Canadian culture. Theatre Passe Muraille made Epic dramas of everyday events, but not entirely in Brecht's sense or in keeping with his philosophy of what the theatrical function is. Thompson did not explore the political possibilities of theatre, beyond presenting "the significance of shared historical or community experience" (Filewod, 1987, p.viii). Thompson's theatre was not, as was Brecht's theatre, an instrument for revolution (Usmiani, 1983, chap.3 & 5). Yet, aside from the historicizing of the present to create a national mythology, the action was usually episodic (montage), and the characters, presented.

Despite the "Brechtian" structures of the Canadian collective creation epitomized by Theatre Passe Muraille, critical perception of the time saw The Farm Show, for

example, as demonstrating the "formlessness" of most of the 1970's collectives. Filewod remembers its boast that it "just bounces along one way and another and then it stops" (1988, p.3), seemingly confirming these critical misgivings. The "apparent formlessness," Filewod points out, concealed "an often intricate substructure" that criticism deferring to the primacy of literary text could not discern. To appreciate a substructure of this nature required an understanding of script as action – the possibilities of "theatrical" montage, of theatre as performance – the gap between here and now and there and then, and of the collectiveness of collective creation – a kind of theatre that transforms a sense of community.

This critical perception not only denied the value of collective creation as text – of a performance, and misunderstood it as performance (to which text may be irrelevant), but it also ignored its politics, the collectiveness of the collective creation. (The political possibilities of the theatre of collective creation is exemplified by the radical, theatrical pacifist anarchism of the Living Theatre.)

Perhaps the benign politics of Theatre Passe Muraille

that thought it "political enough" to produce Canadian theatre (Robert Wallace, 1988, p.10-11) contributed to lack of critical perception in English Canada of the theatre of collective creation as social and political, as well as artistic reconstruction.<sup>4</sup> More likely, of course, this lack of perception is due to critical inadequacy. For though the tradition of French Canadian collective creation and of Newfoundland collective creation is more radical, Theatre Passe Muraille's commitment to community is not weaker, but different.

The Farm Show was the source of most of the examples of an intricate substructure - that is not a literary structure - that follow. These examples suggest how improvisational approaches, those of the drama educators discussed earlier for instance, can be used to structure a play. Since The Farm Show is the quintessential collective creation from the 1970's, the decade in which the Canadian collective tradition was built, conclusions about the collective creation drawn from this discussion may be considered reliable.

The substructure was episodic, rather than narrative; sometimes improvised, rather than set. In a scene in

Theatre Passe Muraille's Doukhahours an actor had to convince other actors to join "the naked parade." Actors were not to take off their clothes unless they were convinced. The script was not set.

Events were performed, mimed, or told directly to the audience, rather than realistically re-enacted. The Farm Show begins with "Auction Song," and includes an enactment of a Clinton town council meeting introduced by an actor in this way:

We went to two township council meeting.. What we expected was a large public meeting something like this (indicates the stage and audience) but what we went into was a large room behind a garage with a group of farmers sitting around a table. Now these men do all the business for Hullett township.

They were pretty surprised to see us and asked if we had any questions. We said, "No. But can we sit and watch?"

This is an impression of the two meetings we saw. (Act 11, Scene VI1. Township Council)

In a couple of scenes actors mimed that they were tractors. In Act 1, scene XI, entitled "Man on a

Tractor," three actors form a tractor, making appropriate tractor sounds. They carry a fourth, the driver.

Actors not only suggested their attitude towards the characters they presented, but even spoke to the audience as themselves about their characters, often referring to the rehearsal process. In Act One, scene five, Bale scene of The Farm Show, an actor entered carrying a straw bale and told the audience:

As part of the preparation for this play, we wanted to go around to some of the different farmers and see if we could help with the work. So one afternoon me and another fellow had the opportunity to help Mr. Mervin Lobb with his haying.

What follows is a description of one actor's experience loading bales of hay into a wagon and into a mow. He summed up the experience for the audience: "Why would any human being choose, for the better part of his life, twice a year, to put himself through that total and utter hell?"

All of these examples show how collective creation is actor-centered. Because the structure is episodic, it easily allows the actor's experience direct course to performance. Actors improvise machines with their bodies,

rather than having them constructed by a craftsman. They act out their own experiences, taking the part of someone they have met or playing themselves. Sometimes they simply tell the audience about an experience they had researching the show. This places the power to create, to make political, social, or artistic statements, in the hands of the actors. Collective creation empowers the actor.

The more radical Mummers Troupe set out to explore the political possibilities of theatre, theatre as revolution. Chris Brookes founded the Mummers Troupe in 1972 with the intention of presenting useful theatre (Soucotte, 1976). The company saw themselves more as social activists than performers. Usmiani calls the troupe "the militant Mummers" (1983, chap. 5) and describes Brookes' goal as "a theatre of political agitation" (p.91). In A Public Nuisance, Brookes (1988) describes the Mummers Troupe: "During most of its ten year life, the Mummers Troupe was the leading edge of the political theatre movement in English Canada. . . . the Mummers . . . developed a theatre intended primarily for community development and social animation" (p.xii).



The Mummers Play from which The Mummers Troupe derived its name and on which it built its style (Brookes, 1988, p.46) originates in antiquity. At the time of its revival by Brookes, it had not been performed in most of Newfoundland in a hundred years. The hobbyhorse that Brookes calls the only Newfoundland folk puppet is connected to Dionysian ritual. Its use was outlawed by The Council of Auxerre, 573-603 (Kirby, 1975: p.145), and by 1200, condemned by the church in tales that reported "a boy disguised as a hobby horse . . . persisted in willing for the "usual play" until a fire sprang out of the ground and burned him up on the spot" (Kirby, p.146). In St. John's mummering is also condemned; it's illegal. There began a radical political history and theatrical style based on a "weird mixture of Kabuki, Commedia, and Brecht" (Brookes, 1988, p.48).

In productions like I.W.A., Gros Morne, and Company Town: The Story of Buchans, the Mummers Troupe made political or social issues the structure. For example, Gros Morne was a vehicle for protest, not a community portrait of Sally's Cove. Brookes exploited the issue of resettlement for social animation.

While Theatre Passe Muraille documented experience, allowing the structure and meaning to be made out of the collective experience, the Mummers sometimes documented an issue that had a story line. I.W.A. was about the 1959 strike by Newfoundland loggers that ended in the death of a policeman. It did not demonstrate an interest on the part of the Mummers Troupe in creating plot; when the Mummers investigated the issue, they found a plot.

Theatre has "the ability to galvanize an audience into a community by providing it with a mirror of its concerns" (Wallace, 1988, p.13). Sandra Gwyn said of I.W.A., "when the powerful story line and characters were allowed to develop on their own, I.W.A. broke through to its audience like nothing I've ever seen before in theatre" (Gwyn, 1976, p.44).

Gwyn goes on to describe the reaction of two wives of the loggers:

When the play gets to the sequences Donna [Butt] worked out, where she plays a striker's wife who changes gradually from a shy homebody to a fiery militant who takes her husband's place on the picket line when he goes to jail, the two women sit bolt

upright. Almost before the scene ends they start clapping. Then they turn and put their arms around each other. (p.38)

She says seeing I.W.A. gave these women a sense of importance.

The dramatic life of a collective creation usually derives from the actor's intense commitment to the people he portrays resulting from his personal involvement. Donna Butt recalls how one woman she interviewed for I.W.A. admonished, "Now for God's sake missus, don't make fun of us" (Gwyn, 1976, p.38).

The commitment of the actor to the people he portrays is the heart of The Farm Show. In Michael Ondaatje's film, The Clinton Special, David Fox expresses his fears that The Farm Show was superficial. Living in Clinton for a mere six weeks cannot give an actor a clear picture of what it is like to be a farmer and who these people are. This may be a legitimate criticism, but it is definitely a vivid demonstration of the concern of an actor to present people as they are. Again, as in the case of the Living Theatre, collective creation is characterized by commitment. This time by the commitment of the individual.

actor, rather than the collective group.

Essentially the collectives The Mummers Troupe created, like The Farm Show, came straight out of the interviews the actors conducted. The presentation of characters allowed the audience direct contact with the power of these stories and the actor's commitment. The actor was not creating illusion; instead, he was presenting a story he had been told by a real person and his own attitude towards that story.

During rehearsals of Company Town: The Story of Buchans, Brookes set up an improvisation in which a miner goes to a watch presentation ceremony. Peter Nofall, a retired driller and a recipient of the ASARCO 25-year watch who had refused to attend the ceremony, participated in the improvisation. He improvised a speech which Brookes taped. The following is an excerpt from Peter's speech:

I came here when I was thirty-three and in the prime of life. I gave the best years of my life to the American Smelting and Refining Company. After twenty-five years, I am given a watch. . . . Does this compensate after more than twenty-five years of

service to this company? NO! Definitely NOT! I will not, I never intend, EVER to put it on my arm and I never will. (Brookes, 1988, p.119-120)

The speech that Peter made was placed in the play verbatim.

Whether they are Peter's words, the words of someone the performer encountered, or the words of the performer in an improvised situation, they are real words. These words were not encountered on a page: they were spoken and heard. Speaking comes before scripting .

To underestimate the impact of the "real" words of real people, is to misunderstand the collective creation. "What you get in a collective," according to Mary Walsh, (personal communication, March 15, 1989), "is a life and energy . . . that comes out of . . . a commitment . . . that people have to their own words. . . . You are saying what you said. . . . This is the way you said it, and you're saying it and you're there on stage doing it."

To underestimate action and gesture is to underestimate something that communicates when words are inadequate. From the human tractors of The Farm Show to the hobbyhorse of The Mummies' The Mummies Play, the

collective creation tradition developed by these companies was not only a theatre of real words, but of symbolic and ritual action. The importance of real words, gesture, and symbolic action in the work of these companies, again, place power in the actor's hands. He is not the medium of the playwright or the instrument of the director. It is theatre created from his own experience and created through his own expression.

#### Collective creation and collaboration

Today, performers, in Canada, collaborate.

Collaborations define creation as a process and kind of theatre where the hierarchy of creation can be restructured. Paul Thompson points to Robert LePage (personal communication, June 30, 1989). By writing, acting, designing, and composing the piece, LePage creates theatre that "ranges from the technological orgy of *Vinci* to the austere settings and props of *La Trilogie des dragons*" (Lefebvre, 1987, p.30). A technological orgy is more sophisticated than pretending to be tractors, no doubt, but the vision of collectiveness and inventiveness survives. LePage describes theatre as a collective event

(Hunt, 1989), wherein lies its strength and its ability to "mobilize people to change things" (Lefebvre, 1987, p.32). He says, "To create my shows, I give myself entire freedom . . . we explore, we improvise, we follow our intuitions" (Paul Lefebvre, 1987, p. 33).

While collaborations are the order of the day, collective creation survives and with it a theatrical function prescribed by its collectiveness. L. Patricia Ives (1988) writes about feminist theatre group, Nightwood Theatre:

While each collective develops its own individual approach and methodology, in most cases the creation is inspired by a particular social or ideological interest and developed through research and improvisation. More significantly, the project is from its inception a true collaboration, generated and performed by a collective of individuals. This approach is revolutionary, as it denies the traditional supremacy of the single authorial voice by incorporating equally the interests and concerns of the group. (p.30)

Popular theatre in Canada, such as the participatory

theatre of Edmonton's Catalyst Theatre and the presentational public shows and social animation performances of Vancouver's Headlines Theatre, evolved out of the collective creations of the seventies (Barnet, 1987, p.5). Both Theatres - Headlines Theatre works with Auguste Boal's theatre of the oppressed techniques: the theatre as a rehearsal for revolution and Catalyst Theatre works with dramatic characterization and uninterrupted action that "evoke the real world outside the theatre" (Barnet, p.5) - seek to animate the spectators or specific spectator groups. This a theatre for political reordering through the empowering of the spectator.

#### Recent community collectives

In Newfoundland, the Canadian collective tradition of celebrating community identity continues, not only within the theatre community, but also within the schools. Ntesinan and A Little Piece of Heaven, both productions of Resource Centre for the Arts in St. John's, indicates the scope of the community collective creation over the past three years. A brief discussion of the work of several schools in Labrador and one in Manuels indicates that



collective writing is used to produce school plays in a number of schools in Newfoundland.

Nresinan, directed by Mary Walsh, concerned the clash between the culture of the Innu in Sheshatshit and the white man, a clash that has occurred because of the encroachment of white man on Innu land, and that has resulted in confusion, alcoholism, poverty of spirit, and despondency among Innu young people. Mary Walsh with Gerald Lunz travelled to Sheshatshit at a time when twelve hunters and a Roman Catholic priest were confronting laws that prevented Innu hunters from hunting caribou without a license and out of season. In Sheshatshit, Walsh worked with Innu "actors" to create the community collective creation, Nresinan. In May, 1987, Edward Nuna, Jack Penashue, Clementine Andrew, and Anastasia Andrew of Sheshatshit and Gerald Lunz of Ottawa performed Nresinan in St. John's ("Production looks," 1987) and toured with it to the mainland.

In 1989, Charles Tomlinson moved to Trepassey for several months to help people of that community create A Little Piece of Heaven, a collective creation about the fishery, particularly the trawler industry. While

Sheshatshit was the site of a political battle when Walsh arrived, this was not the case when Tomlinson arrived in Trepassey. Ntesinan ends with a comment on low level flying made by allowing the audience to experience the intensity of the sound. A Little Piece of Heaven ends on a much more sentimental note, a song about the attachment Newfoundlanders feel to their homeland. Ntesinan makes a political statement, while A Little Piece of Heaven is a story of family life in Trepassey, examining the drama of human life connected to the sea.

Both of these collective creations used non-actors who were community members. Both were theatrical responses to the community outside of the community of the collective group of non-actor "actors." The responses of both the collective groups to their community resulted in theatrical statements about cultural preservation. By performing outside of their own communities, both of these collective groups shared their sense of their own community, allowing an audience to reflect on (interact with) the statements that they made about their social and political understanding of their community.

There is not only an on-going collective creation

tradition in Newfoundland theatre, but also several instances of collective writing and collective creation in Newfoundland schools. In 1989, Town: The Epic a collective creation created and performed by students of Holy Spirit School in Manuels at the Avalon East High School Drama Festival was selected to participate in the Provincial High School Drama Festival. Students and teachers in Labrador schools in Davis Inlet, Black Tickle, and Labrador City collectively wrote school plays.

In a teleconference sponsored by the Labrador East School Board and hosted by Tim Borlase, on June 14, the writing processes described by Lewis Byrne (Davis Inlet), Terry Casey (Black Tickle), and Adrian Rogers (Labrador City) varied. They almost never involved improvisation, but included "brain-storming," extensive discussion and evaluation. For example, after several weeks of work, some groups invited adults to offer an evaluation of their work. Students' participation in decision-making was perceived as an important aspect of the writing process. This illustrates an interest in empowering students and promoting autonomy.

Terry Casey was the teacher member of a group that

created Inside 'en Out, an issue-oriented story that was developed from interviews group members held with fishermen, the wives of fishermen, and R.C.M.P officers. Once the play was created, it was cast. Many of the students who had participated in the collective writing of the script were cast as characters.

The sense of community that a collective group had might be examined by defining the community as the group. In the case of Inside 'en Out and Town: The Epic, which exploited a storyline to satirize "townies" from the perspective of those who live "past the overpass," the community was not only the collective group, but was also the community the collective group represented. Both of these productions are a celebration of a community identity that extends beyond the school and represents the development of a common understanding that goes beyond the collective group, beyond the school, and is a part of the community to which the school belongs.

The key characteristics: discussion and interpretation

The collective creation's most striking quality is that its creative process and product result from the

efforts of a group of actors: that is what makes it collective creation. (In traditional theatre, there is a hierarchical structure of artists.) So, in order to have a collective creation, there must be some degree of commitment to this kind of collectiveness on the part of the collective group whether that is a commitment to an artistic vision, a global network, world peace, a pay cheque, or an agreement to show up at school on Saturday afternoon.

The key qualities of collective creation result from its collectiveness. They further describe this kind of collectiveness. They are characteristic of and in many senses requisite to collective creation.

Cooperation. This kind of theatre offers each member of the collective group a unique position. Because the collective is not a democracy – or perhaps because it is a true democracy – each member is not a part of either an enfranchised majority or a disenfranchised minority. Each member is a part of what makes up the political and aesthetic character of the collective. The collective group then has a responsibility to its members and so, to itself, to create itself as a community of people and

recreate itself as its consensus changes. Cooperation is the way in which a group can maintain itself. Efforts that are intended to maintain the group indicate cooperation.

Where collective creation provides students with the opportunity to cooperate with other students to bring about the performance of a play, it provides them with an opportunity to "mature emotionally," and "to . . . appreciate their privileges and responsibilities as members of . . . the wider community and so live in harmony with others" (Aims of Public Education for Newfoundland and Labrador, 1959).

The collective group exists as a community at least in the sense that it has a shared experience. Its plans, including the performance text of the play, must be formed through agreement. Plans and agreements are ways in which cooperation can be recognized.

Yes-saying and acknowledging the suggestions of other group members create an atmosphere of openness and respect in which the capacity to experience is intensified. Cooperation may also be identified by yes-saying, making suggestions, acknowledging and developing suggestions.

Empowerment. Empowerment is the giving of power.

Collective creation gives the actor the opportunity to work in a kind of theatre that is actor-centered. His commitments, values, and experience, and his ability to express them will shape the group with which he is working, the process, and the performance. He has the power to cooperate in the creation of a community of actors. He has the power with his fellow actors to reject the authority of a single directorial voice and to restructure the hierarchy of creation. His experience is the stuff of creation (as exemplified in the discussion of Theatre Passe Muraille and The Mummers Troupe); he has the power to investigate his experience and discover himself - the meaning of his own experience - and his public voice. In this way, the politics and aesthetics of collective creation are empowering.

Collective creation is a form, like other theatrical forms, in which actors and audience learn through the bracketing off of experience, and the critical examination and transformation of that experience. Actors and audience are educated by the possibilities of alterable action, the knowledge that what is acted out is one of a

range of virtual alternatives – that the actors are, indeed, playing. They are liberated from the authority of a society or situation in which alternatives appear to be few or non-existent. Because collective creation is actor-centered, these educational opportunities for critical and playful examination and transformation of experience – liberation – are dependent on the actor's commitment to them and his ability to bring them about. He is, then, doubly empowered: he has the power to bring about the opportunity for his own education.

Students are often taught about autonomy, but rarely experience it. William Pinar (1975) talks about the arrested development of autonomy in schools where “‘good’ students . . . comply with the instructions of teachers” (p. 365). In instances in which the teacher is able give up the authority of her role (not the authority of her knowledge and experience), allowing her students the freedom to be autonomous, to make or reject commitments, the focus becomes the students’ experiences. They are allowed express their own experiences and to say their own words. While this involves a degree of risk-taking on the part of the teacher, (her students may reject the



educational objectives for which she is responsible, her objectives, or even her); she will be engendering in her students a commitment to their own experiences.

Autonomy is an important educational aim, but also is difficult to achieve where teachers are not free to be autonomous themselves and where there is little room for experimental — disruptive or playful? — behaviour.

Where the collective creation of a school play meets this aim, it empowers students, frees them to be autonomous, provides an opportunity for education and places this opportunity in the students' own hands. Just as the giving of power implies, the teacher's stance is crucial.

Where a student takes on directing or teaching roles, the teacher can be perceived to have given up authority. This does not imply that the teacher has resigned from teaching. She is committed to her students and cares for them. That is why accepting a student's right to be autonomous and his lack of experience is not just risky, but burdensome for her (Spolin, 1963, p.9). How should she act?

Rick Mercer, a member of the the collective that

created Twenty Minute Psychiatric Workout and now an actor and writer, said to me this year:

Because the collective makes you responsible for everything, even though you are the director and you have the final say, even if you didn't agree, if everyone else wanted to do something, we all knew they'd get to do it. So we were responsible and we learned more than you would in doing twenty years of Tchekhov's.

Students can be perceived as empowered when they see agreements as alterable, and are able to make decisions that transform the community to which they belong. This power they have as individuals would be, in instances like these, committed to their community. This may show them providing themselves with the opportunity to develop both as private individuals and members of society (Aims of Public Education for Newfoundland and Labrador, 1959).

Where students write, they elevate their experiences as performers to those of playwrights. Where they invent, they see themselves as talented. Where they share their experiences, they begin to discover their public voice. Where they use their experiences to create a performance,

they see meaning in these experiences, they see their experience as having something in common with others', they see it as alterable – it has been altered to create a performance. Where they acknowledge any of this, they acknowledge the power of their experience and their ability to change it. This also describes the development of the individual as a private and social being, this time looking at students' artistic commitments to the collective endeavor, rather than their political commitments.

The behaviours of students or teachers identified here as demonstrating empowerment will be used in my discussion of how empowerment characterized this collective creation.

An individual approach, The principal technique of collective creation is improvisation. An understanding of script as action is central to the use of improvisation in collective creation. This is an important consideration for the teacher who, though well versed in the approaches of drama educators, may find herself bound up in the perception of the school play as a literary text. A willingness to allow the collective creation to be shaped

through improvisation into a performance, invites gleeful borrowing from any and all approaches to drama and theatre.

Improvisation is an actor-centered technique. The actor uses his unique talents and his skills as a performer to invent a plan for performance. The development of an individual approaches often means the development of the unique approaches of the individual members of the collective group. (The development of the individuality of the student is the objective of the methods of many drama educators, especially Way.) Of course, yes-saying and making, acknowledging, and developing suggestions – the marks of a skilled improviser – are also demonstrations of cooperation. As a collective group continues to work together – to cooperate, the development of the approaches of individual actors, both aesthetically and politically, becomes the development of the individual approach of the collective.

The development of the unique approach of individuals involves the development of students' creativity. "Creativity needs to be stimulated, not only at the level of their [students'] individuality, but also at the level

of their individuality in a social context" (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 57). Collective creation offers an opportunity to fulfill both of these educational objectives.

The collective group can combine well-known collective techniques such as those pioneered by Theatre Passe Muraille in a way that is most appropriate to their objectives. Aside from improvisation, Shank lists the following approaches to developing material: (a) exercises, (b) discussion, (c) research, and (d) a script from someone within the group. Approaches of The Farm Show and the Mummers Troupe have been mentioned and are as follows: (a) episodes or montage, (b) any experience had direct course to performance, (c) games, (d) mime and choreographed movement, (e) speaking as the performer about a character (presenting a character/alienation effect), (f) political or social issues: mirroring community concerns or finding issues for which theatre could be a vehicle of transformation, (g) historicizing, (h) real words, (i) songs, and (j) puppets. The use of such approaches, because they actor-centered and occur within a social context, demonstrate to some degree the

development of an individual approach.

A sense of community. Some collectives have considered their commitment to community to be the creation of a network all over the world of people committed to world peace, so a sense of community may extend to the world or may be limited to the collective group. Because actors involve themselves in work that is shared in performance, the community, in some senses, will always extend to their audiences.

Performance is vicariously playful in much the same way as the process is actually playful. Actors play with the performance of human behaviour. They play with a course of action. They try out an idea. They find out how others respond and they can compare their intentions and process with the response of the spectators. An audience member plays with the attention he gives to the performance. He tries out the idea by perceiving it as the enactment of one of a range of virtual alternatives. This is the way in which the actors (during the process) and the audience (during the performance) are both involved in a workshop. This is the way in which theatre is educational for the community.

As actors come to this understanding of the essential sense of community that theatre explores, the significance of their work becomes a communal one. (The development of a common understanding is the main purpose of drama, according to Bolton.) They may want to show a community to itself, to transform it politically or socially, or to share an artistic vision. Their experiences and processes are given expression in the sharing of their collective creation. Their sense of the significance of the work is given a context: the community with whom they share it and the process with which they worked. Within this context is the knowledge for evaluation and re-working the play.

A sense of community, the development of a common understanding, and sharing are, like cooperation, educational objectives important to the "fullest and best development [of students] both as private individuals and as members of human society" (Aims of Public Education for Newfoundland and Labrador, 1959). Cooperation and sharing experiences within the group have already been mentioned as demonstrating a sense of community. The collective's ability to express itself to its audience, to find a collective public voice, also demonstrates a sense of

community.

These four qualities are characteristic of collective creation and learning. The way in which they can be demonstrated to characterize a collective creation in an educational setting will be the basis of a discussion of how this collective creation may have been a valuable educational experience. The teacher's role, actor-centered theatre, and the process of evaluation are other areas pertinent to education that have already received some discussion and are also considered later in this thesis.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Carnick (1984) points out that the Russian and English text of An Actor Prepares vary, and that the American method owes much to the originality of America's great acting teachers, like Lee Strasberg, in interpreting the English translation. Since copyright laws prevent a new translation at this time, an understanding of the contribution of America's acting teachers is not likely to be forthcoming.

Building A Character offered a more complete



perspective of Stanislavski's work, but was not published in English until 1949.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Chaikin of the Open Group led a workshop in preparation for the Living Theatre's production of Brecht's Mann ist Mann. The Open Group approach is exemplified by Viola Spolin in Improvisation for the Theatre.

<sup>3</sup>Filewod is quoting from the opening monologue of The Farm Show.

<sup>4</sup>Filewod (1989) discusses Theatre Passe Muraille as an aggressive force in the postcolonial nationalism movement expressed as "rediscovery of self" (p.206), but the The Mimmers Troupe, during the same period, were producing work described as "anarchist . . . political warfare type productions" (Brookes, 1988, p.97). They were not producing community portraits of farm towns, or fishing outports, for that matter.

# THE STORY OF THE MYSTERY STRINGPICKER AT THE DEATH CAFE

The story of the collective creation of The Mystery Stringpicker at the Death Cafe is told through my journal and two tape-recorded discussions. Of course, a journal is almost always more than a story told in the first person. In his book, At a Journal Workshop, Ira Progoff (1975) describes how the Intensive Journal method divides the journal into sections, sections that are "mini-processes reflecting the individual aspects of a life in motion" (p.34). These sections he further describes as Log sections - for neutral observation - and Feedback sections - for the bringing about of transformation (pp. 38-39). The journal that I kept also divides into two kinds of writing: one was narrative, the other introspective.

The story was not just narrated through my "neutral" observation, but also through my records of the conversations I had with my students. Just as a researcher looks for support for his observations by carrying out interviews with participants, I, because I am a teacher, talked with my students to come to a better understanding of their situation and so, my own. I talked

with them to involve them more intensely in the collective creation. I talked with them because they are interesting people. Mostly, I talked to them because I liked them and cared about them. Often I recorded these conversations as direct speech. As a result, my journal is able to share the individual voices of my students, as well as is usual, my own.

I have adopted the term "voice" to describe the different ways in which I speak and write in this journal. I have already mentioned two voices that appear in my writing: the narrative and the introspective voice. (Bolton might call these public and private.) Within the narration, I also have two voices: my storytelling voice and my living voice. My story-telling voice is in *italics*. My living voice – where I record what I said in conversations with my students – is given as direct speech prefaced by "LOIS:". The introspective or private voice is my reflection at the time; it is in **boldface**.

My private voice – all the writing that appears in boldface – is very much mini-processes reflecting the individual aspects of a life in motion. I make statements I have since reconsidered. Some ideas I think are good;

some I now see as faulty. Out of the frustration of the moment, I sometimes stray from the situation at hand, to write long diatribes against some aspect of the education system as I know it as a teacher. I let this most glowing record of my short-comings and strengths stand, because I believe it does reflect an aspect of a life in motion.

Two long conversations were tape-recorded, transcribed as scripts, and are presented as scripts. They provide the reader with information from discourse that was recorded by a method other than my journal writing. These two conversations or discussions complement my journal and are presented together with my journal writing because they make up part of the story of The Mystery Stringpicker at the Death Cafe. The first discussion takes place towards the end of the process. In this discussion, the students and I try to decide how to end the play. The second discussion takes place after The Mystery Stringpicker at the Death Cafe was performed. This discussion was a chance for students to evaluate, coming to some sense of the significance of their creation, completed and ready for re-working.

I have appropriated several conventions of

playscripting. For example, the tone of the speaker (if it is given) is in italics as in, CAMERON [*softly*]: I felt horrible. All of these conventions, like the one in this example, are so familiar that there is no need to specify them, (except to mention that the prologue and epilogues appear in bold italics).

#### The collective

The collective group in order of appearance are Lois, Jack, Robert, Kent, Chris, Ellen, Angela, Cameron, and Jeff. This group are the "playwrights." These are not the students real names.

#### The cast

in order of appearance

Jeff is Dave, leader of Dave's gang

Robert is Dingo and The bitter poet

Kent is Ger'd, brother of Jazz

Chris is Luigi, a member of Dave's gang, and The  
waiter

Ellen is Sad girl

Angela is Jazz, brother of Ger'd, girlfriend of Dave

Cameron is John Wayne and Romeo, a member of Dave's  
gang

Jeff is The Mystery stringpicker

Brian is Chef Calvin Penney

Marcia is The Casablanca Viewer

The director, designer, musicians, and production crew

Lois is Teacher Director

Jeff is Composer of "Just a Waiter at the Death

Café," "I met her at the Death Café," "Dave Cares,"  
and the John Wayne theme. He is also Guitar-player  
and Singer.

Astra is Set designer, Set constructor, Set painter,  
and Properties mistress

Tom is Piano-player

Kellie is Set painter and Backstage crew

Cathy is Set painter and Backstage crew

Tina is Backstage crew

My journal

**Prologue:** *Probably like most Theatre Arts teachers in a  
high school, I have responsibility for the Drama Club.*

Again, probably like most Theatre Arts teachers in a high school, I think I have to create extra or co-curricular activities for students that incorporate the principles of both educational drama and theatre.

The first year I supervised the Drama Club, while Teri Snelgrove, then a professional Newfoundland actor, now artistic director of Tamahnous Theatre in Vancouver directed.

We wrote an hour and half musical drama; however, the project was not a very satisfying one. The lack of rehearsal time in auditoriums we performed in meant that students were at a loss to project their voices into these huge spaces. Lack of technical resources to construct scenery, mix sound, provide good microphones, lack of technical support (in the next several years, projects were scaled down to match the support rather than support being escalated to match the projects) contributed to dissatisfaction.

The second year, the Drama Club presented Goldoni's The Venetian Twins. It was three hours long. Again, Teri Snelgrove directed and I supervised; but that year, I also acted in the production. The student actors and I refined

our acting skills by trying to outdo each other, not an inappropriate motivation for the actors of commedia d'ell arte.

The third year, Teri moved to Vancouver. I became director and supervisor of the Drama Club. The Drama Club presented two productions that year. The second production of the year was a collective creation. After much consternation, I had decided to select a small group of students whom I considered to be particularly interested or interesting and convince them to participate in this project.

The end result was Twenty Minute Psychiatric Workout. It was chosen to represent our region in the Provincial High School Drama Festival, despite a cast greater than the number allowable, and including a cast member from another high school and one who did not attend school. There it received recognition for the performance of the lead female actor and for original music.

Play: This year I have decided to work with the collective process again. In March, I posted a notice of a meeting "for any student interested in writing a collective creation to be performed in early April at the



*Regional High School Drama Festival."* I decided I would keep a journal of the six week creative process.

I thought that we had developed a process pertinent to high school and the goals of various kinds of high school curricula, perhaps not terribly unique, but an integration of techniques pioneered by Paul Thompson at Theatre Passe Muraille.

I had tried not to prepare myself for this first meeting, but last year, the adjudicator of the Regional High School Drama Festival, Terry Goldie, had said of Twenty Minute Psychiatric Workout that although the play was clever, almost all the characters were undeveloped; only one of them changed. While the style of Twenty Minute Psychiatric Workout did not require that kind of characterization, no more than The Man in the Bowler Hat does, I thought of that as a challenge.

I had also talked to Fred about contracts. Although a group must make certain contracts - for example, that we will create a production for a particular date, I wanted students to be able to change the structure or themes of their work at any time, to identify choices and make decisions every step of the way. I didn't want them to be

able to avoid decisions by referring to a past agreement.

This conversation also provoked some thought about the episodic nature of collective creations. Fred's view of contracts revolves around creating a narrative. I didn't think that it was necessary to create a narrative in that way.

Seven students came to Room 113, on Sunday afternoon for the first meeting: Jack, Robert, Kent, Chris, Ellen, Angela, and Cameron. Robert and Cameron had been members of the collective group that created Twenty Minute Psychiatric Work-out, and Ellen had had a minor role. Jack, Chris, and Kent were taking Theatre Arts.

After I had asked, for the tenth time, if anybody knew if anyone else was coming, we agreed that those present would be a group. We would collectively create a play. I would direct it. It would be performed on the week of April 6 to 11 in the Bishop Feild auditorium. (The Festival was eventually held in the LSPU Hall, instead.) We would add other actors as we needed them.

LOIS: What we were going to do? Everybody give a suggestion.

I'll write them down. Cameron, what do you want

to do?

CAMERON: People talking like the mob, like Brando.

LOIS: Angela, what do you want to do?"

ANGELA: I can't think of anything.

LOIS: It's not important what you suggest, as long as  
you make a suggestion.

SOMEBODY: Say anything.

*A Pause.*

LOIS: Chris?

*A lot of ideas were suggested quickly. I wrote down  
the suggestions as they were made.*

CHRIS: A sequel.

*The result was a list that included a murder, a  
murder mystery, mad scientist, the Actor, and a showdown.*

CAMERON: People walking like this.

*CAMERON gave a demonstration that translated to the  
list as whistling and hands twirling.*

*The list continued with the twins, drugs and alcohol,  
rape, teenage sex, and communicable diseases.*

KENT: Aids is too over done.

CAMERON: The lighter points of aids.

*The list continued with death, depression,*

*frustration, existential anxiety, not being able to do things.*

JACK: Slapstick, like Airplane.

*The list continued with poetry that makes fun of poets, that doesn't make any sense.*

ROBERT: Total incoherence.

CAMERON: My room. Things that John Wayne might say

like, "If ya don't mind, I'd like to take that job as sheriff."

JACK: Song lyrics. Jeff reminds me of my Tommy Hunter spoof.

*The discussion digressed and everybody started talking about names for bands.*

**Because I was thinking of the challenge we had been made at last year's regional festival and my discussion about contracts, and because where else is there to work from except . . .**

LOIS: What concerns you? What are your major concerns?

*[I had to work hard to elicit responses to these questions.]*

*The list continued with the future and chocolate ice*

cream.

CAMERON: I have no major concerns.

*I wrote that down.*

It doesn't matter what you say as long as you say something.

An epilogue: A year later Cameron and I were having a conversation and coffee and he was talking about what he should do with his life and I reminded him that last year, he "had no major concerns." This year, he didn't mind telling me what he was worrying about. He said that he was always sensitive, I just didn't know it. I said that he just didn't show it.

Play continues . . .

JACK: Overdrinking, drunkenness.

KENT: The cost of university.

CAMERON [interrupting]: Except for the day I'm expected to do something.

ROBERT: Like I won't be able to get it up when I'm over 40.

CHRIS: Reagan will be re-elected.

ELLEN: Getting pregnant.

SOMEBODY: Getting someone pregnant.

CHRIS: My mother marrying Frank.

*Everybody wanted to know who Frank was.*

*The list continued with weight problems, the use of subordinate conjunctive phrases, marriage, Kim, and opera.*

ELLEN: Penis envy. Oedipus complex.

CAMERON: Clint Eastwood as mayor.

CHRIS: Let's go to Broadway.

JACK: Let's make money. Hey, my major concern is the exploitation of amateur actors.

*We combined suggestions and concerns from the list into characters and situations for improvisation. Poetry that makes fun of poets became a poet that sits in a café, smoking cigarettes and writing impoverished rhymes and bitter distiches against the world on the napkins and placemats.*

*We decided to improvise our first scene. We put other characters in the café with the poet, but it was hard for everybody to concentrate and to pass the focus back and forth, particularly for Angela and Ellen. Both of these group members are inexperienced improvisers.*

*We kept improvising. In one of the scenes, John*

Wayne meets a woman who is obsessed with Freudian imagery. Since Ellen was the one who mentioned Oedipal complexes and penis envy, we determined that she had the requisite jargon to play this character. Referring to the list of concerns, we also made the character pregnant. I insisted on trying to improvise this scene several times.

LOIS: What can we do to make this scene work?

CAMERON: We should move on.

LOIS: What scene do you want to do?

CAMERON: I don't know.

LOIS: Well, if you don't have a suggestion for another scene I want to try to work this one.

Sometimes I wonder if I should insist on trying things again that, at the moment, lack appeal for other members of the group. Perhaps, I should allow others to dictate to me more often. On top of that, the scene was just as awkward and uncomfortable the second time around.

In another café scene, Kent and Angela played two twins obsessed with each other and death. He (we named him GERARD) waits in the café for his sister (we named JEZEBEL) rolling cigarettes and smoking. JAZZ - short for JEZEBEL, enters, sits down, and begins to berate GERARD

*for smoking.*

JAZZ: You're killing yourself.

*THE POET drifts towards their table.*

POET: Young woman, let him smoke, if it shuts him up.

Maybe he'll get off easy and die early. If you really care about him, kill him.

*Someone asks the poet about one of his poems.*

SOMEONE: Did it involve much thought?

POET: Seventy-three cups of coffee.

LOIS: Maybe Angela's boyfriend walks in.

JACK: He could be a tough guy, leader of a gang.

LOIS: How about a name?

JACK: Dave.

*The character, DAVE, turned out to make large movements and to overstate everything. DAVE wore a leather jacket and wiped tears from underneath his sunglasses. He called JAZZ, "Babe."*

*We discussed the use of silence, music, and poetry. We talked about the way these elements are used in film.*

LOIS: I think we should work with emotions and themes. Try to talk about some concern and say something about it.



*We started calling the café where the twins "hung out" Death Café. THE POET was always there and he was "a death character."*

*Everyone agreed to make the collective creation about 20 minutes in length, to steer away from "mafia" characters and scenarios, and anything else that was reminiscent of last year's collective creation. Everyone said they would write ideas or scenes and bring them to the next meeting.*

LOIS: I'll ask Astra to do the set.

JACK: I'll ask Jeff if he wants to write songs.

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*I wanted to have more female students working on this project, the students that came to mind - like Tina, were - like Tina, involved in other things.*

*I thought about how to encourage Ellen and Angela to develop acting skills. At the second meeting on March 7, I got the three of us together. I said something like that they would disappear trying to compete with some of the large movements and broad characterizations of some the other group members, like Jack. They should just focus on what they were doing in a particular scene, and pretend*

**that they believe what the other characters say and do.**

LOIS: The sad girl thinks, "I'm sad," that's her emotional connection to everything. If you are in a café, think, "I'm in a café." Believe you're in a café. Act like you are in a café. "I'm Jazz in a café."

The group discussed a schedule. When can people meet? How much time could people devote to the project? What would the schedule of the pre-performance week be like? A number of group members were working on projects that conflicted with this one. Cameron, for example, had to leave rehearsal early.

We discussed last year's collective creation.

LOIS: I think that we should try to create something that goes beyond the farce of Twenty Minute Psychiatric Workout. Let's try to give the characters some depth and an ability to change.

I asked everybody to form small groups of two or three and in 15 to 20 minutes talk about the show we were writing and the ideas that they had developed over the past week.

LOIS: If anyone forgot to develop material, this is

your chance to come up with something.

*Everybody dispersed. A couple of groups decided to work in the hallway outside the classroom.*

**I find it difficult to determine how productive (Ha! Look at me talking about productivity) small group work is sometimes. I remind myself that group work is a chance for students to meet and talk without my interruptions, clarifications, or manipulations.**

*Chris and Jeff came back to get Jeff's guitar. Jeff, on Jack's invitation now a group member, had agreed to write songs for the project and to perform in the show.*

*The only other material - ideas, scenes, people or anything - that anyone shared was a round-robin poem.*

*Kent had been at a party the night before and had got everybody to write a single line of poetry on a piece of paper. The theme was death.*

G'erd's (Ger'd is short for Gerard,) poem in a shoe.  
*was called that because Kent had put it in his shoe for safe-keeping. In order to read it to us he had to take it out of his shoe. Then that became dramatic business for his character.*

G'erd's Poem in a shoe.

Pull the trigger and blow your brains . . .  
I'm losing my life quickly  
It's morbid, dark, and deep  
forever  
bang, bang, now you're dead  
See the brain dissolve  
and the body is dead  
claustrophobic underground  
delivered to the devil  
And Death reigns over it all  
Phlegm in a bottle  
Crushed skulls lie everywhere  
eternal contemplation  
feeling the body shut down  
as the life drains away  
Death clasps my soul in an eternal struggle  
for domination  
Delivered into darkness, I am dead.  
nothingness  
flames  
Is this blackness limbo?  
frozen water burial

It seems a wakening,  
but the screams put you into solemn silence.  
You fall never-ending,  
as the next life sets in  
Hard to perceive is the change.  
Do you have any cigarettes?  
Have it all.  
An experience never to be had  
again  
The lights go out.  
Beats go through your mind.  
Hard to perceive, but so familiar.  
people all around  
but silent still  
A voice screams from an unknown source.  
sex in the background  
Others join.  
but except for the beats,  
silence  
someone at the door  
Can't get in  
It's crowded.

More and more join,  
but still no one.  
Then darkness, blackness  
and finally nothing

Although Kent and I thought of his poem as a valid piece of poetry, almost everybody else expressed the opinion that it was "bad" poetry. This poem continued to be the focus of sarcastic comments. Kent and I continued to like it.

*Astra came in, and so we talked about the set.*

LOIS: We could create action for the set, instead of what is usual, creating a set for the action. We don't have to be committed to this suggestion, but we can keep it in mind as a possibility.

*Everybody agreed to think of cheap, but unusual set materials.*

*I read what I had written down the Sunday before: the list of ideas and concerns and the dialogue from the three scenes that had been improvised.*

*We decided to write the scene in which Ellen played a sad, pregnant girl. I wrote down the dialogue. Ellen,*

Cameron, and Jeff acted it out, working out the blocking. The Freudian imagery was forgotten. Cameron played JOHN WAYNE, THE SAD GIRL's boyfriend. We didn't decide if Cameron's character was John Wayne, was a guy that thinks he is John Wayne, or was a guy who just emulates John Wayne.

We fooled around with long pauses in the scene and a guitar player/character who enters and plays background music.

Robert laid claim to the poet character, making him still more bitter and disillusioned. In one of the scenes, Kent, playing GER'D, takes Ger'd's poem in a shoe . . . out of his shoe and reads it to his twin sister, JAZZ.

The bitter, disillusioned poet, played by Robert, eavesdrops and comments upon the stupidity of the twins' conversation.

POET [commenting on the "shoe" poem]: That really sucked.

GER'D [to JAZZ]: Did you like it? Why no reaction?"

POET [ignoring the fact that GER'D is not talking to him]: I already reacted. I said it really sucked.  
[Writing his own poem.]

Bad poetry in a two-bit cafe

Makes me feel better

Better, better, bitter

Betty's bitter batter . . .

Dumb twerp that can't write. Maybe this poem will be published.

*[He indicates his own poetry.]* Again, I write. *[He writes something, crumples it up, and throws it away.]* Maybe I should write comics.

Jokes

Pornography

Prolonged pornography

Poetic pornography

Characters in the café

sit and wait

for tea and sprouts

A redneck enters and asks for meat

the waiter says,

"Sprouts, if you'd like to try them."

LOIS: When the poet says, "Poetic pornography," Dave, the tough boyfriend, could enter, overhear the poet and say, "Right on." Let's improvise from there.



POET: Maybe I should write . . . poetic pornography.

DAVE: Right on.

POET *[belligerently]*: What did you say?

DAVE: Nothin'. *[shows him the puffbar he's bought  
JAZZ.]*

*According to Jack, JAZZ loves blueberry flavoured  
puff-a-fruits.*

DAVE: Want a puff-a-fruit?

*THE POET tries unsuccessfully to snatch it out of  
DAVE's hand.*

DAVE *[to THE POET]*: Ask the waiter.

POET and DAVE *[in unison]*: Weirdo.

*They do a double take.*

JEFF: Every character who hangs around Death Café  
thinks everybody else was "a weirdo."

*Everybody really liked this idea.*

*We tried the scene where DAVE meets his girlfriend's  
twin brother - GER'D - again.*

LOIS: Let's make this scene believable.

*Jack said that he was uncomfortable trying to portray  
the emotional reality of DAVE's character and that he  
preferred to play him in a farcical way.*

LOIS: Do you think you think you can create a character that changes and develops, if you interpret Dave in a farcical way?

We agreed to discuss this and try different interpretations of the character at the next rehearsal.

Before the meeting ended, we discussed titles. The High School Drama Association needed the title of our play and cast list in order to begin publicizing the Festival. Most of the suggestions were absurdist, like the play we were writing.

KENT: DDT kills Plants.

Lots of titles mentioned the poet or the guitar player, like "Death and the Guitar Player." **Everyone seemed to conceive of the poet and guitar player as commentators on the action of the play.**

Some of the other titles were "John Wayne, Death, and the Guitar Player" and "John Wayne is Dead and He Still Can't Play Guitar."

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Early Tuesday morning, Jack had doubts about the project.

JACK: The audience is going to be leaving our

performance, saying "What the fuck was that all about?"

LOIS: I feel the same way. Just because I've been up to this drama business a bit longer than you have or because Cameron has done a couple of productions and you haven't done any, don't think we're all not totally paranoid about this project, because I know I am, and I know Cameron is.

I thought Jack's comments were made as if he weren't a part of the group. It was as if he thought that he couldn't affect the project. Last term, during the rehearsals of Great Catherine, a negative comment he made about the quality of production that could be expected of that cast had led me to make a few angry comments to him.

LOIS: The trouble I have with the way you're voicing your feelings is that it makes me feel like saying, "Yeah, you're right. Let's forget the whole thing."

If you want to do your part to keep the project afloat and stop us all from sinking into a deep clinical depression, you should probably talk about what we could do to make the performance accessible

to an audience.

Things like Jack's comment send me off on a moral warpath: he should be committed to the project. He has responsibility to solve that problem instead of letting his attitude become part of another problem. On the other hand, I can see that his questions and comments in both instances probably have to do with his own concern to produce work of high quality.

*I had called a meeting at recess to make sure we all agreed on the title, the author's names and the cast list before I presented it at a Drama Association meeting that night; so I thought I'd mention Jack's concern to everyone, then.*

LOIS: Jack says that the audience won't know what this play is about. How can we make an audience understand our play?

ELLEN: We could add characters that are usually found in a café.

*There was a waiter in the scene between JOHN WAYNE and THE SAD GIRL.*

CAMERON: We could add a chef.

LOIS: Let's get Brian

Brian was alternately admired and feared at our school for his strength.

CAMERON: He could smoke a cigar and have an anchor tattoo.

CHRIS: He could have "Mom" tattooed on his arm.

CAMERON: I think an audience could understand a play without a storyline. The characters are the interest. The audience would meet the characters and see what kind of people they were.

This was a key event in the creation of Death Café, because this gave the play its "container," its structure.

Everybody agreed to take responsibility for understanding and performing his own character.

We scheduled rehearsals for the week. I described our play-to-be for the Drama Association, as "a tragi-comedy about the clientele of the Death Café, a place where endless coffees are consumed, endless cigarettes are smoked, and endless bac poetry is written. There is no story. There are only the characters. The play touches on their emotions, satirizing the incoherent world they, and we, inhabit."

The Mystery Stringpicker at the Death Café was

according to everybody at the recess meeting, but me, the title we chose. I thought the title was "The Mystery Player at the Death Café" and since my mistake turned out to be unacceptable to my group, I had to spend the next evening on the phone correcting the information I had given to the Drama Association the night before.

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We met again on Sunday, March 15 at about 3:00 pm. By 10:00 pm, everybody except Cameron, Jeff and me had left. We there until after eleven. That's eight hours of rehearsal. **That's ridiculous.**

Jeff, Cameron, and I had been having casual conversations about Death Café all week and we had invented a song title, "Just a Waiter at the Death Café." As soon as Jeff and Cameron arrived, they with Jack went into the hallway outside the classroom to write a song to go with the title. A guitar plugged into an amplifier has a lot of appeal and soon there was a bigger group outside the classroom than inside.

Jeff, Cameron, and Jack had managed to write two verses of what Jeff described as an "Arlo Guthrie type song." It described the customers at the Death Café as

"smoking cigarettes and collecting U.I.C." We decided that this song acted like a prologue and that it should start the show.

Some of the group had already set the room up to represent the Death Café, so now we tried to rehearse the opening scene.

Cameron suggested that a character sit in the back of the café watching Casablanca, a character who is a part of the set rather than the action. He mentioned the grandmother in the Sheila's Brush production Jaxxmas, as an example of what he meant.

Chris was assigned the part of the sensitive, "could be a little effeminate," but "not gay" waiter. Everybody got into the directorial act, telling Chris what he should do, the way he should do it, and his attitude towards each movement he made. Finally, everybody explained in choruses of "Yeah, Chris - Be yourself."

After all that, Chris improvised a scene: the café is opening for the evening. Jeff is playing "Just a Waiter the Death Café." Chris lights the candles, puts clean ashtrays on the tables, and pours the Casablanca viewer a coffee. He concentrated on everything he did and as a

result he created this, though uneventful, extremely believable scene. Even though it was so familiar, so mundane, it was atmospheric and interesting.

Kent's character, GER'D, entered next and sat brooding and playing harp. Then the rest of the characters enter. By that time, the last few notes of "Just a Waiter at the Death Café" are heard and the lights are dimmed in 100%.

CAMERON: Jeff should be on stage, sitting on his amplifier.

Everyone started talking about getting the amplifier from the music room.

SOMEONE: How can we get in the music room?

SOMEONE ELSE: Who has keys?

SOMEONE ELSE: Who has keys to the closet?

LOIS: Let's not get into trouble until closer to the performance.

ROBERT: Kent has an amp Jeff could sit on.

The conversation began to revolve around amplifiers, who owned them and how big they were. I did not want to be the one who has to say, "Let's stop talking about amplifiers and get back to work."



LOIS: Forget the show. Let's just get an incredibly huge amp.

KENT: Let's run the opening, again.

*We rehearsed the opening again. JOHN WAYNE entered to "riding the range" music, as Jeff called it. We tried giving the poet the same theme music.*

LOIS: Repetition is a comic device, according to Bergson.

Whenever I say things like this, it is quoted back to me forever. During Twenty Minute Psychiatric Workout, I tried to win an argument by saying, "Okay, I'll go along with whatever you want, but I am the one with fifteen years of theatrical experience." I have yet to live that down.

POET [to THE SAD GIRL]: Would you like another cup of coffee?

SAD GIRL: Yes.

POET: Ask the writer.

*I asked Robert to shout that line, making his behavior towards THE SAD GIRL even crueler. THE POET and JOHN WAYNE treat THE SAD GIRL so despicably that our collective conscience got the better of us and we decided*

that somebody, *THE WAITER*, should have a romantic or at least sympathetic interest in her.

LOIS: Let's have the the waiter immediately came over to the sad girl's table, pour her coffee, and smile at her. She smiles back.

WAITER: Is everything okay?

SAD GIRL: Aside from the fact that I'm pregnant?

WAITER: Congratulations, you must be very happy.

SAD GIRL: Not really.

ELLEN: The waiter should have theme music, too, the tune to "Just a Waiter at the Death Café."

CHRIS: Everyone should have a theme.

CAMERON: That's stupid. It's not a musical. We don't want farce type stuff.

JEFF: It's movie music.

LOIS: That's great, Jeff, because everything we've created so far, the characters, the focus changes, the pauses are all filmic. We could continue to build on the filmic style that we are developing.

We agreed to something: no farce, or not that much, but there is more a checking of each other, than a formal agreement. Music for every character could be farcical,

or it could be "movie music."

*Kent and Angela improvised a scene for the purpose of having JAZZ explain her feelings for DAVE to GER'D.*

JAZZ: Dave is gorgeous. Dave is great. He cares about me. Dave is . . . Dave is . . .

GER'D: An asshole.

*Kent said that Angela kept changing her lines, so he didn't know when to say "asshole."*

LOIS: Say, "He's an asshole."

*That didn't work, because Kent is supposed to finish Angela's line. That's the joke.*

CAMERON: Listen to her. Listen to what she says. Then finish her sentence.

LOIS: Yes, do that.

*The group encouraged Angela to continue describing her character's feelings for DAVE, but whereas Ellen was now very sad as THE SAD GIRL in the scenes we had rehearsed earlier, Angela didn't want to share her feelings and her ideas.*

**I guess Angela is insecure. I feel guilty about my inability to create a situation in which Angela wanted to share, even though when she acted a part in Great**

Catherine, I had spent a long time with her improvising scenes, developing emotional responses to the character's situation. I also felt guilty about the lack of a major female presence in the play.

Everyone made suggestions. Perhaps JAZZ, like GER'D, viewed life as pointless. Her boyfriend, DAVE, brings excitement into her life. DAVE may be self-destructive but he's exciting. His life may be pointless, too, but it is anything but drab. He lives on the edge. That makes him more alive. When she's with him she feels more alive, too.

LOIS: These are just suggestions, you can work out for yourself why Jazz is attracted to Dave.

The group ended up writing a lot of Angela's lines. "Goopy" was a line written for Angela.

JAZZ (trying to persuade GER'D to change his opinion of Dave): Okay Dave is different. He's a bit self-destructive, but inside he's goopy.

ANGELA: I don't want to say, "inside he's goopy."

LOIS: Say whatever you want to say to reveal that Dave's soft on the inside.

ANGELA: I don't know what I want to say. I don't see

why I should say anything at all.

KENT: You might as well say, "Why say any lines?" Let's have a play without any lines.

I was exasperated. She wanted to be a part of the group, but several times she had said that she couldn't pretend she liked Jack, because he wasn't attractive. Sometimes she says things to other group members, especially Jack, that ensure that a scene can't proceed. If I say to Jack that he should enter, and put his arm around JAZZ. Angela might say to him, "Don't do that," completely undermining my direction. Perhaps she was embarrassed; I was definitely frustrated.

LOIS: Well, I guess, if you don't want to say Dave's goeey, you can say, Dave's a good screw, instead.  
*Angela started laughing when I said that.*

ANGELA: *[laughing]*: Okay, I'll gladly say "goeey."

I decided we should tackle another scene at this point. That way I could remove myself from a frustrating situation in which I might be driven over the edge, and Angela would have a chance to escape psychologically unscarred and to mull everything over before rehearsing the "goeey" scene, again. By then, the difficulties we

**were having may have evaporated into thin air.**

Jack loves Motown. Before rehearsals, he would often sing and dance to the sound track of The Big Chill that he had on cassette. Sometimes, Jeff played guitar for Jack's rendition of "Good Lovin'." There had been some light-hearted suggestions that this should be in Death Café. I thought it was a good idea.

LOIS: Let's rehearse "Good Lovin'" next and try to decide where it should occur in the performance.

JACK: This is stupid.

JEFF: He just doesn't want to do it alone.

LOIS: Your gang is with you.

JACK: Right on. Great. Fantastic.

LOIS: *[aside to Jack]* I think this the hardest thing to do, because it's energy and fun, not harmony that will make "Good Lovin'" entertaining. Don't half do it.

**He couldn't sing and dance tentatively.**

LOIS: Go over the edge. If it's too much, we'll haul you back.

*Jack improvised a rendition that he described as "not too bad."*

I suggested that there could be a pause in the song where DAVE thinks of his reply to his gang, now his back-up vocalists, and then sings another verse. Jack thought the audience would interpret the pause to mean that he had forgotten the words. We all disagreed with him, but he was going to perform the song, so we agreed he should do his own version of it.

I asked Jack and the gang members, Robert, Cameron, and Chris, to choose some movements from what they had improvised and to agree to do those movements at certain points. This time, during the second chorus, DAVE jumped on the chair next to JAZZ's and sang to her: "Give me that good, good lovin'."

DAVE and his gang bursting into song and dance in the middle of the Death Café was improbable, farcical, silly, even; but it was fun, dynamic, and even touching to see "tough guy" DAVE serenade his girlfriend in this outlandish way.

Although we rehearsed this several times and I already thought it hilarious, Jeff told me later that Jack could "go further than that."

LOIS: We'll work for that, then.

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*Wednesday evening, Jack was sick and I forgot the script.*

*Angela was on time, of course. Nobody else was, of course. We moved my desk into the centre of the room, so that everybody, when he got there, could sit around it and we could complete scenes by actually writing down lines for characters. Up until now, we had developed most of the dialogue and action by improvising scenes.*

LOIS: I forgot the script. Maybe we should try to decide what the throughline would be. What happens to the sad girl and the waiter? Maybe there could be an altercation between the cook and the waiter, because of the cook's treatment of the sad girl.

CHRIS: The waiter quits.

CAMERON and JEFF [*enthusiastically*]: There be a slow motion scene between the sad girl and the waiter.

JEFF: They end in each others arms as flowers . . .

CAMERON [*interrupting*]: No, daisies fall from the rafters.

LOIS: I thought we agreed to avoid farce and fantasy.

**Here I am taking the other side of the argument with**



**Cameron.**

LOIS: What happens to Ger'd and Jazz at the end of the play?

CAMERON: Dave and Jazz get engaged and Ger'd commits suicide.

CHRIS: There's a battle between Ger'd and Dave and the gang realizes that Ger'd is stronger and they decide to follow him.

LOIS: Maybe we should write a scene in which Jazz and Ger'd get engaged.

*With this as a jumping off point we ended up with DAVE expounding on the virtues of suburban living and longing for the white picket dream. He tells GER'D that he does care about JAZZ and that he loves her. He tells JAZZ, "I want to marry you. I want to take you and the kids and your mother to Florida on Easter vacation."*

*Jack's family had acquired a microwave the week before. Unperturbed by the reactions of the anti-radiation league within our group, Jack's delight was profound. This week, it was DAVE who longs to acquire a micro-wave oven with a digital clock "with little buttons that go beep, beep, beep."*

CAMERON: Dave wants to do up a household budget on a computer from Radio Shack. Dave cares about Jazz.

ROBERT and CHRIS: He cares a lot.

LOIS and CAMERON: There could be a song entitled "Dave Cares."

CAMERON: And the *sons* could be the back-up vocalists, once again.

*We wrote some ideas down on paper. "I want to take you and the kids and your mother to Florida on Easter vacation. I want to join the P.T.A. I want to be there when little Joey takes his first itty, bitty steps."*

LOIS: Jeff you are exiled to the hallway to write the rest of the lyrics and compose a tune. Do you want to?

*Jack arrived. Robert and Jack improvised a scene in which DINGO and DAVE discuss "business." DINGO mentions dropping a few people at the doughnut shop and putting bombs in tail pipes.*

LOIS: [to Kent]: Why doesn't your character like Dave?

KENT: Because he's a dunce, a druggie, a gang leader, and a fool. On top of that, he likes Jazz. I'm obsessed with the woman. I think I'll commit

suicide. *[He laughs.]*

LOIS: How about a scene where Ger'd talks to Dave?

Maybe Ger'd tries to get Dave to break up with Jazz.

Let's have it at Luigi's so Chris can be in it.

Since you're so hyper, Chris, might as well get you in this scene, okay?

*DAVE is sitting in LUIGI's apartment. Cameron and Chris, as ROMEO and LUIGI, arrive.*

DAVE: Where is Dingbat?

ROMEO: I had to bring Luigi, here, 'cause it's his apartment.

**This was the first time any of the group had improvised a confrontational situation without satirizing the emotions involved in the conflict.**

*GER'D, marches into LUIGI's apartment where he finds DAVE, ROMEO, and LUIGI. DAVE sits drinking a beer.*

GER'D *[standing over DAVE]*: I want you to leave my girl alone.

LUIGI: There's a guy here to see ya, Dave.

DAVE *[to Ger'd]*: She's your sister. I'm dating her. I can say she's my girl. Jazz is not your girl.

GER'D: She loves me.

DAVE: Of course, she loves you. You're her brother.

Everyone loves their brother. You have to. It's  
like it's written in stone, love your brother.

GER'D: Is it written in stone, love an asshole? You're  
just a group of dingbats who do nothing but put  
people down.

LUIGI: You going to take that, Dave.

DAVE: Get lost, Dingo? ...Romeo?

CAMERON: Romeo.

CHRIS: You're Romeo.

CAMERON: Whatever.

CHRIS: It's Luigi.

*Cameron makes a swipe at Chris.*

**Sometimes the characters were talking. Sometimes the  
performers were talking.**

DAVE: Whatever your name is go out and get smokes or  
beer or something. *[He looks at Ger'd.]* You don't  
know how I think, how I feel.

GER'D: You beat people up and deal drugs.

DAVE: We don't push dope for the fun of it.

GER'D: Why d'ya do it?

DAVE: We do it for public relations.

GER'D: You got Jazz on drugs? Do you sleep with her?

DAVE: That's none of your business.

GER'D: That's my point. She's my sister. Leave her  
alone.

DAVE: It's a free country.

GER'D: You're a no-good slimebucket.

DAVE: Shut up and get out.

*During this improvisation, Kent began to make GER'D a  
more assertive character.*

*Robert was sitting by me and jumping up periodically  
to ask me if he could tell Cameron what to say.*

LOIS: Why don't Kent, Jack, and Cameron improvise this  
argument again, but at the café. And Jazz is  
present. Robert, in character as Dingo, can tell  
Dave what to say from outside the scene. We began  
with Ger'd calling Dave "a dunce, fool," and so on.  
Robert jumped in right away.

DINGO: Man, don't take it, Dave. He knows nothing. He  
lives in suburbia all his life. He got a white  
picket fence and TWO parents. We know - okay, we  
don't know everything, but we know more.

GER'D: You have no sense of anything. If you're going to see my sister, make something of yourself.

DAVE: I got sense.

GER'D: Yeah you got sense between the sheets.

*Robert jumped in.*

DINGO [to JAZZ]: Look what your brother's laying on you.

GER'D: He thinks drugs is it. You're second to his drugs.

JAZZ: He thinks I'm it. He's not always gonna be dealing drugs.

GER'D (to DAVE): You have Grade 3. What can you be? A stockboy at K-Mart?

DINGO: School doesn't teach you anything. You know the square root of 144. Big deal.

GER'D: Twelve.

DINGO: Big deal.

GER'D: Aw, forget it.

*Ger'd leaves.*

It 's difficult to end an improvisation, but most of the members of this group are very good at that. They recognize the goal or objective of a scene, achieve it,

**and resolve the situation or exit.**

*Later Cameron, Jeff, and I were the still discussing  
Death Café and everyone else had left.*

LOIS: I'm worried that the main story is not the café,  
anymore. It's more about Dave, Jazz, and Ger'd.

CAMERON: Of course, that was obvious weeks ago.

LOIS: Well, yes, but if that is the case, then the  
order of the scenes may have to change to show that  
we recognize that. The scenes involving other  
characters are then really sub-plots and should  
thread through the Dave, Jazz, and Ger'd story as  
subplots usually do, to break the tensions in the  
main plot.

*We talked about how members of the collective behaved  
towards each other and the attitude of group members.*

CAMERON: I catch myself treating Chris like  
interrupting him or shitting on him. It makes me  
feel horrible because the guy is so nice, but he  
drives me nuts.

LOIS: I know what you mean, but Chris is very  
enthusiastic and positive, when so many group members  
are not.

A lot of Chris' ideas get set aside. Although most people find the rejection of their ideas upsetting and stop participating, Chris responds to this like everything else with good will.

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On March 20, I arrived late and everybody was waiting outside the entrance for me. Also, I had brought a tape recorder, but not a tape. Fortunately, Jack had brought one.

We moved the flats outside the classroom, so Astra could paint them. We tried to set the choreography for "Good Lovin'," but after some frustration, Cameron and Robert said that since they were the resident choreographers (last year, they had created a series of movements for their characters in Twenty Minute Psychiatric Workout), they would exile themselves to some other classroom and create the choreography for "Good Lovin'."

We rehearsed the scene in which GER'D and DAVE first meet. GER'D already knows of DAVE and is convinced that he is not a suitable boyfriend for his sister. Everybody discussed what GER'D could do that would make DAVE react



*and that would not make him react. Everybody took on the task of explaining to Kent how to intimidate somebody*

*We directed Kent.*

SOMEONE: Stand closer to Jack.

SOMEONE ELSE: Move towards Jack, when he says his lines.

LOIS: Kent, don't move away from Jack. Hold your ground.

SOMEONE ELSE: Try to get Jack to move away from you.

*These were not directions to the characters, but to the performers. They were performer's objectives. These objectives, acted on, made the scene between GER'D and DAVE much more intense. Everybody got excited because they had given Kent and Jack these directions and now, it looked like GER'D and DAVE were having a real fight. It was clear that fights start like this. We were watching the body language of conflict.*

**The transition from a first meeting to a full-blown argument about DAVE's unsuitability for JAZZ is sudden and heavy-handed. Since so many other scenes were in so much worse shape, that problem was not dealt with.**

*The scene with THE SAD GIRL and the cook was written*

down and acted out. The SAD GIRL complains there is too much vinegar in her salad.

COOK: Picky, picky, picky.

SAD GIRL: Well, when I come to a café and order salad, I expect to enjoy it.

*She bursts into tears.*

COOK: What do you mean "enjoy it", little girl? You're just supposed to eat it.

SOMEBODY: If you want home cooking, stay home.

COOK: I'm Chef Calvin Penney. I attended ten of the finest European cooking schools. *(Pointing to his apron which says, "Bonjour", (Cameron's suggestion; he has one.))* See, French. I should know how much vinegar goes in a salad dressing.

*The Waiter enters.*

WAITER *[to Chef Calvin Penney]*: Don't you think you're being a little tough on her.

*They argue and the waiter quits.*

JOHN WAYNE: I'll take that job as waiter, Pilgrim.

COOK: Start now.

*The ex-waiter asks THE SAD GIRL if he can sit with her. She says that he can and they smile at each*

*other.*

*We agreed that tomorrow we would write down the script.*

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I remind myself that my role is simply to record. Of course, that is not true. I know the group and am usually able to devise situations and roles that members of the group can play successfully. I also try to respond to ideas seriously. Sometimes students suggest things that they think are impossible. They say "too bad we can't do this." I say, "why can't we?" Sometimes we can, and sometimes a possibility is born out of an impossibility.

I remind myself that my role is to record, because I know that I also reject ideas, because they don't appeal to me or because I don't understand them. That is sad, because sometimes students don't know how to make their ideas possible - that is what they are learning.

When I'm just the recorder, the group accepts and rejects ideas. Sometimes students have great ideas, but they are inarticulate, and therefore dependent on the appeal the idea has to someone else. When they present an idea to a group, there is a greater chance that somebody

will become enamoured of its possibilities.

I talk about the group a lot. Sometimes I think that there is no way to get around the fact that I'm the most powerful member of the group. I can pretend I'm not, to offset that inequality. I can accept dissension and encourage argument and openness.

The group or I make judgements through discussion, by and trial and error. Sometimes, I decide things on my own, because there is no time for discussion, because I'm the most experienced, or because I am the director.

The more perceptive students become, the more able they are to differentiate between a creative and a directorial decision. Because I am the outside eye (every other group member is inside the creation), it does not make sense to direct collectively. I accept suggestions, and I try to be able to explain why I'm doing something.

A student said to me, "You are repressing our creativity."

I said to him, "Au contraire, You are repressing my creativity." I whole-heartedly believe that is the trade-off: not only do I restrict students, but I am restricted by them.

The thing about a collective creation is that it is a problem. Whatever other issues arise, this is the problem that the group has agreed to investigate, play with, and solve. Even when I am teaching in a content area, literature or language, for example, I think that a student must. That they haven't the capacity or the inclination always appears to me as completely irrelevant. They simply, must. "How?" is the only question.

"Must" may seem restrictive, but it becomes expansive when "how" is the question. That you must do what you are unable to is demoralizing. That "must do" has only been impossible so far, because we haven't figured out "how to do," makes for an exciting journey. This attitude seems to be appropriate to discovery, to problem-solving, to contracts, creation, and the building of a community.

As well as collectively creating a play, this group was writing about changes. We had agreed to play with characters that develop and feel things, to steer away from fantasy where characters can be sawed up, but not hurt.

*We started today at 3:30, because that is when Jack could arrive.*

*On Saturday, Kent had called me, because he wanted to miss rehearsal, so he could go to see a volleyball game and view a potential date from afar. I said that dates were important.*

LOIS: Why don't you call this girl and arrange to see her after rehearsal?

*He hesitated.*

LOIS: It's your own decision, but why don't you check with Jack. If Jack can't attend rehearsal, we could work on scenes that exclude your characters.

KENT: Okay. If Jack can come, I'll definitely be there.

*Jack could attend, but Kent was very late. He said that he "forgot the time." Actually, he had called his volleyball player and was having coffee with her well into rehearsal time.*

*Everybody was tired. The classroom seemed smaller and stuffier than usual.*

JACK: There was not enough room in here for me to perform.

LOIS: You're right.

*Everything Jack did is so close to where I was seated that he was afraid of knocking me over. He could see every*

expression that I made. That bothered him and he often stopped in mid-line, staring at me.

JACK: What?

LOIS: Nothing, Jack. I love you. I think you're great.

Don't pay attention to every little expression that crosses my face. I'm thinking.

Actually sometimes, I probably did make faces, because I find it is amazing to watch students create things and perform them. Of course, I had started to fall in love with every member of the group. They were now allowed to say anything. Sometimes, I would say that is disgusting, if a particularly disgusting comment was made, but generally they knew they had the final say.

*Chris, Robert, Cameron and Jack rehearsed "Good Lovin'." The guitar was the only instrument and the song had a thin, stingy feeling about it. Jeff and Jack mentioned that Tom, a keyboardist and student at our school, could be added to the band of one. Jeff was appointed to ask Tom if he would be interested in performing in Death Café and if he was available for rehearsals.*

Sometimes Cameron exerted too much force and I caught

him saying things like, "Next year, you'll be able to boss people around, too, Jack." I didn't comment, because he was not interested in controlling the group; he liked his own ideas. He had a lot of them, and a lot of them were good. He had a gift for idiom: in improvisations he didn't refer to the photos or the pictures, he talked about "8x10 glossies." Robert refers to this as "Cameron's extended vocabulary." The tension he caused was mediated by his enthusiasm.

*We went through the script we had. Ellen said she had to leave. I told her I wasn't pleased, but it was her little brother's birthday, so I could hardly be angry.*

LOIS: You get away with murder, because you make me think that if I yell at you, you'll cry.

ELLEN: I probably would.

*Cameron began itemizing instances where this technique had allowed Ellen to exempt herself from other situations.*

LOIS: Ellen, try to be at other rehearsals. If you miss many more, your part will dwindle, because you won't have been here to develop it.

**The collective creation reflects the commitment and**



talent of the people involved, and that means that I don't have to be arbiter of justice, in these cases. I don't have decide whether Ellen's part should go to somebody who can attend more rehearsals. Her part simply becomes smaller. All I had to do, was make her aware of this. I don't have to consider the legitimacy of excuses, or allow birthdays, deaths, births, marriages, or therapy to pull at my heart strings.

*We tried to connect scenes. We improvised a scene with DAVE's gang. They try to knock GER'D over as he's leaving the café.*

GER'D: Who are you guys?

ROMEO, DINCO, and LUIGI: We're Dave's gang.

GER'D: Gang?

ROMEO *[sarcastically]*: Yeah, Dave's gang. We're sorta a social club. We meet on the weekends, have little dinner parties, serve mashed potatoes out of ice cream scoops.

LUIGI *[smirking]*: Hey, this guy looks like he writes poetry.

GER'D: What do you guys do for a living?

ROMEO: Well, I'm the president of Botswana and these

associates of mine are travelling salesmen.

LOIS [coaching]: Talk about writing poetry.

GER'D: You guys wouldn't have the intellectual capacity to write a poem.

ROMEO: Oh yeah. [Pokes Luigi.] Make a rhyme, Luigi.

*LUIGI can't think of anything. Finally ROMEO swipes at him.*

ROMEO: Never mind. [He looks at Ger'd.] Mom and Bomb.

SOMEONE: Hey, that was a very socially conscious rhyme.

*Rehearsal ended at 8:00pm. We were all pleased. There were lines written down for almost every scene. That was an objective we had agreed upon the day before, and we had nearly accomplished it. By the time we improvised the final scene, nobody wanted to script it. I decided I would not do this by myself, so everybody begrudgingly decided to stay. We wrote an outline of this scene with the proviso that it would have a re-write.*

**It needed more than a re-write.** *The script read:*

*GER'D enters, says stuff from improvs. JAZZ says stuff about loving DAVE. DINGO defends DAVE; says stuff about suburbia to GER'D. He says GER'D is boring compared to DAVE. DAVE says that he cares. "Dave Cares" song. Gang*

*improv needed to find the gang's reaction to DAVE. Does DAVE desert the gang?*

*The gang agreed: "Let Dave go his own way. We can't hold Dave back. Dave's changing. Best of luck, Dave." Everyone leaves, except JOHN WAYNE who is clearing up, the woman who is watching Casablanca, and GER'D who is left alone.*

*There were several bits of dialogue suggested:*

*DAVE [to DINGO]: I haven't changed that much.*

*DINGO or DAVE: Yeah, talk to you, later.*

*Throughout rehearsal, Jack had kept coffee brewing. Angela allowed her character to be affectionate to Jack's character. Even so, Jack told me after rehearsal that although he felt comfortable with Kent, he still feels uncomfortable with Angela.*

*We discussed the importance of positive comments. I had requested that there be no more insulting of each other, not even in good humour. For example, during a break in the rehearsal of a scene between Jack and Angela, I had said to Jack, "Who's your girlfriend, Jack?"*

*JACK: She's a Booth cheerleader.*

*SOMEONE: She's ugly.*

JACK: Geeezzz. No, she's not.

*Not very much later, we had returned to rehearsing the same scene.*

LOIS: Jack, Your character looks at Angela's character.

JACK: Okay, but it's hard not to throw up.

*It is difficult to communicate feelings, even as another character, if negative comments are flying fast and free. The sarcasm, on the other hand, seems to be a result of group members not taking their own or someone else's feelings seriously.*

*We met on the 23rd. I said that I had had trouble sleeping, because we had worked so hard and there had been so much accomplished, so many good ideas suggested at the last rehearsal. Others said that they had found it difficult to sleep, as well.*

*We need to rehearse in a bigger space. I must request the use of the gymnasium.*

*At times, I definitely view this process as a psychotherapeutic experience for all of the participants, myself included. Thus the need for "unremitting concern and respect" for each other . . . and the process. This respect requires in my mind the constant re-evaluation of*

process. I'm going at this with reference to Laing's The Politics of Experience, published in 1967.

He talks about the relationship between persons and the necessity for a description of that relationship that includes both behaviour and experience. On page 45, he describes psychotherapy as "an obstinate attempt of two people to recover the wholeness of being human through the relationship between them."

Laing contemplates life as a therapeutic experience. This gives leeway for engaging in unique experience, one in which not all the answers are known by an omnipotent therapist or teacher. The group can engage in creation, collaboration, sharing, and problem-solving with a teacher who is familiar with these kinds of processes, but ultimately the situation is unique.

This should be rather terrifying for the teacher (me) who is taking responsibility for an open-ended learning situation. The route and results may be so unfamiliar as to be unmeasurable, unrecognizable, indeterminate, or even, non-existent. In other words, I, "the teacher," have embarked on a journey where I may not know what is going on; my advice may be unsound, and the results may

only be recognizable after a long period of time, if at all. However, as Laing points out on pages 44 and 45 without reference to the self of the persons involved, "practice that proposes to act . . . in terms of behaviour without experience, in terms of objects rather than persons . . . is inevitably a technique of non-meeting, of manipulation and control." A controlled situation is not unique or open-ended. It doesn't include the experience of an individual which is, of course, unique. It is not humane. That's my point.

In case of the drama or theatre teacher, the open-ended situation is essential. Manipulation and control are contrary to spontaneity, non-associative thinking, and yes-saying; in other words to the dramatic or theatrical or human investigation.

The open-ended situation is essential to the workshop. Only in this situation can the investigators combine and recombine: construct, deconstruct, and transform.

It is necessary to play.

The controlled situation de-emphasizes the teacher-pupil relationship, allowing the teacher not to enter into

a relationship with the student, allowing the student to be viewed as "object to be changed rather than person to be accepted." In psychotherapeutic terms, according to Laing on page 45, this "simply perpetuates the disease it purports to cure. . . . Any theory not founded on the nature of being human is a lie and a betrayal of man."

Here is what I can see, although I hold the uniqueness of the teacher and student relationship primo:

1. (And this one is not a problem; it's just something I want to note down while I think of it.) The research situation - just reminding myself - is not my actual classroom, although the conclusions may be valid or even inspirational. *In this case, the research situation is my actual classroom.*

2. How does a teacher provide consistent rules and allow thirty students and herself to co-exist in an open-ended process?

My experience of the democratic model, a possible answer, is that students are so poorly disposed to it that it is one of the most horrendous models to try to implement. And it is not necessarily humane. (It de-emphasizes the experience of the minority; in fact, it

probably de-emphasizes everyone's experience in order to label each member of the group as part of a majority or minority, etc.) It's not necessarily conducive to learning, either, since the teacher's broader knowledge is immediately understated by this model, or approach, or system or whatever it is.

Management is another word that implies control and manipulation. We, teachers, are always telling students why they are in school. Actually, it might be more appropriate to say, we are always announcing to students why they are in school. Half the time, they don't agree with our statements in the slightest. If there is not an agreement upon why teachers and students exist as a group, together, how do we proceed?

First of all, that is the frightening part of teaching, that out of thirty people, maybe nobody agrees with the stated or unstated or unstatable objectives. Some will allow the teacher to carry out "a lesson" out of sheer consideration for the teacher as a human being, others in order to avoid conflict in an effort to "live and let live," and some will simply not allow the teacher to carry out a lesson without interruptions born of



disagreement with the basic situation, i.e., that we are a group.

Some teachers are so sick of anti-teaching, anti-school interruptions, like announcements over the P. A. that they don't bother to hold discussions, at all. Now I'm not sure what my point of connection here is, except that the situation is difficult and perilous, and I've spent many of the hours teaching Literature 1200 to 15 and 16 year olds trying to reach an agreement with a student, for example, who proclaims that she "hates" me because? . . . I don't give notes. She means I don't tell her exactly what to copy down. She is so resentful that she finds it almost impossible to glean anything from lesson after lesson on how to approach note-taking. She reminds me of Sontag's comment that labelling has become a substitute for thinking. I will teach this student, please, terms and definitions. The themes of To Kill a Mockingbird become a memorizable definition - no discussion, no interpretation, no comment, and, please God, no thinking.

Is it appropriate for me to spend any part of the year, let alone the entire two semesters, trying to come

to some agreement with a student about why we are here? But, how else do I proceed, except to ignore that student, discipline her if she interrupts, maybe belittle her into a blessed silence, and if possible, non-existence?

I'm not kidding when I say this is what I think and feel my options are. This note-desiring, teacher-hating student to which I refer actually refuses to engage in a discussion of agreement, because she knows what I don't, that school is for collating facts, not thinking. This attitude, so unbending in her, precipitates my anger. Just like teachers who are angry because students refuse to act with basic human goodness towards them when it is obvious that they are in a difficult situation, forced to be generous towards their students. Some students will say to you, "Well, you get paid to be generous, that's your reward. We don't get paid, so we aren't required to act with generosity."

That's Angela's attitude in a nutshell. And I'm angry with her, even though I am supposed to be her teacher.

Another thing about management is that if I begin to examine agreements, to respect students, to ask for

discussion, I am immediately engaged in a process with which most of them are basically unfamiliar. Because of that, all hell breaks loose. I have to deal with thirty students talking at once.

That does give the student in the back, the one who when I say, "What did you have to say?", under the scrutiny of fifty-eight eyes and twenty-nine brains, usually says, "Nothing," the opportunity to speak. (Although, probably not to be heard.) Of course, this uproar has to be moderated by other considerations.

Gradually students do learn something about discussion, in spite of the fact that many find it a disgraceful waste of time to hear the insights of other students. And maybe it often is, since this process is so unfamiliar to many of them that they are either afraid or unable to say they think.

That students have for so long agreed that any activity must be measurable, or it is not worth doing, is another reason why many are treading water when it comes to open-ended learning processes. They refuse to believe they are interested or curious; they refuse to act as if they were; they refuse to produce, unless what they

produce is graded. Maybe I should go in into the classroom next year and hand out their marks off the bat, then say "now can we get down to work?"

3. Teachers are required to meet certain objectives. That means there must be evaluative procedures to determine whether those objectives have been met. If the procedures are not controlled and experiences are unique how can we know if they have been met? How can we report to the client group i.e. parents and community, that they have been met?

Of course, when I propose to say: "now can we get down to work," I'm implying that I know exactly what we have to do, that I have objectives, (I do have objectives). I know when the work will be complete, when the objectives are met. I'm also required to report that they've been half met. I'm also required to use inappropriate evaluatory systems, but then that's truly objective evaluation, is it?

Not to mention, the learning is in the process, not the product. My brother recently started a business and hired my cousin. My uncle commented, "Well, son, the best way to learn about running a business is to involve

yourself in one that is going to fail."

Well, in any classroom the teacher is the acknowledged subjective evaluator, but her evaluation is mediated by formal evaluative techniques. There are formal evaluative techniques to the procedure upon which I have embarked with my group of students. The problem of evaluation is still there, because what is supposed to be learned, what is attributed to this experience, may be unmeasurable and difficult to report.

Now I've talked myself into a circle. It may be that the developmental aspects of this kind of experience have to be self-reported at the end of longer time periods or just that we cannot pre-determine the time for revelation and transformation. Maybe we should just stop attributing self-developmental processes to this procedure? Maybe they should be encouraged as part of the teacher and student relationship. When we stop having to grade everything, that time can be allotted for learning the unmeasurable.

At school, I find that there is little encouragement to make time for that which is not immediately measurably good. It's weird, because the teacher is carrying out a philosophy (whether it is her own philosophy or one

aggravated by the institution she is in, or, as in many cases, imagines herself to be in). Educational procedures are basically philosophical with a dash of Christian politics, system, and science. Our humanity is self-evident. Experience is primordial, but the mixture of system, science, and human beings is confusing.

Well, for that matter, how do you grade thinking? Labels - no problem. Isn't my note-desiring, teacher-hating student participating in my school's evaluatory system in a more wholehearted way than I am?

I am making some incredibly basic philosophical and educational decisions when I work with the process I've been describing in this diary. I'm not sure I am aware of all of those decisions and their philosophical significance. In fact I'm sure that I'm not. The teachers with whom I work and the institution of which I'm a part signal attitudes and impart a philosophy of learning to students that remain unacknowledged and that the stated philosophy of education may oppose. The bells, announcements, and class schedules are overt examples.

We are all engaged in philosophical decisions, even if some argue that they are only adhering to a series of

objectives.

In meetings with fellow language teachers, we discussed how to teach grammar or structure to students of Language 1101. This course is called Argument and Persuasion; however, our intra-departmental mandate seemed to be to teach students how to recognize the various parts of speech and of a sentence. Most teachers taught this as if English were a dead language, that it is not, in fact, used to communicate ideas - worse, that it was ever used or could be used to communicate ideas, emotions, or anything. Labelling again. It's as if the whole process of learning existed without a verb or anything to function as a verb.

Even though I described the structure of the English language as operating as a system with the purpose of communicating, in class I evaluated students' ability to label parts of speech and parts of a sentence. Talk about confounded objectives . . . and the endless paragraphs you assign high marks to that are grammatically correct, even imaginative in design, according to the textbook, but barren of ideas, while mercilessly squelching the tangled half-idea that seems to be peeping through the miasma of

tortured words, scattered in a scrawl across the brain of some page. Some student has an idea, but communicates in pen only to himself.

Enough of this.

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*On the March 24, rehearsal ran from 7:30 until 9:30. Tom came with his synthesizer and we discovered that Jeff would need to be miked. Of course, this might have been anticipated anyway.*

*Everyone was tired and cranky. We ran through the material we had. We were supposed to continue writing, but we didn't.*

*Jack is in his own world. I give him a direction and he sort of repeats what I'm saying under his breath, concentrates real hard, then does that portion of the scene again without taking my direction into the scene, at all.*

LOIS: Jack.

JACK *[looking around at you as if he's forgotten I was there]*: What?

*Reality hit Ellen, today.*

ELLEN: My part is really small.



LOIS: That is because you miss so many rehearsals.

*Jeff argued till he was blue in the face that the gang should have an establishing scene with DAVE. In a twenty minute play, if the audience doesn't get "it," when it is stated that this is DAVE's gang, they'll not only miss that connection, but the play will probably be lost on them anyway. DAVE makes three or four references to his gang, before they appear.*

CAMERON: The audience will see the gang with Dave, and they also state that they are Dave's gang.

LOIS: Perhaps we need a scene with Dave and the gang.

Not for inclusion in the script. For character development. Who are the gang members? Why did they become the kind of people?

*We agreed that Robert's line about suburbia should go in.*

LOIS: I'm concerned that we establish when the gang members are gang members and when they are other characters, because the changes in roles will occur in front of the audience, not backstage.

ROBERT: How will we do that?

*The gang also have unrecognizable accents. They give*

*the impression of some sort of international, Neopolitan gang. When I say, "Lose your accents," however, they lose their characters.*

*We decided to end with another song.*

*We tried to decide how to get Ger'd back on stage for the final scene. Ellen suggested that perhaps he returns to apologize.*

LOIS: I think that's a bit cliché. It also changes Ger'd's character. It weakens his position in the play. We need Ger'd's point of view. Ger'd is the only character arguing against Jazz's romance with Dave. I think he needs a position of strength if his conflict with Dave is going to be interesting.

ELLEN: Ger'd could return to continue his abuse of Dave. He could say all this stuff about "what a creep Dave is," but that "your gang's okay."  
*So GER'D returns, but his apology became virulence.*

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*We all met on March 26 from 8:00pm until 11:30. We had a lot of headway to make. Jack was going to be away this weekend. Although this put an extra pressure on what we would achieve during this rehearsal, it also allowed us*

all to look forward to weekend that we had agreed we wouldn't meet. We agreed to have a short meeting Friday afternoon instead of the weekend rehearsals.

Brian came to rehearsal for an hour to act the part of CHEF CALVIN PENNEY. We improvised additional lines for the scene with CHEF CALVIN, THE SAD GIRL, and THE WAITER. I wrote down what was said. Sometimes the improvising would break down, so we would suggest lines to the actors, to try to come up with the line that would be said next.

LOIS: Try the scene again and see what the character says. What does the character want to say?

We worked very quickly in that way; the group could discuss what each character perceives as the situation and the resolution of that situation.

During this rehearsal, without prompting, everybody entered into a discussion about the resolution of the situation. "What should happen, now?" and "How should the play end?"

We discussed JAZZ's feelings, again. Why would she have a romance with a guy like DAVE? Why might she decide to stay with him. Can DAVE change? He says that he wants to change.

Kent said that he thought his character is the more sympathetic, the one with which the audience would empathize. Jack, Robert, and Cameron disagreed. They thought the audience would find Ger'd boring.

ROBERT: The audience will be more interested in being with Dave.

**Therefore Dave is the more sympathetic character?**

We improvised a scene in which the gang explains to GER'D that JAZZ loves DAVE.

LUIGI [to GER'D]: You, you should accept that.

LOIS [coaching]: Dave, tell how you met Jazz?

DAVE: I saw her. I decided I need her. I got her and I'm not giving her up. I saw her . . . I met her at the Death Café.

LOIS: I met her at the Death Café. That's a hit song. You should write that, Jeff.

Every member of the group, except Kent and me, thinks that DAVE would "change for love."

We continued to examine the possible ways the play could end. DAVE could get a job at the Café and give up dealing drugs. DAVE could get a job at the Café and deal drugs on the side, only. JAZZ doesn't care if he gives up

dealing drugs or not. JAZZ leaves DAVE. We could writ a final scene which suggests what the possibilities are. The audience could be left to decide what happens.

Jeff was adamant that the theme of the play is we change, but nothing changes. The play must end with everything as it was, although characters could be playing different roles. There is still a waiter, but JOHN WAYNE now plays that part. The original waiter now sits with THE SAD GIRL.

Astra came to rehearsal with an army of females. She ordered them around in monosyllables. This group gave us a sense that the production was a reality. They were building a set, so we must be going to present a play.

On Friday, we met and decided that we would write the scenes we had improvised the day before. We realised that the hit song, "I met her at the Death Café" could be about THE WAITER and THE SAD GIRL and their scene could lead into it. Since there are on-stage character and costume changes to be made between this scene and the next, the song will also provide an interlude in which that took place.

We wrote a scene for Kent, Jack and Angela, even

though they weren't there. Cameron argued over who got what lines. This was a natural reaction to the fact that he had written a lot, but didn't have many lines. He and Robert argued, but it was lighthearted. They made compromises and worked out something they were satisfied with and that worked for the play as well. It was a relief that Chris didn't feel any need to participate in this argument, since we already had a scene which was overcrowded with points of view and characters.

We talked about meeting on the weekend, but there seemed little point until we saw what Jack, Angela, and Kent would do with what we had written.

We argued again about the ending. The same arguments. We noted that we had scenes written, but that we didn't know where they should occur in the play. We would put off writing the final scene and organizing the scenes already written. On Monday, we would work on the performance.

These last two rehearsals, I've been much more the director and decision-maker. It seems the only alternative, since time is running out. Of course, time running out is a logistic of the process, isn't it?

Over the weekend, Kent had a conversation with

Graham, a visual artist and crafts person, aged 42, about Death Café. Graham contended that the play we were writing, like the punk penchant for wearing black and the punk movement's interest in death, was mere fashion. According to Graham, Kent knew nothing about the frustration and meaninglessness - the void - we were pretending to write about. Graham told Kent he thought that Kent's main interest was in winning the Drama festival.

KENT: I told him that it would be nice to participate in the festival and win.

Their entire argument hinged around Kent's response to Graham's question, "Why did you call the play Death Café?"

KENT: I told him, "It's just a name."

LOIS: I thought the title had more to offer than its cuteness. What are we doing? Does anyone have an understanding of these characters?

ANGELA: I think these characters hit close to home. I know people like them.

Perhaps each individual has an understanding that is incomplete outside the group. We are using a collective

process, and perhaps the understanding of the characters and situations we are presenting is collective, as well. The poem Kent brought and that we included in the script, he took very seriously, although the majority of the group considered it bad poetry.

His attitude about this poem may be obliterated by majority rule, but it is an essential part of the collective understanding of the poem.

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*I checked with the principal about a rehearsal in the gymnasium that I had arranged last week.*

THE PRINCIPAL: Oh, I wasn't sure what night that was.

I often think that I'm the most fallible, because of my preference for working off the cuff. I guess a certain amount of chaos pervades any system.

*On March 30, we rehearsed in the gymnasium. We did vocal warm-ups, worked on switching focus, projection, and articulation. Our gymnasium, with its poor acoustics and sight lines, is a test. Everybody was tense because we were rushing and because the play is still not finished. Jack was late.*

*We worked on Jack projecting security, control, and*



power - "cool." He appeared very uncomfortable; he'd rather play the role of "jerk." It has fewer responsibilities.

Astra and Cathy were having a wonderful time painting flats. One of my Theatre Arts classes had helped them to paint an expressionistic abstract on one of the flats.

I remembered that Kent said that he would dream an ending. When I asked him about it, he said that he had a dream, but it was about something else.

I had spoken with Fred, again. We talked about character change. He said he had worked on a show where characters said to each other, "You say that now, but in Act four, you will say . . ."

LOIS (to Fred): Although in your show, this is a convention, it's true. Friends of mine were arguing. One said, "I've been trying to get you to do something new for years." The other said, "There is nothing new". Then, he said to me, "Tomorrow night, he'll be telling me that there is nothing new, that it has all been done."

After, we worked the show as it stood, and discussed writing the final scene tomorrow.

*I taped the discussion about how to end the play.*

Talking about how to end the play: A tape-recorded conversation

LOIS: Want to talk about what you think, what's happening in this play? How do we get through to the end? What's the overview of it?

KENT: Start with Cameron. We'll work our way around.

LOIS: Okay, we'll start with Cameron.

CAMERON: Mmmmm. Okay. Hang on.

KENT *[after a pause]*: Cameron, answer the question.

LOIS: Cause last day we were talking about whether Dave was the hero or whether Kent's character was the hero.

CAMERON: Kent is absolutely not the hero.

KENT: You're a fucknut, cause I am the hero.

JACK: Would you stop saying "fucknut." It's not even a word.

CAMERON: Kent is not even close to being a hero. The hero in this story is Dave.

KENT: The druggie, who sells . . .

CAMERON: Dave is the . . . The whole cast is the hero,

but like, Dave is the biggest hero. But Kent isn't even close to being a hero. What do you do that is heroic?

KENT: I'm just a nice guy.

CAMERON: No, you are not. You won't even let your sister marry the guy of her dreams.

KENT: That is cause he's a drug dealer.

CHRIS: So what. She loves him.

JEFF: I want to get my two cents worth in cause I have to leave.

LOIS: Okay. Jeff wants to say what he has to say and leave. Okay. Go ahead.

JEFF: Okay. What am I supposed to be answering?

LOIS: What is the overview of the show. What is the play about? Because we have to write an ending.

JEFF: You mean what is the point?

LOIS: Yeah.

JEFF: The point is the more things change, the more they stay the same.

CHRIS: Yeah.

KENT: Oh fuck, you are wrong. Although, I don't know.

CHRIS: What do you mean, "You are wrong?"

JEFF: That is the point.

CHRIS: They all end up back where they started.

LOIS: Explain that in terms of the characters.

JEFF: All the characters in the play do a complete one-eighty in the way that they do things or they change completely, or they get married or whatever; and they change completely from what they were before, but what do they do? They end up going to the same café, doing the same things, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee . . .

CAMERON: The gang doesn't change.

JEFF: Okay fine. But the characters change.

LOIS: Jack just gave him a nine point five.

CAMERON: How much from the Russian judge, Jack?

JACK: Three.

CAMERON: Three!

JACK: Nine point five, and three from the Russian judge.

LOIS: Okay Jeff, we'll continue on and let you know how it comes out.

JEFF: You want to put in your two cents, Tom?

TOM: I don't have two cents to put in.

LOIS: Okay, see you guys later.

JEFF: Bye.

*Jeff and Tom left to create songs for the play.*

*Disruption because of the group's fascination with  
the tape recorder.*

CAMERON: Okay. I'm calming down.

*Sounds of giggling.*

LOIS: I want to know how you think the play should end.

Do you really think someone can change because of a  
Motown hit? What you think the Death Café is? Why is  
it called the Death Café? Go ahead, Kent.

KENT: Graham asked me this question the other night and  
I got shit on for answering it.

LOIS: Well, go ahead. What did you say to him.

KENT: I really can't remember.

LOIS: Well, what do you say now after you've talked to  
him.

KENT: Why is it called Death Café? Well. *[He pauses.]*  
Auugghh.

CAMERON: We asked Kent this puzzling question and he  
said . . .

KENT: Well, it's got no inner . . . well it has got a

meaning, but nothing too serious. Just the fact that when we tried to write most of the ideas that came out seemed to relate to death.

LOIS: How can you say death's not serious?

*Laughter.*

CAMERON: Well, whoever dies usually doesn't remember nothing.

LOIS: Robert, why is it called Death Café?

ROBERT: The Death Café . . . oo-oo-oo-oo

KENT: Well, the way I see it is my character . . .

ROBERT: Pick that one up for me, Kent.

KENT: My character is totally . . .

CHRIS: Mr. Death. He is.

KENT: Mr. Death. Yeah.

LOIS: Why is he Mr. Death?

CHRIS: Listen to his poetry.

ELLEN: In the original improves, they started out as two characters that were bordering on incest. They were completely obsessed with each other, but also with death and all they were supposed to do to begin with was sit around and stare at each other and talk about death. Then Kent writes death poetry. Then Robert

wrote more death poetry. Then there was me. I was supposed to be obsessed with Freud, but that's irrelevant. And there was all this death and death and death and death. Then we got sort of satirical.

LOIS: What do you think it means now? What do you think it means to the audience that we call it Death Café?

CAMERON: It means that people who come into the café . . .

KENT: Eventually die.

ELLEN: Nooo.

CAMERON: They die, like in the café, because they come in and it is like they do the same things so they may as well be dead while they are in the café. Like people . . .

ROBERT: It is so monotonous.

CAMERON: Yeah. It is so monotonous. It is death. But when they leave they change, type a thing.

LOIS: The café keeps them boring.

CAMERON: The café keeps them constant, but every time they go in the café they do the same thing, but they leave being a little bit different.

JACK: Death Café is just a sense, a part of everything.

CAMERON: Yeah. So people sort of die a little bit when they go in there, but they get born again in other ways, but they die in this way. Then, they blah, blah; it's sort a like the vicious cycle.

CHRIS: The eternal . . .

ELLEN: They start out as one thing and they change into something else and maybe you could think the original thing it is like it died, because it wasn't there anymore.

CAMERON: Maybe, it should be called the Metamorphosis Café.

*Laughter.*

LOIS: Do you think that Jack, his character Dave, is going to go and marry Jazz and live happily ever after . . .

CAMERON: Yes, I do.

LOIS: Because he sings good Motown?

CAMERON: Yes I do.

ELLEN: Nooo.

CHRIS: Yes.

JACK: Yes.

LOIS: You guys think that you are going to meet a girl



some day, that you are going to fall in love and that's going to be it.

CAMERON: I think that Dave and Jazz are going to go away and live very happily ever after. Have two kids. Have a white picket fence. Have the son that hits the home run in the final game of the little league season. They are going to have the Cunningham's family.

CHRIS: Ger'd is going to be a wino and die.

KENT: Ger'd is not going to be a wino or drunk and die.

CHRIS: He's obsessed with death.

LOIS *[to Cameron]*: Why do you think that? How will that come about?

CAMERON: I don't know how. I don't know.

LOIS: Don't you think that his childhood, his background, could make that impossible?

JACK: My father grew up in the Battery, so there you go.

LOIS: Yeah, I know that.

KENT: Rasp *[Rasp is Chris's nickname]* I'm going to become a drunk, a wino and die.

CAMERON: Your character or you? *[Laughter.]* You

probably don't even drink, your character.

KENT: I know. That is what I'm saying.

CHRIS: I just took that. He's going to be a derelict.

CAMERON: But Jack and Jazz, absolutely. They are  
lifelong, forever.

LOIS: They're going from boredom . . .

CAMERON: Dave's not bored.

LOIS: Watching porno movies and selling drugs . . .

CAMERON: Dave's sure as hell not bored. That's one  
thing he isn't.

KENT: He's an asshole.

CHRIS: He is having fun.

CAMERON: Dave is not bored. Jazz finds humour in him  
and he finds humour in her. And they are always  
happy. "He, he, he, he. Blueberry. B-L-U-E berry."  
*[Cameron is referring to a scene in the play where  
DAVE gives JAZZ a blueberry puff-a-fruit.]* Give me a  
break.

LOIS: Yes, but when you are poor and you have three  
kids and you can't support them, you are not happy  
any more.

CAMERON: They will be.

ELLEN: No, they won't.

CHRIS: They are going to be. Look at it. It's perfect.

LOIS: Rob, what do you think?

ROBERT: Yeah. I think they make a perfect couple.

They'll be happy forevermore.

ELLEN: They won't end up happy forevermore.

CAMERON, CHRIS, and JACK: Yes.

KENT: No, I don't think . . .

CHRIS: Yes, but you are Ger'd.

KENT: I know I'm Ger'd.

ROBERT: Yes, come back to Kent, here, Ger'd.

KENT: I'm saying this from Kent's view, so just give me  
a break.

LOIS: What do you think, Angela?

ANGELA: I think they are already happy.

CAMERON: All of the people who came in here and wrote  
the death poetry think that they are not going to  
work out. All of us with a semi-optimistic view and  
a realistic outlook on life, and being in sync with  
the rest of the audience, are going to think that  
Jazz and Dave are going to live happily ever after.

LOIS: So this should be called "Escape from Death

Café."

CAMERON: No.

LOIS: Yeah. That is what you are saying. That is the message you are giving the audience, that it is possible to escape the Death Café.

CAMERON: Okay. Yeah.

CHRIS: Okay. It is.

LOIS: You can quit smoking cigarettes. You don't have to drink coffee, anymore. You can stop writing poetry.

CAMERON: But most people won't. Most people won't.

CHRIS: What you are saying . . . You want them not to change. Nobody ever changes. This is it. You are going to be this way. Then, you are going to die.

CAMERON: This is the one success story of the Death Café. The one.

CHRIS: Everybody else changes and these guys make it.

ELLEN: Chris and I are a success story.

ROBERT: We'll change the name.

CAMERON: Nooo. You have no chance.

ELLEN: I may be pregnant. I'm not poor. He doesn't sell drugs. Oh shit, he's only a . . . He doesn't

even have a job; he doesn't even sell drugs. Oh never mind. I'm pregnant. I'm less than twenty. I'm unmarried and he doesn't even have a job as a waiter, so maybe we won't be that happy.

*Sounds of Shouting.*

CAMERON: Excuse, me. Ellen and Chris just met each other twelve minutes ago.

CHRIS: But she's eternally grateful.

CAMERON: Oh fuck off. Chris just quit his job as waiter. They just met each other. Ellen is happy that she just got saved by this big hunk-a-dunk who stood up to Brian. B.F.D. They don't have a chance. They don't have a chance in hell. They'll go out for a couple of weeks. They'll be good friends. They are not going to get married. They are not going to sleep together. He is not going to raise her child.

LOIS: You think there is hope for a guy who watches

"Lisa and Lana . . . "

CHRIS: *[interrupting]* I know that the girl is pregnant.

I don't give a shit.

LOIS: "Together Again in a Bowl of Jello" on the VCR?

CAMERON: Yes he's getting cultured by Angela.

LOIS: Oh come on. So next week, he'll be reading Being and Nothingness.

ELLEN: Just because I'm pregnant means that I'm shit.

CAMERON: No that has nothing to do with it. *(Everyone is shouting.)* Time out. Time out. Shut up. Being uppercrust has zero to do with how well you get on in a marriage. That is the biggest prejudice I've ever heard.

LOIS: What has to do with how well they will get on in a marriage?

CAMERON: That's what the whole bloody issue is about.

ELLEN: I was thinking economically.

CAMERON: Economically does not a marriage make.

LOIS: Jack can you say what you think is going to happen to Dave and can everybody else listen, please.

JACK: What I think is going to happen to Dave is he's going to clean up. He is not going to be the best success story in the world, but he will clean up. He's not going to be the ultimate drug dealer all his life.

LOIS: How are Dave and Jazz going to make a go of it? They come from completely different backgrounds.

JACK: Who said Angela was culturing me? Who said that?

CAMERON: Me.

JACK: I thought that was right. He's getting more  
mature being with her.

KENT: Hold on a second.

LOIS: Okay, then we have to show that. We're not  
showing that.

CAMERON: Yes, we are.

LOIS: We're showing a desire for a fantasy. That's  
all.

CAMERON: And the fantasy comes true.

LOIS: How do we show that?

CAMERON: We have Ricardo Montelban come out in a white  
suit.

*Laughter.*

LOIS: That surely validates everybody's love affair.

KENT: Dave says during the play to me, "You know  
nothing, You've got your education, blah, blah, but  
you know nothing of the way life is." I know more  
from living on the streets type thing. Now, for the  
first while that he's with Jazz, she will be  
culturing him. Yea! Big deal. But he only knows the

way of the streets: Theft, Drugs . . .

CAMERON: Not theft.

KENT: No, murdering people.

CAMERON: What!

KENT: That was the way it was first.

CAMERON: It ain't now.

JACK: I don't kill people. No way.

KENT: He is a slash 'em up character.

CAMERON: No, he's not.

KENT: That's the original character.

CAMERON: He's the cleanest . . . he comes into a café  
and sings "Good Lovin'." He is not a slash 'em up  
character.

KENT: Now, he's made into a total clean-cut person.

CAMERON: No. He's not a clean-cut person either.

JACK: He's a fun-loving, obnoxious person.

CAMERON: Right. Exactly.

KENT: Can I finish my thought.

LOIS: Yes.

KENT: So the first while she will be culturing him. He  
only knows the way of the street.

CAMERON: That's why she will be culturing him.



KENT: I know. But he's got this idea, of course, that the man is the bread-winner of the family type thing. Oh come on Cameron, you know he does.

CAMERON: Yeah, he does.

KENT: After a while, he will end up influencing her and she will be destroyed in the end.

CAMERON: Not true. They'll meet half way.

JACK: Dave is obnoxious and fun-loving, but he's going to grow up.

KENT: Dave used to slash people up.

CAMERON: He did not.

JACK: That's news to me.

CAMERON: Dave is not a thug.

KENT: The original character of Dave was a thug.

CAMERON: Original has nothing to do with what happens in the play.

LOIS: He isn't a thug, anymore. He just sells drugs.

CAMERON: He even checks his dope to make sure he's not hurting these kids he's selling to.

LOIS: Oh come on. Let's not make him a saint.

KENT: You have him made into a saint.

CHRIS: He is a general good guy. Look at him.

LOIS: Be realistic.

CHRIS: Okay, he deals drugs and he might have killed a few people . . .

CAMERON *[shouting]*: He didn't kill anyone.

CHRIS: But he's basically a nice guy. Just because he killed somebody doesn't mean he's a slimeball.

CAMERON: He didn't kill anyone. He doesn't even carry a weapon.

JACK: Keep your friggin' voice down. Okay. The thing is . . . I forgot what I was going to say.

CAMERON: Well, that should make your speech a lot shorter, then.

JACK: No. Everyone pretend they're in the audience and think of Dave.

LOIS: Let's stop for a minute. Be quiet and think about it.

*Pause.*

JACK: Dave is just a fun-loving, obnoxious character who definitely will grow up in the future, because you can sort of see. You can see he is going to be sweet. You can see he's going to work well with children, aside from the fact that he sells drugs to

them.

ANGELA: He's definitely not a thug. He might be a gang leader and do drugs and that, but I know lots of guys like that. *[She laughs.]* It doesn't mean they're thugs and kill people. You know, like he's nice, down deep. He cares about people, but he doesn't like to show it.

LOIS: What about the fact that he has no education; how will these guys manage that? What will you do? Do you guys think you have a good enough communication system going to make it work?

ANGELA: Yeah, I do.

KENT: I think that Angela's view is blocked by the fact that she loves him. She's not saying that from the audience's view, she is saying it from her character's point of view. I don't think the audience sees enough of Dave to see the real Dave. I think the only Dave they will see is the one that comes out and sings the Motown stuff, sings "Good Lovin'," sings all the stuff to her. They don't get to know that he's a thug and killed people, but we do.

LOIS: Chris?

CHRIS: Dave is generally a nice guy. He acts like, "I'm cool, I'm Mr. Macho," but when he gets near her, he's like he's a good person inside. I think he'll change.

LOIS: You guys are saying he's a good person doing bad things.

CAMERON: Yip.

JACK: Exactly.

CHRIS: Necessity.

LOIS: But necessity is always there.

ROBERT: I think he will stop dealing drugs. He's going to think so much of Jazz that he going to straighten out his act. I mean, Dave cares, right. He's not a real thug. He's a general nice guy. And it's necessity that he's doing this for, for now. He's got nobody else, so he's got nothing to worry about. Why not do this. But once Jazz comes into the picture, he has to worry about Jazz. He has to stay with Jazz. I would imagine he will clean up his act.

LOIS: What happens if Jazz becomes the family supporter and he can't get a job or do anything? What's that

going to do to him as a person?

ROBERT: It is going to be very degrading and I think he'll probably be very moody and depressed constantly. But I think they could make it.

KENT: With what?

ROBERT: If Angela had a job. They'd make it.

LOIS: What about him being moody and depressed. How would they work that out?

ROBERT: He could get a job. He could get a labourer's job or anything. I mean, the guy is smart. He's a smart dude. And I think that really comes over unto the audience. He isn't dumb. He's not tripping over his feet constantly. I'm sure he could lug a sack of potatoes eight hours a day. If worse comes to worse. Ya know.

LOIS: But if he's smart maybe he's not going to want to do that. Maybe he'll end up taking it out on Jazz.

JACK: Maybe he'll work Seven Eleven stores.

ROBERT: That's right.

KENT: Maybe he'll beat her up.

ROBERT: Where do you get that? Where is the audience going to see that Dave in the future is going to beat

his wife.

LOIS: I agree with Kent.

ELLEN: I think he's a generally nice guy, but he's got a very warped sense of morality. His ethics are really, really off. And there is nothing to say. . . Okay fine, Romeo keeps saying, "Dave's too smart, he won't go to prison," but, I mean, a lot of people who are in prison aren't stupid. There's nothing to say that he is not going to get caught and end up in prison. He might be a nice guy, but he's obviously got some sort of temper. He's living on the streets and he has been a violent person in the past.

LOIS: Dave is without a job. He's depressed and moody. His wife who he thinks he should be supporting is the breadwinner. That situation is quite likely to lead to arguments and misery. I'm not saying that there isn't a solution. There well may be. If there is I'm challenging you to say what that solution is. Because I've gone through relationships, where that's not been the factor, and it has been very hard not to relate to the person in a pretty violent way.

Cameron?

CAMERON: I have no idea where anybody thinks that Dave is violent. He doesn't show any violence, whatsoever, at no point throughout the play does he show violence. Not at one point in the play does he show violence. Never.

LOIS: But in the back-up scenes and in how we developed his character, that was there.

CAMERON: When?

JACK: At the improvs. We were writing it. We were just learning about it.

ROBERT: But we didn't use it. I was the one who said we would blow up a car and we scratched it. Dave didn't say it. I said it.

LOIS: But in my mind, it is still there.

CAMERON: But in my mind . . . and in the audience's mind which is what we are talking about . . .

ROBERT: The audience has not seen our rehearsals.

LOIS: Okay.

CAMERON: Dave is the nice guy. He is not a thug. He doesn't cut people if they don't pay for his drugs. He gives them a bit of time. He probably won't sell it to them in the first place if they don't have the

money to spend to cover it. But he doesn't cut people . . .

CHRIS : Because he's intelligent.

CAMERON: And he doesn't hurt people. He has never killed anyone in his life. He's not going to rough up Jazz. If they have kids, he's not going to rough up the kids. And if Jazz has to work then he will support her, however he can, as a working mother. And he will try and do whatever he can. Dave is waiting for Jazz or someone like Jazz to come along and bring that out of him. He's a damn happy guy.

LOIS: Okay, Let's improvise two scenes. Let's improvise a scene where we leave the audience with a question about Dave and let's improvise a scene where you definitely show Dave's change. I don't think "Dave Cares" is enough. A Motown hit does not convince me that Dave is anywhere near . . .

CAMERON: It convinces the hell out of me. Not just it. It's sort of like the coup de grace type of thing. He has already showed that he loves Jazz, in the blueberry bit and in the "I love you" bit and in "Good Lovin'."



LOIS: You are like . . . "All you need is love," right?

ROBERT: Yeah, well how do you get out of "Good Lovin'",  
out of a Motown hit, how do you get that he's going  
to beat his kids and his wife?

JACK: Exactly. Who runs across the stage, sings "Good  
Lovin'" and goes home and beats his wife?

LOIS: Well, he comes from a lower socio-economic . . .

CAMERON: That's a major prejudice, right there.

ROBERT: I come from a lower socio-economic group. I  
live in a basement apartment. So I'm going to grow  
up and beat my wife and my kids.

CHRIS: I think I should too. Yeah, let's beat our kids  
together.

KENT: Lois, . . .

CAMERON: I come from a middle-class family, so I'm  
going to snort coke when I get older.

KENT: I think what you guys are saying is true, but  
that doesn't necessarily portray Dave.

LOIS: I am not saying Dave is going to beat his kids or  
anything like that. I am saying, "How are they going  
to make their relationship work?" And you are saying,  
"Love."

CAMERON, ROBERT, and JACK: Yes.

CHRIS: Yes. You ever heard of it?

LOIS: I hate to tell you this Robert, but just name  
some people who have loved you that it has not turned  
out that good with.

CAMERON: This is a play; it is not real life.

ROBERT: That it hasn't turned out that good with?

KENT: Cameron just said it. This is a play; it is not  
real life.

LOIS: Yes, but we trying to write some real life stuff  
into it.

CAMERON: We are writing some real life into it. Dave  
is a semi-real life character. Semi. This is a  
play.

LOIS: We agreed at the beginning that we weren't going  
for farce.

ROBERT: Okay.

LOIS: That is why I'm putting you through this.

KENT: Lois, Dave is supposed to be a gang leader, drug  
dealer type person. In this play, if you were to  
look at the hand-out type thing it would say, "Dave  
is a gang leader." If it was a description of him it

would say, "gang leader, deals drugs, blah, blah, blah-blah, blah. On stage, he gets up there, he runs around, singing "Good Lovin'" and this Motown song, showing how much he cares. It never once really shows, except for that scene, "We got to talk business" which is the only one like that, it never once shows what Dave is supposed to be like. It is like he is not living the character he is supposed to be playing.

CAMERON: Yes, he is.

KENT: Somebody who runs around saying how much he loves life, how much he wants white picket fences, for twenty minutes on a stage, is not going to look like a drug dealer.

ROBERT: And they are going to read on the programme that he is a drug dealer, and they are going to say, "Now, that's a decent dude, for a drug dealer."

LOIS: I want you to answer the question of how you get the idea that love answers everything. And I'd like you tell me if you've never had an experience in your life where someone who loved you . . . What are you doing, Jack?

JACK: Sorry.

*Laughter.*

LOIS: Absolutely.

CAMERON: You still can't say, "Absolutely."

LOIS: Say it. Say it, Cameron.

CAMERON: I can't say it unless it's in context.

LOIS: Do you think Dave's a good guy?

CAMERON: Absolutely.

*Laughter.*

LOIS: I think Dave's a good guy, too. But I think it is a challenge for Dave to bring out the love that he has. My experience is that lots of people who love you, also betray you. I don't think you can know at the end of this play if Dave betrays Jazz or not. I think there are lots of things to suggest that he might have to.

ROBERT: If the belief is there, he doesn't have to.

That's all he needs.

LOIS: I don't think you can be so sure, Robert. Just because somebody loves you, does not solve everything.

CAMERON: No, which is good to have in this play, too,

because people will sort of know that and then they will wonder - they won't have this sort of a discussion - but they'll think did Dave and Jazz get married and have the white picket fence or did he slap around his wife. I don't think anyone will think he did slap around his wife.

LOIS: No, I know. That was probably a wrong thing to get off into.

CAMERON: But I think that some of them will think that the marriage won't work out.

ROBERT: Love doesn't solve anything.

LOIS and CAMERON: Not anything. It doesn't solve everything.

ROBERT: Well, it doesn't solve everything. But Dave and Angela, in the play, seem like they can work anything out. That is what people are going to believe.

CAMERON: It is a modern fairy tale.

CHRIS: I like that.

CAMERON: Thank you. I like that. It is. The Mystery Stringpicker at the Death Café, a modern fairy tale.

CHRIS: It's about how things change, but there is a way

to change things all together.

LOIS: You are missing my point. I do not care right now about the structure of the play. I'm saying, Robert, if you didn't fall in love there wouldn't be any problems at all, because you would be by yourself. So being in love is the reason for the start of the problems, in a sense.

ROBERT: Right.

LOIS: I think you have to ask yourself, how do they solve their problems?

KENT: Love is a bitch.

LOIS: How do they keep on loving each other? Maybe you leave the audience just wondering how they solve things, but I think if you guys really believe that love can be a solution then I think you've got to say in an improv a little bit how. Right now, you are all saying "This is the way it is and I have to tell you," but what you are not doing is challenging yourselves. You are not challenging yourself with the question, "How does this work?" The collective process that we are working with has presented a question. Now, we should try and answer it.

ROBERT: It's a long story how you deal with betrayal in a love relationship.

LOIS: You don't need to tell your personal history, just the qualities that allow you to love someone after betrayal. What qualities must Dave and Jazz possess to make their relationship work.

ROBERT: Understanding. Forgiveness. Optimism. Thinking things will get better. Facing problems. Hanging in there. Discussing problems.

LOIS: That's what I think we should suggest in the final scene, that Dave and Jazz have some understanding of the necessity of nurturing these qualities in their relationship.

KENT: Look, I'm sorry about the position I took. I got into character and couldn't see the audience's point of view. I can now.

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My journal writing continues . . .

We improvised scenes trying to incorporate some of the conclusions reached. We discussed some of the other problems we had to deal with before Tuesday. Dave needed

a leather jacket.

What would Jazz wear? As we debated whether she dressed like a metal maiden or whether her sophisticated dress was part of her attraction for Dave, Angela objected to every suggestion.

LOIS: What do you want to wear?

ANGELA: I don't care.

I pointed out to her that this was hard to believe since she had vehemently objected to every suggestion made so far. She laughed. We all laughed at the contradiction.

At the end of rehearsal, Chris said that he wasn't very good at improvising. I told him that that was okay. "I'm not very good at improvising, either. Don't worry. You make your contribution. Everybody is different. Robert is a good improviser, but he is too hyper to write."

After this rehearsal, Robert said to me that he thought the discussion we had had was a waste of time, because I knew the answers to questions I was asking. I was just trying to get them to say those answers.

I told him that I thought that if we hadn't had this



discussion the play would end differently. I hadn't thought of the qualities of love that he had listed. I had come to rehearsal with questions, not answers.

On the way home, Robert talked about last year when he registered for Theatre Arts. He had thought that he was too shy to remain in the course and had tried to switch into another course. The administration wouldn't allow him to drop the course. Throughout the year he performed in the Drama Club productions, a Wonderbolt Circus production that I was in, and a Sound Symposium production, The Wiz of the Wireless.

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The next day, Angela brought in some dialogue she had written.

JAZZ [to GER'D]: I don't expect you to understand the way I feel. Love is hard to understand. You have to trust me and the decisions that I make.

Dave is different one-on-one. We all have our faults. Some are worse than others. When you are in love, you see the person quite differently than everyone else does. I see things in Dave that you would never see, just as you see things in Dave that

I don't see. Nobody's perfect, not even you.

\*\*\*

On April 3, we met at my home between 7pm and 10:30pm. We didn't need the larger rehearsal space because we were writing down dialogue. We drank several cups of coffee, and sat around my dining room table and listened to the tape I had made of last rehearsal.

By the time we were starting to get down to really working, some people had to go. Robert and Kent stayed and we wrote together. As well as writing the final scene, we also wrote a scene in which THE POET makes satirical commentary on "Dave Cares" in a poem about Care Bears. This also provided a transition into the final scene - a serious scene - of the play.

Robert and I ended the evening with a conversation about what makes a good actor. I said that I thought a good actor had ethics. He considered what he would and wouldn't do in a production. For example, I'm not doing this character because it is part of a statement I don't agree with. (We were talking in terms of collective creation.) This is not my part; it would be better played by another actor.

We also talked about how an actor benefits from having an emotional history. Maybe it gives him range, a range he may not acquire in any other way.

Robert said that he thought he would be a good actor. We talked about how he couldn't tell his girlfriend about certain things that had happened to him growing up.

When he tried, he cried. Crying didn't make him feel any better. He said that she knew anyway if she let herself know that she wanted it put into words, but that was unnecessary.

LOIS: Sometimes you know things that can't be articulated in words and to put them into words somehow makes them less than what they are. Sometimes, there are no words. You have to accumulate the knowledge or experience.

ROBERT: Here, here.

We talked about how a collective contains knowledge that one individual member of the collective doesn't have on his own.

Ellen had left the dining room, at one point in this rehearsal. Later Kent sort of found her sobbing her heart out in my living room. We all tried to comfort her.

ELLEN: I wish you were teaching next year. Because I won't get the chance to take Theatre Arts from you and everybody else did.

*When she left, I talked to Kent.*

LOIS: Why do you think Ellen is so upset? She doesn't really talk to me a lot or anything, so?

KENT: Don't underestimate the importance of having an adult take you seriously. It's a big thing.

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*On April 4, from 1:30pm until 4:00pm, I attended a Drama Association meeting and was warned against interlopers participating in the Drama Club production this year, and about exceeding the number of participants allowed. Last year, both of these things had occurred in our production. One of our actors was from another high school and another was not attending any high school, although he was of high school age and did enrol in high school (at our school) the following year.*

*Directly after the Association meeting, we had a rehearsal. We agreed that all lines would be memorized by tomorrow.*

*Angela cried through the entire rehearsal, today, and*

left early.

*The group teased Jack, because he showed up dressed in a suit. He had come from a Junior Achievement meeting. The general thought is that Jack's participation in Junior Achievement is a defense, that he'd rather be acting and writing.*

JEFF: Of course, he'll never admit this. He needs to be able to call us "bleeding heart liberals" or "communist dogs" or to tell us that we are "full of socialist crap."

*We worked on "Dave Cares." All the characters, including the evil-tempered CHEF CALVIN PENNEY, shuffle out during the song to sing the "Dave cares. He cares about lots of things" line.*

*Kent said he liked this.*

KENT: Not only will Brian's bass voice improve the sound, but also Chef Calvin Penney singing "Dave cares about lots of things" and swaying to the music is funny.

*The contrast between the attitude CHEF CALVIN PENNEY demonstrates in the scene where he tortures THE SAD GIRL, and the sentiment of the song is great enough to be*

humourous.

We are all beginning to see how the play does or can fit together and whether costume changes work or do not work and how to make them work.

Tom suggested musical bridges. This "film sound track" idea works well in a couple of places.

The last scene has to be intense. We discussed the way in which Angela should play JAZZ in this scene. I suggested that JAZZ's conduct be used to break the intensity at certain points. Rather than consider what her motivation is, for example, is it anger, love; let's consider the pacing of this scene.

The group has to work on sharing, as Spolin calls it, sharing the voice, the body, the expression, with fellow actors and with the audience.

The writing is over, now. It is important that performers feel comfortable with my direction, but I accept few suggestions from the group.

Brian asked me if he could co-direct. I said, "No."

LOIS: At this point, time is at a premium and I don't have the cooperative spirit, or the manners to wait for someone else's suggestions, to consider them, and

incorporate them.

BRIAN: Okay.

A lot of what we have written is poetry. In Death Café a sizeable portion of writing progresses through the connection of sounds. For example, the poet says in Care Bears:

This is getting monotonous

Mono Tone Us

Mono Toneness

Postmodern Motinism.

That's it.

I quit.

\*\*\*

*On April 5, we rehearsed from 3:30pm to 10:30pm. I tried to get the group members to fill in pauses with presence. It is usual for people to not talk, to pause; but often young actors seem to be under the impression that their character doesn't exist unless he or she is speaking. This kind of performance quality, while quite obviously necessary, is a knack that some have or else must acquire, and it is not easily acquired. Eventually, under the limitation of time, we began to eliminate many*

*of the pauses the script had originally called for.*

I have said everything I can think of to Angela to cause her to realize that she has an effect on people around her, to no avail. I said to her, "Angela, you are the baddest girl in the universe. Can't you realize that your attitude and what you say affects Jack or Robert or me, for that matter?"

She doesn't respond in any way.

She can't seem to figure out how to accomplish what I'm asking for in terms of performance, either. I'm at a loss to know where else to go to shed a little light. Unfortunately, she says so little, she also gets drowned out by the rest of us. This is evident in the script.

I'm most pleased with Chris and Kent. Chris had trouble writing and improvising, but the parts he performs he performs confidently, charmingly, and with complete commitment. Although Kent does not project his performance, energy or interpretation, as far as he could, he is also totally committed to each thing his character does (and his character has the long death poem to read!)

The main problems remain filling out pauses, focus - which amounts to much the same thing, projecting energy,



**pacing, and enjoying sounds, articulation.**

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*On April 6, we rehearsed for two periods in the morning. We ran through the play a couple of times and had a lot of fun.*

*Kent was really excited today. He came up to me during first period, jumping up and down.*

KENT: Guess what. Guess what.

LOIS: What, Kent?.

KENT: I started a fight. This guy in the corridor was staring at me. I said, "What are you staring at?" He said, "Nothing." I said, "You're always staring at me," and pushed him. It was great.

LOIS: Kent, we were analyzing the body language of intimidation for dramatic reasons, not so that you could start fights.

BRIAN [*glances at Lois*]: Right on, Kent. Cause people should know, you don't fuck with the Drama Club.

*Brian wants to change the name of the Drama Club to The Angels of Death Drama Club. We all laughed about that.*

*During recess time, Kent apologised to the student he*

had pushed.

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We met at the LSPU Hall on Victoria Street after school and did another runthrough there. Everyone was extremely tired. We argued about lighting for the production, but I insisted on minimal lighting changes. We already have some nice effects with practicals like the candles and the television set that is showing Casablanca.

Robert mentioned to me that Cameron makes a lot of negative comments backstage. He makes fun of Kent and Chris. Robert said that this really bothers him.

LOIS: Did you say something?

ROBERT: Yes. I said, "Cut that now, Cameron."

LOIS: When it comes up again, say something about his inhumanity to man.

\*\*\*

April 7, The Mystery Stringpicker at the Death Café was performed at the LSPU Hall on Victoria Street. First, the amplifier for Jeff's guitar didn't work. That was terrifying, but we finally turned some button and resolved that problem. As a result, however, the balance between Jeff's guitar, Jeff's voice, and Tom's synthesizer was

readjusted and for the most part, Tom was overwhelmed by whatever sound Jeff was creating. This caused profuse sweating and a short delay, throughout which it seemed the president of the Association kept saying, "Are you ready. You have to go, now. How long before you are ready. You should go, now.

"The production was received enthusiastically. The audience cheered and clapped throughout. Jack responded to the audience easily. He held for all the laughs, never rushing himself, giving the audience time to attend to everything he did or said. The pause after "Dave Cares" where Dave is in an emotional quandary was perfect.

Some of the local arts community came to the Festival to see our production. Mike Wade of the Newfoundland Shakespeare Company thought Robert's performance as THE POET stood out. Ed Riche, local filmmaker, said that he thought THE POET got a little tedious. Charles Tomlinson, animateur at Resource Centre for the Arts, said, "Kent's poem was too long and the ending was too abrupt."

THE POET is tedious at times. Gerd's poem in a shoe is long. The ending is abrupt. I've thought this at different times during the process, but I like the rawness

of the play and these "faults" are part of that quality. Of course, rawness may be a fault. Then, it's called looseness.

Our production was evaluated by an adjudicator who mostly said negative things about the changing of focuses, basically that it was sloppily done. She asked why JAZZ was such a silent character. She suggested that JAZZ's lines could have been broken up, so that she was engaged in a dialogue, rather than three or four short speeches.

She also mentioned that many of the characters did not "cheat out" enough, or project. What she mentioned we knew, but did not quite accomplish. **There is a dissonance between what the mind knows and what the body knows.** During this project, there were things we came to know and other things we became able to do. I'm not sure that we needed someone to tell us what we already knew. On the other hand, we discovered that group members did not always have the same knowledge about shared experiences. **An outside adjudication of this kind could provoke a realization.**

She did not seem to be particularly interested in the process. The fact that it was written in this way, that

the process was such an important experience, didn't seem to occur to her. She did not even allude to this experience, except to suggest the revision with regard to JAZZ's dialogue which I would hardly call reference to the collective process.

I thought her most interested in narrative. The method that we used to string images together to create Death Café, then, would appear more as lacking in skill to create defined form, rather than what it was, an experiment with this kind of juxtaposition. Of course, she was quite right in what she said, but I loved this group, was a part of this group, and was not very keen on hearing it. I wanted to hear the reactions of someone more sensitive to our process. Probably what I wanted to hear were the reactions of those most sensitive to our process: ourselves; however, I did like hearing the positive reactions from outside the group.

Fabian said that he would buy a tape of the music right now, if there was one available. He loved "I met her at the Death Café." Ed said he was very proud of Jack, and felt relieved that the production Jack had helped to create was neither sexist nor racist, as he conceived the

first show of the evening. He also said he though Jack did "a pretty good job singing," too.

The last night of the festival we met for a pot luck at my house and walked down to the LSPU Hall as a group. We saw a production that was appropriate and performances that were touching and funny. The group was very impressed. It was beneficial that they saw something that they considered as good or better than what they had presented.

Robert won a \$500.00 acting scholarship.

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On April 15, we performed Death Café in the library, without the benefit of lighting, for students who wished to attend.

Before the performance, Angela asked me if she could see the lecture in the gym. I was taken aback and asked her why she didn't want to prepare for the performance.

ROBERT: Angela said to me, "This show is dead. I don't want to do it again."

KENT: To me, too.

LOIS: She's sabotaging the performance, when she makes comments like that just before you have to go on.

**I thought of this situation going to bed that night;  
it bothered me alot. The next day, I saw Angela on the  
street, in front of Atlantic Place. I told her what  
Robert and Kent had reported to me.**

LOIS: Angela, you can not be saying things like that  
just before you are about to present a play. You are  
throwing off other people's performances.

ANGELA: I did good.

**I felt angry.**

LOIS: You can't refuse to believe you have an effect on  
other people cause you do.

*She walked away from me, saying that she had to have  
a smoke.*

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*We met to talk about the collective event, process,  
and group. I taped the discussion.*

Talking about the play after the performances: A tape-  
recorded conversation

LOIS: Let's discuss the play.

KENT: Robert.

ROBERT: The play is a play about a café.

CAMERON: OOOOOUUU deep.

LOIS: Well, when asked about the themes of the play  
during our evaluation, nobody made much of a response  
so I was wondering . . .

KENT: Cause nobody knew.

LOIS: Yeah, that's what I'm wondering if anyone has any  
ideas.

ROBERT: I always thought it was a take-off on the cafés  
around town, because it kinda is and . . .

LOIS: What does it say to the audience?

ROBERT: It talks about love, but not just love,  
understanding, and forgiveness.

CAMERON: I don't think it does.

ROBERT: And also integration of class systems: slums  
unto suburban yuppie-like geeks, like Ger'd there.

KENT: Thankyou.

LOIS: But what do you think the poet's role is and what  
do you think the John Wayne's and the sad girl's role  
is?

ROBERT: Fillers.

LOIS: Fillers. *[Everybody laughs.]* But don't you think



they comment on the other situations. Like you say  
Dave and Jazz are the main focus of the whole thing.

ROBERT: The poet is an existential extremist. Totally  
on the other end of everything that's going on in the  
play. So he tells it through his negative point of  
view. And gets the meaning across by shooting it -  
by shooting everything that happens in the play - by  
shooting it down.

JEFF: That's pretty good.

LOIS: So what does that leave the audience with because  
we don't say either one is good or bad, or do we?

ROBERT: No we don't. It leaves the audience to make  
their own opinions which is that the relationship  
between Jazz and Dave is the good part of the play  
and everything. It's the happy ending. The poet is  
just the guy who is there to interpret to the  
audience what the hell is going on in his own words.  
You know, he tells about Dave's love, but he tells  
how he smears it over the whole café. A really  
negative dude. So I guess the audience would pick up  
on the relationship between Jazz and Dave, rather  
than John Wayne and the sad girl, because like the

adjudicator said they're kind of along the same lines, although none of us really realized it.

LOIS: I'm just wondering what does that say about the collective process when you can do something that is obviously a comment on something else to the audience, but don't recognize it yourself?

JEFF: I was thinking like the sad girl and John Wayne are kind of like what happens after Dave and Jazz don't love each other any more. Ya know, cause probably John Wayne and the sad girl, they had a really good time for maybe a very long time, but just don't give a shit any more. They don't care.

KENT: No, the sad girl does.

JEFF: The sad girl cares, but she seems like she's pretty fed up. She's pretty well drained.

KENT: She doesn't really care. She just cares about being pregnant.

LOIS: Yeah. He's got her to an emotional burn-out point.

JACK: I think the audience saw it as maybe a comparison between the two couples.

JEFF: Well, that's what the adjudicator said.

ROBERT: Anyone ever tell you, you sound like Ronald Reagan?

LOIS: Yes, but what does it say about the collective process that you can do that and not recognize it?

CAMERON: I really don't know.

ROBERT: It's a real thing. I mean, the fact that that could happen in the collective process, I mean it could happen in real life. I mean you could be in a café and you are talking about all those things when the person next to you could be a victim of what is to happen or what is allegedly going to happen.

LOIS: I know what you mean. You say something, start talking about something and then the same thing happens to you.

ROBERT: The person right behind you, that could have happened to them.

JEFF: If you think about it, everything that goes on in the play, everybody looks at it and goes, "Ha ha, that's really stupid," but that's exactly what goes on. It's just a little bit more extreme. Sometimes it's even worse than that.

LOIS: Give an example.

JEFF: Okay, all this stuff that goes on between Dave and Jazz, everybody goes, "Oh, that's really stupid," but people out there really do act like that.

KENT: Yes, like I can think of times . . .

JEFF: It's really stupid.

LOIS: But some of it isn't stupid, like when they say they love each other. That's not stupid.

JEFF: No, it's not stupid, but everybody in the audience, the way that it was done, everybody in the audience sort of sits back and laughs at it, and if you think about it that's exactly what goes on.

JACK: Their lives. They're applying it to their lives all the time.

LOIS: Maybe that's why they laugh at it.

JACK: Exactly.

CAMERON: I think they weren't applying it to their lives. They were saying that's never going to happen to me. No, no, no.

KENT: Yeah, but it does.

ROBERT: The play is the basis of reality. It is like either the basis of far-fetched . . . It is just blunt reality.

JEFF: I think we've hit upon the meaning of life, here.

ROBERT: There it is, right.

LOIS: What do you mean "blunt reality?"

ROBERT: Well, what happened on the stage could happen to anybody else in a longer span of time with more and more happenings and integrations of other people, right. So it'll probably become unnoticed, but whereas in the play everybody knows that things like that can happen. What happens to someone else can happen to you.

CAMERON: That's true in a sense, but I don't think that is what the play means. You are figuring out that after.

JEFF: What does the play mean?

LOIS: Go ahead, Cameron.

CAMERON: I don't know what the play means, myself. I don't think it means anything. I think that it's just a good play. It's got some funny things in it. It's got some things you might want to consider thinking about.

LOIS: The audience has a brain, so they're obviously thinking about something. When they go away, what

are they thinking about?

CAMERON: I think that they would think like what happened to Dave and Jazz. I don't think they would have applied any of that to their own life. A couple of them might, but I don't think for the majority of them . . .

*A pause.*

LOIS: Kent, we're going around the circle.

KENT: What is the question?

LOIS: Well, reply to what Cameron said. Usually when you perform a play for an audience, it makes it - the performance - into something else, cause it jells. Just like when you perform a song for an audience, the song becomes . . . You recognize what it is or you see your writing in print and you say, "Hey, that's pretty good," you know, or you say, "Geez that's really bad. That sucks," you know.

KENT: Okay, the play, it's the idea of love, as Robert says, between Jazz and Dave. I think that Ellen and Cameron play the part, of well the sad girl and John Wayne, that is, showing us what might be in the future of Dave and Jazz. And the part about it not

being real life is bullshit. I believe the part about what Robert said, "It's the blunt." It's like a speeded-up process, but over time these things do happen. People say, "Oh this Motown stuff that happened in the café doesn't happen. The screaming and having fighting matches and stuff on the sidewalk doesn't happen." If you think about it, to somebody, to everybody at some point in life that will happen.

CAMERON: Not everybody.

KENT: Well, not everybody, but to most people.

CAMERON: Not in the realistic sense.

KENT: Yes. Yes, stuff like that has happened. I can think of stuff like that has happened.

CAMERON: Not quite so . . . the same way.

KENT: I can remember somebody telling me about having a fight with somebody in a street up in Ottawa. It was an argument, and they were in the middle of the street up in Ottawa, holding up traffic, arguing and they were just shouting and there were like three hundred people around them like staring at each other and they were just shouting back and forth. Stuff like that does happen.

CAMERON: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT: It happened last night, actually. At Dave's.

KENT: It happened to me at the 301 Club in front of  
four hundred people. I'm standing up by the  
equipment freaking out on Danny and Jack and  
everybody else.

CAMERON: And it happened with Greg Babstock.

KENT: And with Greg Babstock. But stuff like that  
always does happen if you really want to think about  
it enough. And what happened in the play was just  
all put together, and we had to do it in a certain  
amount of time, and we wanted to show everything.  
So, there you go.

ROBERT: It's all compiled together. If we're looking  
for the meaning of the play, I think, we should  
probably look at what are the audience thinking as  
they're heading towards the intermission and what is  
their after thought of the play? Everybody reviews a  
play in their mind.

ELLEN: Do you want to know what my parents thought?

KENT: Well, I think . . . Okay.

LOIS: Okay.



KENT and CAMERON: Okay, Ellen.

ELLEN: I mean this is really great. I mean, we've got all these wonderful thoughts and the adjudicator had some thoughts like maybe the sad girl was a reflection on what Ger'd thought was going to happen to Jazz. . . . Okay. So my parents are just generally run-of-the-mill people who don't really attend a lot of theatre. When I got home that night, I sat down and I said, "Well?"

And Dad said, "That was hysterical. That was really funny. It was the funniest thing I've seen in ages, Ellen. I haven't laughed that hard in, oh boy, over a year."

He said that he was so embarrassed to be laughing that hard, because Mrs. Standidge was sitting in front of him. [Laughter.] Anyway, I looked at my Mom and I said, "Oh God, we didn't intend it to be that funny. There were funny lines, but we figured it was a relatively serious play. Mom got real embarrassed and said, "Oh."

CAMERON: I thought it was funny.

LOIS: It is serious-funny.

JACK: I thought it was a really funny . . .

ELLEN: Mom said, "Well, I guess that I can see where it could be saddish."

She hadn't even thought about it. She just viewed it as something really funny. She took it so light-hearted. And we spent hours and hours and hours, talking . . .

LOIS: I don't see anything . . . Does anybody see anything bad about that?

CAMERON: Nope.

ELLEN: I don't see anything bad.

LOIS: Or a mistake?

CAMERON, ROBERT, and JACK: No.

ELLEN: I'm not saying there's anything bad or a mistake. . .

LOIS: Or that was a reaction you didn't expect? You thought that was a reaction we didn't expect.

ELLEN: I was just thinking. I was just commenting, like I was just noticing we said so many things and we spent hours, and hours, and hours, discussing it and it just seems funny to hear somebody else just take it so light-heartedly. When we spent hours . .

JEFF *[interrupting]*: But there wasn't hours. . .

ELLEN: Shut up. I'm not finished. I'm not saying that it is wrong or even something that we hadn't expected. It just seemed odd after hearing so many conversations about . . . I mean we've got tapes of the great, big arguments we've had about Dave's character.

LOIS: Yup.

ELLEN: And then they just thought it was funny. They thought it was "a really great play, Ellen." They thought it was hysterical.

CAMERON: That's the same with my father. That's exactly the same with Dad.

ELLEN: And I was thinking . . . I'd say that's probably how a lot of the audience feels.

LOIS: Yeah, well, it is funny, right? But they didn't go beyond saying it was funny. They didn't go beyond and say, "Well, what is this play about?" You don't have to, I guess.

ELLF.J: Well, no. Obviously, you don't have to.

LOIS: But for people who have seen it two or three times, like Ms. Parsons. They have a bit of a

different attitude. If they had to sit through it again, they might not find it so funny, because they already heard the jokes. They might think of something else. Yeah, no, I mean that's a good point, Ellen, I'm just saying.

JEFF: It is not just a collection of gags. There is not that many funny lines. There is not enough funny lines in it to make it hysterical.

KENT: No, but there is.

LOIS: We could have written way more funny lines.

Cameron wrote lots of them, but we didn't use them.

JEFF: So what I think makes it funny is it's . . . so ridiculous, because you can all sort a sit there and go, "Well, that couldn't happen, but may be it could happen." It is kinda . . .

LOIS: In fact it did happen.

JEFF: That's what makes . . . That is why I found a lot of it funny, cause it was just so ridiculous, but it was pretty true. You know stuff like that, if it's true, it's pretty funny.

LOIS: Yeah, familiarity, I think is funny.

ROBERT: Interrelate.

JEFF: It is not just a collection of one-liners.

LOIS: Angela, you say something, now.

KENT: We are now going to hear the voice of Angela  
Warren.

LOIS: What do you think the play is about?

ANGELA: I don't know.

CAMERON: Well, there you go, now.

KENT: There you go, now. That was the voice of Angela  
Warren.

CAMERON: Thank you, Angela.

ELLEN: Shut up.

ANGELA: I heard one really strange comment after,  
though. I was talking to a friend of mine and she  
said that her Theatre class was talking about it, and  
they couldn't figure one thing out. They all  
thought, that like, Ger'd was sexually in love with  
me.

KENT: I am.

LOIS: Yeah, I think. Yeah, both me and Kent think  
that.

KENT: It is like incest.

CAMERON: You remember, you go, "You think our love is

so perfect?" And Kent goes *[makes a snorting sound.]*

LOIS: I didn't hear him go *[makes a snorting sound.]*

KENT: I didn't hear me do that either.

*Laughter.*

KENT: What did you think, Angela? Cause you just said,  
"I don't think I'm sexually in love with you," so say  
what you think.

ANGELA: I thought that you were very close to me as a  
brother. Didn't want me to get involved with scum.

KENT: No, I'm in love with you. I want you to get  
involved with me.

ROBERT: Get in bed.

KENT: Speaking Ger'd, not Kent Young, by the way. It  
started off as an incest relationship. We were both  
obsessed with each other and death. And then, I was  
the only one obsessed with both, you and death. You  
were obsessed with this fucking dingbat, here.

ROBERT: You were a necrophiliac.

LOIS: I think that's okay. You have different  
viewpoints. We never really said in the play, if it  
was this way or not. We just let it be implied. Did  
they say anything else about that relationship?

ROBERT: Well, do you want to hear a good comment?

LOIS: Yeah, okay.

ROBERT: It has nothing to do with the question, but it is a good comment on the play. A girl from another school, she came up and she said, "I'm from another school, but I liked your play lots better than ours."

*Laughter.*

JACK: Right on.

LOIS: What do you think the play says, though, Angela?

ANGELA: I don't think it says a lot. I think it picks a couple of scenes out of life that could happen or do happen or whatever and shows them.

LOIS: Just reflects something that's true?

ANGELA: Yeah.

LOIS: On what topic?

ANGELA: Love and lack of.

LOIS: And in terms of love, what else? What things about love is it saying?

*Pause.*

CAMERON: It's saying, love is a rose.

*Pause.*

LOIS: You know, like there are different aspects of

love, right. What aspects of love do you think it's talking about?

ANGELA: Not many. It only shows . . . like two.

LOIS: What two?

ANGELA: Oh Kent. Dave.

LOIS: What kind of love do you think that is?

ANGELA: Well, I thought it was just like. *[She pauses.]*

LOIS: Yeah, that's what I want to know, what you think.

ANGELA: Brother-sister love.

LOIS: And what other aspect?

ANGELA: The other love.

LOIS: What's that?

ANGELA: Sexual love.

LOIS: Sexual love.

CAMERON: Like mine and Ellen's. John Wayne's love for the sad girl was sexual love, but Jack didn't have sexual love for Jazz. He had love, like deep love.

LOIS: Romantic love.

CAMERON: Romantic love, yeah. More than sexual love.

KENT: I think this play showed three kinds of love: the wanting from me for my sister, the absence of love



between the sad girl and John Wayne, and the being of love between Dave and Jazz.

*Laughter.*

CAMERON: Who wrote that for you, Kent?

JACK: Oh. Ten, nine point five, nine point seven, and three point five from the Russian judge.

LOIS: Let's go over to Jack, but before we go to Jack, 'cause it's his turn, then Astra's, then Angela's. Let's go around quickly and can people tell me some adjectives about love, so people can talk a little bit more clearly; because we're saying love, and we've got three things and there is more than that. There is understanding. Then, we said there is forgiveness. There's generosity. There's obsession; there's sexual; there's romantic.

You know, I think what Kent has for Angela, to me - their characters I'm talking about, now - is obsession on his part. On her part, a kind of generosity and charity, and caring about him. And on his part, obsessed with his sister. It's like she is the only one who loves him or something, so he's totally obsessed with her.

JEFF: I don't think the Ger'd and Jazz thing has anything at all to do with sex. He doesn't like the idea of . . . He's sort of scared of Jazz, but he doesn't want anybody to have his hands on her.

LOIS: Well, he might not admit it is sexual love, but there is a sexual thing to it.

JEFF: I don't know. It seems like he'd see that a kinda being, like I don't know. Filthy? I don't know exactly what I mean.

KELLIE: I think there is a special relationship between twins. They always feel something different from brothers.

LOIS: He feels some sort of physical connection with her, more than what is acceptable between a brother and sister. That's what we talked about earlier. And maybe no one sees it or feels it, but I think that all the way through the play, myself and Kent kept that idea for that particular thing. And that's probably where those guys got it from. Certainly, I don't think your character views it like that, Angela.

Remember last time, when Kent was arguing and he

realized afterwards that he was basically arguing from his own character's point of view, and not from an objective point of view. I think in what you are saying, you are not recognizing that, because you are so involved with your own character and what that character feels. You probably know a lot about what your character feels and a lot about Dave. That is what you mostly know about.

What he should feel. You are often telling Ger'd what he should be, the way that he should behave, and the fact that some of his feelings are not suitable. They are not appropriate.

JEFF: When I was doing the Mystery Stringpicker thing, I kinda felt like what the Mystery Stringpicker was as he was. He'd seen all this before, because he'd seen all these people come to this café, before, and looking at it kind of like God, looking at it totally removed from everything and going: "You stupid . . . You're so incredibly stunned. This is how stupid people are."

And all that stuff, like the love story thing; it's all really sarcastic because he's seen it before

and he knows that eventually this whole thing between Dave and Jazz, this isn't going to . . . like the "Good Lovin'" thing and all that. Fine. That is going to go on. That is going to go on for a little while and then it is all going to die.

ROBERT: The stringpicker and the poet . . .

LOIS [*interrupting Cameron*]: Will you stop that?

ROBERT: I'll hold that comment.

LOIS: Go ahead, Robert.

ROBERT: The stringpicker and the poet, I thought were kind of related. Although not till during the show did I think, hey, they are kind of along the same lines.

LOIS: Because they are making comments about what is going on.

ROBERT: Him through music and me through poetry.

LOIS: Both of you guys are saying this is familiar.

This is the same old story. Jack?

JACK: Well, I'm just going to add the point here that I don't see how the sexual attraction between Jazz and Ger'd comes along. I don't see how that could have happened.

KENT: Because I'm obsessed with the woman.

JACK: Yeah. I don't think the audience got that. I didn't hear any comments about that, whatsoever.

KENT: But when you say, "Jazz is my girl . . . " I go, "But you love me." That is sort of like, "but you love me. You want to go out with me."

ELLEN: He says that more than once.

LOIS: That's fine. This points been made. Why don't you just continue on with what does the play say?

KENT: I want to argue this after.

JACK: Well, the play, itself, is definitely familiarity, because the audience sees and goes, "Hey, that's me. Well, not exactly, it's just more extreme." And it is that way, because it is a collective and each of our individual personalities reflect each of the character's, right? And I see how that gets through.

KENT: No, that's wrong.

JACK: Wait a second. Shut up.

LOIS: Okay. Talk about it afterwards. Keep it in mind.

JACK: I forget what I'm saying. Okay.

LOIS: You're talking about what the play says.

JACK: It has just gone to so much of an extreme, like somebody runs in singing "Good Lovin'" just to show what kind of character this guy is. He is obnoxious, but he cares, right? And there is sort of like a summary all the time with the songs.

CAMERON: That is the thing that people said to me, that it was so casual. Like at the end, the way that like the cool, smooth tune there at the end, and John Wayne was going around clearing up the tables. And it was really casual, and mellow. The atmosphere is what made the play the way that it was, so mellow.

LOIS: Some things as performers, I think we are lacking. I instituted my idea of wanting to deal with pauses, but a lot of pauses, like ninety per cent of pauses were dealt with unsuccessfully. I think that is just a matter of not having a lot of experience on stage, but the atmosphere grew out of wanting to deal with pauses, as well. If that came across, if someone had a positive comment on that, I think that shows a lot.

KENT: Okay, Jack, first you say that my incestuous love

for Jazz doesn't come through, and I think it does, because at one time I say, "Yes, but you love me," and at another time when she says, "No, I don't love you, you're my brother and I love you that way." That definitely comes through to the audience. She says, "No you are my brother," as if to say, "No I don't love you sexually." That definitely comes through.

And another thing, you said that this play reflects each of our personalities. I think it does with everybody. In the beginning, it did with me, like 'cause I was this person who has this loving sister type thing. Well, I'm not an incest type person. That doesn't reflect my character, but in the beginning I had all these beliefs about love, but in the end I was the pessimist. Like, "Love is everything," that definitely doesn't reflect my character. I've got no basis for money or anything and you're saying that it affects our character, but like I'm not a person who goes around saying, "Yeah, you got to have a future, you got to have this. You got to have money," cause I really don't believe in that.

LOIS: Is that what Jack is saying? I mean, Jack as a person talks a lot about money being really important.

KENT: Yeah, he does do that, and in the play, he doesn't.

LOIS: Yeah, and in the play, he doesn't. It is the emotional truth of the character that you reflect.

JACK: Exactly.

KENT: The emotional truth that I'm putting through in this play is that I think you've got to have a future and you've got to have money. Love doesn't really count for a lot, which is total bullshit.

JEFF: But you're saying certain lines don't agree with your character, you know like . . .

JACK: I don't sell drugs to kids.

KENT: But those certain lines, they reflect my total character almost.

LOIS: Yes, Ellen.

ELLEN: I just made a quick phone call to somebody who is more involved with theatre than my parents are and I just said what kind of love do you think existed between Jazz and Ger'd?



LOIS: Well, we've got information coming in on the phone lines.

CAMERON: Yes.

ROBERT: And phone line number two is ringing.

*Laughter.*

JEFF: Hello, you're on.

CAMERON: And what did they say?

ELLEN: They said, "incestuous."

And I said, "Bingo, excellent. I told you before didn't I?"

He said, "What? No, you didn't."

I said, "Oh, okay. Never mind."

LOIS: Click.

*Laughter.*

JACK: Can I call my brother?

LOIS: Sure.

JACK: I want to call Ed and see what he thinks about it.

CAMERON: I thought that every character had a large chunk of the person playing it. A large chunk. Every character you play will have something, but like all these people had a large chunk. That was

Tina's influence, there.

LOIS: I said to Robert, as people we only own so much of the knowledge. When the adjudicator said to you, "Well, what kind of love is it?" I mean that was a major discussion among all of us, because we had a large part in writing some of your lines, Angela. I think that when she asked you that question, you answered. She directed it to you, because it was your character. Really, we all had a bit of knowledge of that.

As a collective we hold the total knowledge, but as one person, we don't. A few of us here have more knowledge, because we sat down and assimilated in our own minds what everybody else's knowledge is. Like me and Robert probably have, because we had about an hour and a half conversation one night after you guys left here. We put together a lot of bits of knowledge.

One thing that she said . . . . I've noted in my diary all along that as actress, as yourself - we're talking about this emotional thing - you have a really deep emotional well - as a person - that could

be tapped, but that doesn't come across. You keep it so small. Like Kent. He keeps things so small that sometimes it only reaches out to the first few rows of the audience.

When you did Great Catherine, somebody who knows you, like Justin, said that as far as he was concerned, you were the best thing in the whole play. He was watching you more, because he knows you. Because he was focused on you, he was able to pick up a lot of things that you were doing, the truth of what you were doing.

The problem we had in this play, and you know it, cause you are the one that had it, was to say enough lines to reveal Jazz's feelings.

I have similar quality. I am a very still person on stage. Once I said to a director, "I'm going through twenty different emotions in these five minutes."

She said, "But Lois, nobody knows it."

I learned that if you don't choreograph little movements to reveal those emotions that they don't get communicated. Even as I'm talking to you, you

are probably going through twenty zillion different things, but you're sitting there, so totally silent, not showing one little thing on your face. It is really, really powerful, if I had a film camera and I could shoot up your nose.

On stage, you aren't revealing everything you have to reveal. These minute changes don't read. In this play, we wrote a lot of stuff for you to say. You wrote sections, too. And this is just a little idea: if you are doing more stuff give yourself, in your own mind, certain things to work with. I think you have a lot to share, but you didn't give yourself enough lines or stage business to share it with.

Another thing I didn't think worked for you - I didn't realize, like a lot of things I didn't realise until performance - was having a section of several lines. You needed a line, a response, another line, and so on. If we were going to rewrite that would be a suggestion, I'd have.

The adjudicator mentioned that.

Now, I'm going to shut up. And I'd like to know what you think and I'm willing to wait for a few

seconds while you think about it.

*There is a pause.*

LOIS: You have a problem, this is the last of it, in that everyone is gab, gab, gab, and I'm really gabby, too. And nobody is willing to wait long for you say what you have to say.

CAMERON: Okay, we'll wait.

LOIS: I'd like to know what you think of what I just said?

*A Pause.*

ANGELA: I have to go.

LOIS: Do you want to say something first? Are you coming back?

ANGELA: When I come back.

KENT: That stuff about the types of love that we were trying to figure out, Lois. I just made another phone call, one like Ellen's, similar to Jack's, I said, "What kind of love do you think existed between me and my sister?"

And the person I was talking to said, "It was incest on your part, but on her part it wasn't." So that came through definitely, because this is a

person who has no theatrical background at all.

LOIS: Is this from our school?

KENT: Yes. Then I said, "What did you think of the love between Jazz and Dave?"

She said, "It was a love like fantasy." And it is in a way. That is kind of what I got. Then I said, "What kind of love existed between Ellen and Cameron?"

She said, "There was love there?"

LOIS: Okay, that's your absent love.

JACK: Well, Ed wasn't home. I agree with the John Wayne, the Dave and Jazz part. I still don't agree on the incestual part.

KENT: I think it came through, totally.

JACK: I don't think so.

JEFF: Why is this argument going on? Everybody is supposed to have an opinion. It's breaking down into an argument again. It shouldn't be an argument.

JACK: But then we've got two different characters here and we've been like living out these characters.

JEFF: Neither one of you is being terribly objective. You are really getting into this like you are taking

everything personally.

JACK: No, I'm not taking it personally.

JEFF: Yes, you are.

JACK: I'm not.

LOIS: Your character is taking it personally.

JACK: That's also true with Ger'd and Kent.

*A Pause.*

LOIS: Is there anything more to say? Robert, want to  
sum up?

ROBERT: What was the original question?

*Laughter.*

LOIS: What are the important things that we did in this  
play?

JEFF: We entertained people, because that is what we're  
supposed to do. Everybody forgets that. That is  
what I was talking about in rehearsals, and, I guess,  
I didn't get my point across.

LOIS: That's because we put you in another room, Jeff.

JEFF: What we've got to do in the first place . . .

Look at the Fortress Island play. It stood there and  
it screamed facts at you, and fine, it made a very  
valid statement, but it was boring and it was stupid,

'cause it wasn't entertaining.

LOIS: You have to entertain. You have to keep people's attention, but I think we did more than that.

ROBERT: We started off with the poet character. He was very sarcastic about everything. So what came from that was a poet in a café. The original idea was the café. So we got a poet who is sarcastic, built around that a story of love. Okay.

LOIS: Okay. Did we do anything new? Did we do anything specific?

ROBERT: No.

LOIS: I agree with what you are saying, Jeff. I think it is forgotten sometimes. We definitely intend to entertain.

ROBERT: We took the collective process, we took a character, and we worked around it. We got a whole scene and from that scene, we built on and on and on. What we did was we got the original idea of love. Yeah, I guess just of love and . . . comedy and the integration of the classes.

*Cameron and Kent light the woolies on Kent's pants.*

ROBERT: All right. The transition of characters that



was a new idea to us. We didn't really do it, last year. When characters changed, we changed off stage, but here we did it on stage. We had different roles. It worked out really well.

JEFF: It was very, very good.

ROBERT: And we got what we wanted to put across, through endless conversations and improvs and the normal collective process, in an entertaining fashion.

LOIS: So transitions of characters. What else? The theme stuff.

ROBERT: The theme stuff. The characters that were making the follow-up statements in the sarcastic manner - the musicians, the poet.

LOIS: Episodes. Instead of trying to follow a narrative, we used little episodes to comment on each other.

KENT: I think we wrote it, and we had a great time writing it. We did it for the audience, and they loved it.

ROBERT: Yes, but that's nothing to do with process.

JEFF: Integration of music that dealt with the

situations presented.

ROBERT: That's what I mean by follow-up statements, the commentary.

CAMERON: And the use of making fun of . . . using John Wayne, somebody else's character, not even a character, an actor, using him and turning him into a character. People thought that was really funny that there was this guy who thought he was John Wayne going around, calling people, "Pilgrim." People thought that was funny.

LOIS: It is funny and it's true, because people model their behaviours on other people. Right? Like on stars and that.

JEFF: And you gave people characters that . . .

KENT: Changed.

JEFF: Not just that changed, but the actual actor - the actor and the character aren't the same, but they're very similar. You see what I mean. You didn't create characters and make the people fit them. You took the people and made characters fit them. That is why everybody did what they did well.

LOIS: Jack, what do you think we did that was

interesting?

JACK: The pauses. You know, we learned a bit about pauses.

KENT: The pauses were great to work with.

JACK: It is a very, very hard thing to learn, right.

We are learning acting, right? And I just learned so much about pausing, even though I didn't do so hot a job of pausing in the play. It's just that I learned a lot more about it.

LOIS: So there was changing of characters, commentary on the part of the poet, the music, the use of already known characters, like a guy who thinks he is John Wayne. We used clichés, like the poet and tried to put them in real situations.

CAMERON: The set was entertaining.

KENT: And working with poetry was great.

CAMERON: Because the set was so dirty and because the set was just so bizarre, because it was almost what you expected. It was bizarre, because it was what you expected, and it shouldn't have been type-a-thing. You know what I mean?

That it had dead people in it. One person told

me that they thought it was a really good set and the next day they were doing something, I don't know, doing something in school and then it hit them . . .

The set made the atmosphere and also the big luscious, green plants, but these plants were in the Death Café and the posters, someone told me the next day that they thought the posters in the café were really cool and everything, just gave it that sort of ambience, all black and white and every thing. Then, the next day it hit them that all the people were dead people in the Death Café.

LOIS: Exactly. Ellen's parents have a reaction. It's entertaining. Well, we set out to be entertaining, but there is also the part . . . Not only is it entertaining, but there are other things to think about.

JEFF: Entertaining is the first thing, and if it makes you think that sort of makes it more entertaining. I really get into things that are a lot of fun when you watch them and you have a great laugh.

KENT: Pink Floyd. The Wall.

JEFF: You just sit back and enjoy it while it is going

on. Then when you leave, it hits you. It all hits you about an hour later. You go, "Oh, wow."

ROBERT: It's like what I was saying, what are the audience thinking as they leave.

CAMERON: After the show was over, I was talking to my father. He saw the dress rehearsal. I said, "Well, what do you think?"

He said, "Very funny."

I said, "That's it?"

He said, "Yeah, it had some really, really good lines in it. I thought it was really funny. I laughed out loud a couple of times. Ho-ho-ho."

And I said, "Do you think it was sad there at the end?"

"Ah . . . Sad, where?"

"At the end, when they turned off the lights and Kent was left by himself."

"Nah."

"Not sad, at all?"

"No, there is nothing sad about it."

LOIS: I think that is another performance thing of getting Kent's performance quality out there to

people. Like your father is sitting way, way back when he saw it.

CAMERON: But the average run-of-the-mill person didn't think that it was sad at all.

LOIS: No, that is not true. Some people did think it was sad.

CAMERON: Some people did. Oh yeah, okay. I shouldn't have said that.

JEFF: Wouldn't your father have come expecting it to be funny?

CAMERON: That is another thing. People expect our Drama Club to be funny. It is the same way as Ms. Parsons was saying the way I lean into lines will make the line funny whether it is funny or not. People come into see us and it is going to be funny and they are ready to laugh so they are going to laugh.

LOIS: Yes. I was involved in an improvisational performance at the LSPU Hall. The members of the cast outnumbered the members of the audience, so we sent Andy Jones to tell the audience that we would not be performing and that we would refund their

money. Andy went on stage and told the audience to go home, that there wasn't enough people in the audience to do the show. They started laughing. They wouldn't take him seriously. They thought it was funny. They wouldn't leave, so we ended up doing the show.

KENT: Another thing is, during dress rehearsal, something I always did and I never learned how to do was share out to the audience. I didn't learn how to do that until after the dress rehearsal which your father had seen. So what I was doing that afternoon was I was always looking down and stuff. When I did the play, I was sharing it out more.

CAMERON: The thing that I thought was really bizarre about doing it, was when we did it, it was weird for us and it came off differently, because things snapped more, but also they broke more because of the laughter. That helped our performance that they laughed. They would actually applaud sometimes for lines that I didn't even think were funny.

"Who are you? What do you guys want?"

"Dave. Dave. We're looking for Dave". They

applauded that. They thought it was so funny, they  
applauded that.

KENT: There are two things I was going to say. What  
did we find fun about doing this play or what do we  
think we did? I thought the working with poetry was  
great. I really loved doing that. I think it went  
over well, too.

CAMERON: People thought that your poem was funny.

LOIS: Not everybody did.

CAMERON: People laughed.

KENT: Okay. Big deal, but still I thought it was  
really good. Lois loved the poem. As long as  
somebody loved the poem that is all I care about. I  
thoroughly enjoyed it, too. I thought that working  
with poetry was great.

LOIS *[to Robert]*: Give me that, please. . . . Give me  
that, please.

CAMERON: That's what counts as long as you,  
yourself . . .

KENT: Another thing we did was something I don't even  
think we knew we did. Well, I guess we did, sort of,  
was working with the three types of love. We were



working with three types of love and we didn't even know we were working with three types of love.

CAMERON: Reginal Love?

KENT: Fuck off.

JACK: Shut up, Cameron.

KENT: By the way Rasp just arrived.

LOIS: Are you mad at me, now, Robert? Well, all my personal things are written in there and I don't want anyone else to look at it.

ROBERT: Okay. No, I wasn't really mad at you.

KENT: Okay, hold on. I'm going to ask a question to Rasp. Rasp, just got here, so we are going to get his opinion, because we got everybody else's. What did you think the play was about? What do you think it showed to the audience? Everybody shut up for this.

CHRIS: Questions, all day. What did I think the play was about? Basically, you have your people that are in a situation that they think they can leave any time they want, and they really can't. They are stuck there. It shows how Dave, how Dave can get out. There is a chance, you know. We do have some

chance to get out.

JACK: That's cool.

JEFF: "You can check in, but you can't check out."

*[Laughter.]* They're stuck in the cycle. You know, they're all going to come back tomorrow. They are never going to give up doing what they have always done which is sit around and drink coffee and smoke cigarettes. They are going to do it forever. They are going to it, until they die.

CAMERON: Even if they don't do it there. Even if they don't actually do it, but thinking about doing that.

*There is a Pause.*

LOIS: *[to Astra]* Can you say something about creating the set, because it was so important to the atmosphere.

KELLIE: The atmosphere was really cool, really mellow.

CAMERON: That's because of my posters. They made the set.

ASTRA: I thought it was a certain atmosphere, just like the one you get from a café.

LOIS: Which is?

KELLIE: Cluttered and you know . . .

ASTRA: And really sort of cosy, like. Everyone is sort of together in there. We were trying to bring the whole café on to the stage. There was parts from the Continental in there. It was just like a café, anyway.

KENT: I still don't think we should have had all those cigarette packages at my table, but it was nice anyways.

KELLIE: No. It would look really dumb, if it wasn't crowded.

ASTRA: Haven't you ever gone in and sat down at one where there is five or six cigarette packages and all this junk . . .

CAMERON: The café was just opening for the day.

ASTRA: And it just stays there. You sit down and you start doing something and nobody cleans it up 'cause they think it is yours.

KENT: That's true.

ASTRA: It just looks like it belongs there. A mess.

KELLIE: It makes it look cosier.

ASTRA: A lot of people got those dead posters, too.

*Pause.*

LOIS: Let's just leave this now, unless somebody else has something to say about anything we did that was particularly interesting.

KENT: I thought the people we worked with were great. I'm just going to give my basic outline of what I thought about working on this play. I thought working with Cameron and Robert was a real thrill. Jack was really good, I thought. I really enjoyed working with Jack. I liked working with Angela, but sometimes she was a bit weird. I liked working with everybody and I had lots of fun writing it. Lots of fun. I'm really glad it went over so well. My general idea when we finished the play was I didn't care if we won or not, 'cause I thought it was so great and it went over great, and I don't care what people thought, 'cause I had a great time doing it.

CAMERON: Doing the play, actually in the end, wasn't a downer, but it almost was, 'cause it means we don't get to go on Sundays, anymore, and do that.

KENT: I'm going to miss that.

CAMERON: I am, too, 'cause that was great fun.

KENT: I almost didn't like Cameron, at first.

CAMERON: Yeah. I was not pleased that you were in the Drama Club or going to be in this show. You were a real asshole, in my mind.

KENT: Yeah, I had you made out to be one, too, 'cause you never talked to me or anything.

JACK: Me and Cameron did not like you at the beginning of this play.

CAMERON: Boy, let me tell you, I really wished that you weren't in it.

KENT: But now you know, I'm great.

CAMERON: Let's be blunt. I do like you, now. Even if you do listen to Depeche Mode and wear . . . You're a man with no personality, Kent.

KENT: I liked working with everybody.

JACK: The finishing part of the play, it was just like, you know, everybody was . . . Well, this is my first time acting, really. My first acting job. I learned a lot of garbage and shit like that.

KENT *[laughing]*: A lot of garbage. Erase that part.

JACK: I just call it "garbage". Gaabage.

CAMERON: Gaabage. *[Laughs.]* Say that line. Say that line. I think that is what the play meant to me.

JACK: Gaabage.

CAMERON: No, no. The whole line.

JACK: It was good to work with people who are a lot more experienced than me, even though, like sometimes, I'd feel like punching everybody in the head, because you had eight different people coming up to you and going, "Nooooo. That's not right. That's not right. You are doing it wrong. You're wrong. You're the shits."

KENT: "You're an asshole. You're an asshole."

JACK: That's when I got upset the most, because nobody really bothered to explain to me that it was an improv, right?

CAMERON: Take it from "blueberry." *[Laughter.]*

"I don't understand."

JACK: That's theatre talk.

LOIS: Jack: "What's going on?"

KENT: "You're an asshole."

"What's going on?"

"You're an asshole."

"What's going on?"

*Laughter.*

LOIS: Astra, one of the things that impressed me was -

I really wanted you to do the set - the way you and Kellie and whoever else the two of you nabbed . . . You used to march in with your little military squad. Then, when I watched you work, there would be these conversations: "Don't get your blue on my red."

"What? I'm not getting my blue on your red."

"I said, Don't get your blue on my red."

And back and forth like this. I really got impressed with the fact that there was stuff going on and it was going on in the most efficient way possible. The words back and forth between these two, or whoever else was there, would be like three - word sentences, but it was very impressive, because you knew that that there was no shit going on.

CAMERON *[laughing]*: No beating around the bush.

LOIS: "We're painting now, and then, we are doing this.

Okay, clean up. That's it."

They'd march in. When they came in across the rehearsal space, it was march, march, march. "Get this. And go." It was definitely a little troupe or an army.

JACK: It was pretty competent.

LOIS: Yes. And when I asked you I just thought of your melted down Barbie dolls. And I said, "We want that on stage." Something like that. But I was very impressed with the efficiency of the whole thing.

ASTRA: I want to do it bigger, but I can't find mannequins.

LOIS: Yes. We all have to look for mannequins for you for that.

ELLEN: I just want to say that I enjoyed working on this probably more than I've enjoyed anything else I've ever worked on. I'm really glad that people gave me hugs and actually noticed that I was crying that day. If nobody had noticed, I would have felt even worse.

LOIS: My final question was "what was your evaluation of the play?" but I think that we already discussed that.

JACK: Entertainment.

LOIS: I don't know if you want to say anything about the evaluation that we got. Did you find the adjudicator asked any questions that you hadn't



thought about before?

JEFF: She asked what was the play about. I hadn't really thought about it.

LOIS: Except I have you on tape, Jeff, expounding on it at length. This sounds like my conversations with Cameron throughout the process. I'd say, "Oh Cameron, I see how this connects up now."

Cameron would say, "Didn't we decide that, like two weeks ago?"

I'd say, "Oh, did we?" or I'd say, "Wow. This is what's happening."

He'd say, "Yeah. Well, we established that last week."

"Oh. Oh, okay."

LOIS: What happens to the play, now? You could perform it for the Peace A-Chord. I don't think I'll be here, but Charles would direct you.

KENT: The thing is you know how we wrote this and how all the stuff and all of our emotions are in it. Charles wouldn't. He'd be saying, "No. It's not right."

LOIS: I think he'd be good. Robert?

ROBERT: He'd be good, but a little . . . . It's like before we went on, I was headed up to the first show, right? And he said to me, he said, "What do you mean? You're going to see the show? Oh, why aren't you down here preparing yourself for the show? You can't go up and watch that one."

I said, "I am preparing myself. Can't you tell? Can't you tell?"

CAMERON: I must breathe.

ROBERT: "Well, you're going to stand, aren't you? You're not going to sit down and watch the show? You're going to stand?"

Then, I said, "Aren't you going to wish me good luck?"

"Don't fucking screw up." *[Laughter.]*

That's what he said.

LOIS: You know what else is interesting about working in a collective. I wrote this in my diary. One day, Jack said about a suggestion I had that he didn't want to do that. Then Robert or Jeff told me that he just means he doesn't want to do it by himself, so I said, "Your gang is with you. They're doing this

with you."

Jack said, "Oh wild. that'll be great."

JACK: Well, I just feel that some of the things I did were stupid and totally out of character before that, but with the gang it seems a lot more realistic.

*Later that same evening, when I was alone, I also tape-recorded myself.*

LOIS: One of my concerns is that I monopolize a conversation, that I need to listen more carefully or fully. I do not use a lecture style or a style that precludes a need to listen, so I think I have a certain skill. What I am expressing is a desire to enhance a skill.

This year Lee Saunders, who studied with Bonnie Cohen, and I discussed re-patterning at length and, most importantly to me, asking questions. I naturally question, but I also tend to closure. I jump to conclusions, and I am rewarded in this activity, because my conclusions are for the most part sound; however, a question without curiosity, directed to arrive at a presupposed conclusion - however perceptive that conclusion may be - is not a

sincere question. Without sincere questions, I am a self-interested questioner, who arrives at insights; rather than a sincere questioner who elicits insights.

Further to that, I have found that the sincere question evokes an interest in an answer, because there is no resolution implied in the question, there is no "loading" of the question. There is little of the questioner in the question, and therefore much more of the respondent in the answer. A sincere question helps the questioner to listen closely, and it inspires discovery and revelation in the respondent.

There was an urgency on my part to talk about performance to certain individuals: to Kent, to Angela, and to Jack. I wanted to talk about the pauses that did work in some instances, but that did not work in others. It worked if it was part of the script, but didn't work as a pause, that is, filling the space without words in a way that brings the audience towards the actor, suggests an internal activity on the part of the actor. The pauses were

mostly pointing or suspenseful. It was interesting, though, that their reaction was that they had learned a lot about pauses. I think that is really great.

One of the joys of this tape is the camaraderie between everybody. They speak of the fact that they were not a group that would form on the basis of friendship, but that through the process they had come to like each other. The implication is made that it was their mutual interest in the project that allowed them to deal with each other with a certain amount of respect.

They don't make these comments out of a need to be polite. It is more a confession of an initial reaction, because of the amazement that they feel that their response to that person has changed so completely.

The effort on stage, the process, is a cooperative one. Perhaps cooperation enforces an ethic of respect. Whatever, we worked with changes in the content, and these changes in group member reaction to each other are beautiful.

They are such wonderful people. I am really

pleased with Astra and glad Kellie got involved.

Sometimes I wondered about Angela, because she seemed to have had such a difficult time.

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## DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

Was the collective creation of The Mystery Stringpicker at the Death Café, characterized by the key characteristics of cooperation, empowerment, development of an individual approach, and a sense of community? More important than the existence of these are these qualities is the story provided by the journal and tape transcripts of how these qualities structured experience in specific instances in the life of the group and in the lives of individual members of the group. How were these experiences offered and which individual students took advantage of them? This is the question that has shaped my reflection on this process.

Other qualities have already shown themselves to be essential to an understanding of the key characteristics of this process. Specifically, that the process is actor-centered (that is, in this setting, student-centered), and that the performance is part of the process of evaluation. How I acted in this process is also essential to an understanding of the key characteristics, even though the teacher would not be a part of this process unless it was in an educational setting. Yet, as a teacher, (especially,

since I have already described myself as having realized these key characteristics were my educational objectives), I was responsible for the way in which these qualities were offered as experiences to my students and I probably influenced how students said or showed they experienced them.

In interpreting the key characteristics, the stance of the teacher was said to be crucial to one characteristic in particular, empowerment (see p.72). The teacher is present as an institutional fixture, but also as an agent of an educational process that involves giving up the authority of her role. While the politics of collective creation make her presence a little odd, the educational system makes it requisite. She is an individual member of a group that eschews hierarchical structures, but an individual member with responsibility for the care of the other members of the group who happen to be her students.

Looking at the key characteristics

The key characteristics are closely linked. Cooperation demonstrates a common understanding, a sense



of community. It is the way a community re-creates itself as its sense of itself transforms. An actor shows himself to be a skilled improviser through his ability to cooperate, his investment in the talent of another, his fellow improviser. Yet, here he also has a commitment to himself, his individual approach. In the same way, empowerment, necessary to the operation of the community, represents a dialectical commitment to self and to others. As real instances are discussed, the distinctions between these categories may become more blurred, and perhaps less important:

For, while insisting upon the individual importance and worth of all human beings, as such, and the necessity of their preserving their individuality and identity, as well as upon their right to the fullest and best development of which they are capable as individuals, we recognize that in actual fact they are members of human society. But, in both capacities, or aspects of life, they are, of course, the same person. Thus, what they are as private individuals will depend largely upon what they are as members of society. (Aims of Public Education for

Newfoundland and Labrador, 1959)

So, the committed member shows his skills by using his individual approach to further the development of the group project. This "blurring" is not just a result of competing human responsibilities, but also the result of development in all aspects of humanness.

Cooperation

Cooperation may be identified by agreements, group maintenance, yes-saying, making suggestions, acknowledging and developing suggestions. Cooperation is evidenced in two ways - formally and informally.

The Death Café collective made several formal agreements (some people call them, contracts). The formal agreement that instituted the Drama Club as a collective group and initiated the creation of a play was made in this way: I suggested it and the students accepted the suggestion. This agreement identified these students and me, a teacher, as members of a group and other students and teachers as non-members who could only become members by invitation of the group. It made the group responsible for creating and performing a play together.

Later, Jeff was invited to become a group member. He helped to create the play and performed in it. I invited Astra to create a set. She was never responsible for helping to create or perform in the play. Astra asked Kellie to help her. Brian and Marcia performed roles in the play, but were not responsible to the creation of the play.

The opportunity to perform on the week of April 6 to 11 did not require decision-making, but consent. Once consent was given, this group was obligated to perform at that time. Other agreements to which the group gave consent did not engender the same sense of obligation. In the initial meeting the group agreed to "write ideas or scenes and bring them to the next meeting" (see p.104). Only Kent and Jack brought anything to the next meeting. Jack brought Jeff and Kent brought a poem.

At the second meeting, I put everyone in groups of two or three people to discuss the ideas they had developed over the past week. My direction, "If anyone forgot to develop material, this is your chance to come up with something" (see pp.105-6), demonstrates that as a group member I did not necessarily expect the agreement to

write ideas or scenes to be met.

The group seemed to be more committed to agreements it made with another outside group and less committed to agreements made within the group. This made it appear a stable entity to outsiders, while allowing insiders to change agreements. For example, the group decided on a title for the play, The Mystery Stringpicker at the Death Café, to be used in the Drama Association's publicity. When I gave the outside group, the Drama Association, a similar title - "The Mystery Player at the Death Café," by mistake, the group insisted that I "correct" this information, indicating the group had made a decision that they expected to stand. Here we see how closely cooperation is related to a sense of community. Cooperation gives the group an identity and that identity makes keeping certain agreements important.

Although Cameron says, "People expect our Drama Club to be funny" (see p.253), the group members agreed to avoid farce in order to try to create characters that could change. However, comments like: "I thought we agreed to avoid farce" (see p.127), and "This is a play; it is not real life. . . . Dave is a semi-real character" (see

p.193) occur over and over again, indicating that there was a different degree of commitment to this intra-group agreement. It may be that here group identity - "our plays are funny" - interferes with the commitment to avoid farce. Keeping this agreement may change us. It is difficult to maintain an agreement that may bring about change, and it is appropriate to be flexible in the face of change.

In this case, this is what I describe. The agreement to avoid farce is "more a checking of each other" (see p.121). This checking of each other reminds us that we are a group that has agreements. It is an acknowledgement that there was an agreement and that that agreement may be changing. Disagreement or flexible commitment occurs as suggestions are developed (developing suggestions is a demonstration of cooperation), and although it indicates a lesser commitment to an agreement, it is an indication of cooperation. A certain amount of disagreement or flexibility can be a mark of the responsibility the collective has to its individual members.

Some intra-group agreements were expedient and implicit. For example I didn't say things like "Be on

time," because that is expedient. Committing yourself to a rehearsal schedule is expedient. The Death Café collective agreed to specific rehearsal schedules. An initial discussion of when group members could meet and how often they could meet was held. Most group members felt obligated to these schedules; those that did not played smaller roles in the play.

For example, Ellen often missed rehearsals or had to leave early (see p.143). She ends up commenting that her part is small. I told her, "That is because you miss so many rehearsals" (see p.160). In my journal, I commented, "The collective creation reflects the commitment and talent of the people involved, and that means that I don't have to be arbiter of justice in these cases" (see pp.143-4). Often the situation is a little more complicated than this suggests. I may give my students the power to make their own decisions, but often they serve a greater authority - their parents. The degree to which my students are making their own decisions, in this regard, is often difficult to determine, because they wish to appear autonomous.

At one point, Kent called me to discuss skipping a

rehearsal to go on a date. Kent made a decision to attend rehearsal, based on whether Jack could attend or not. This was sensible, because most of his scenes seemed to be with Jack. Despite his sensible decision to attend rehearsal, he was late (see p.141). It was not unusual for there to be a gap between a making of a decision and the carrying out of a decision. Even legal agreements are violated. Kent was late, but he did manage to carry out his decision. In many cases, others did not do as well.

Making agreements and decisions were not the only ways, and not even the predominant ways in which the group demonstrated it was a group. Mostly this group showed its collectiveness by the participation of its members, vividly demonstrated by the collective's creation and performances of Death Café. There was tacit understanding that to demonstrate membership of the group was to participate by caring about and cooperating and creating with the other members of the group. Although this understanding can be demonstrated, even in situations where it is demonstrated, the caring and cooperating sometimes is not.

Group members attitudes towards each other changed.

Kent said, "I liked working with everybody." Originally, he had felt differently. Kent said, "I almost didn't like Cameron at first." Jack said that both he and Cameron "did not like you [Kent] at the beginning of this play." Cameron said that he thought Kent was "a real asshole, in my mind." (See pp.259-260 for a complete account of this discussion.) The change from dislike to like is connected to the cooperating and caring that are necessarily felt within a community.

I equate liking with cooperating, because my students equated liking with acceptance and yes-saying. Jack said:

It was good to work with people who are lot more experienced than me . . . sometimes, I'd feel like punching everybody in the head, because you had eight different people coming up to you and going, "No, that's not right. . . . You are doing it wrong. You're the shits." (See p.261.)

Jack equated "No, that's not right" with "You're the shits." He equates being told "no" with a diminishment of his self worth. It makes him angry. This is not a surprising connection for a student to make or a surprising reaction to have. School is a place where



students are rewarded for being right and often go unrewarded for cooperating, creating, and contributing to a sense of community. Spolin (1963) says that in our culture approval/disapproval is often a substitute for love. Always being wrong, whether learning is taking place or not, results in the erosion of ego, self esteem, and identity and the conclusion that you are unloved.

On the other hand, Chris' suggestions were often rejected (see p.135), but he did not seem to equate these rejections with self-worth. He was unrelentingly enthusiastic and cooperative.

Chris was unusual. Most people can probably empathize with Jack or with Ellen when she says, "I'm glad people gave me hugs and actually noticed I was crying that day. If nobody had noticed I would have felt even worse" (see p.263). Many group members demonstrated caring by hugging Ellen and she identifies being noticed with caring.

Group members did not always care about or demonstrate caring for other group members. When someone insulted Jack's girlfriend, his reaction was to insult Angela (see pp.146-7). Cameron struggled with his treatment of Chris. Cameron commented: "I catch myself

treating Chris like interrupting him or shitting on him, It makes me feel horrible because the guy is so nice, but he drives me nuts" (see p.135). Several weeks later, Cameron's treatment of Chris had not improved. Robert said that it bothered him that Cameron made fun of Chris and Kent backstage (see p.209), but at least it was out of Chris' hearing. Cameron's ability to value Chris is at odds with his inability to demonstrate cooperation or caring. This conflict makes him feel horrible. Cameron's behaviour affects Robert as well.

Not all students were equally cooperative. Angela didn't want to say, "Gooey." That's fine. I suggested she make up her own line, say something that would show that Jazz thought Dave was a "good guy" on the inside. Then, Angela said that she didn't know what she wanted to say and didn't see that she should say anything (see pp.123-124). In this example, Angela cannot make a suggestion, take a suggestion, or develop one. Finally, she said that she doesn't see why her character should participate.

During a discussion of what Jazz should wear, Angela objected to every suggestion, but when she was asked what she wanted to wear, she said that she didn't care (see

p.199). In a discussion after the initial performance of Death Café, I talked about Angela's comments to the adjudicator, her performance, and the character she plays. When I asked Angela to respond to my comments, she said that she had to leave (see pp.241-244). The contrast between my effort to elicit a response and Angela's lack of response is comic. On April 15, Death Café was performed in the library for students who were interested. Before the performance Angela told Kent and Robert that the show was dead and she didn't want to do it. Later I spoke to Angela about her comments and the fact that they negatively affected other peoples' performances. Angela responded that she "did good" and left (see p.214). All of the examples above show Angela's lack of cooperation.

On the other hand, she was always on time (see p.127) and at one point, she brought in a short monologue that she had written for her character (see p.200). Although they are not spontaneous, both of these exemplify forms of cooperation. They are probably Angela's attempts to cooperate while reducing the need to interact with anyone in the group and eliminating any risk-taking. She introduced the topic of incest in the final discussion

(see p.228), suggesting that she is willing to interact with the group in some situations. As well worth noting is that these examples, excluding punctuality which was consistent, occur later in the process, suggesting evidence of growth.

The greatest difficulty with cooperation for this group lay with ability of individuals to realize their intentions. As Eliot (1934) wrote:

Between the idea  
And the reality . . .  
Falls the Shadow 'p.58)

Angela wanted to be a group member, but found it difficult to contribute. Cameron felt horrible, because of the way he treated Chris. I wanted to facilitate a collective creation, but was often trapped by my perception of failure in the antinomy of a situation, rather than liberated by a perception of its dynamic. (I discuss this later on pp.320-1 and 350.) Angela's membership and participation in the collective and Cameron's thoughts about and ability to allow others to contribute to the group - to accept them as part of the group - show that

intention and behaviour are not necessarily compatible. Angela did not identify this incompatibility - probably couldn't, although Cameron could and agonized about it.

Cameron's agony is a result of his desire to live in harmony with himself and others, like Chris. His discussion of his behaviour and feelings may be the beginning of change. Jack talks about being angry, but he also acknowledges the benefits of his experience. The many discussions and constant chatting is a way in which individual experience was expressed and examined, as a substitute for cooperative behaviour in Cameron's case, and as a way of dealing with disharmonious emotion in Jack's case. At other times, it was the way in which group members shared their joy at having been cared for or in caring for someone else. All of these discussions acknowledged (to varying stages) developing emotional maturity.

The opportunity to cooperate resulted in these experiences. These experiences were brought about because cooperation was an objective of the collective and members showed themselves committed to it. Although this objective was not always met, as has been shown, all of these

experiences have some educational value. Further to that, these educational experiences because they resulted from the commitment of the collective are, in a sense, educational experiences which these students have brought about for themselves. Those that took on a responsibility for caring for other group members took on one of the responsibilities of a teacher. Cooperation is the building block of any liberating social or political situation, and out of it and caring these students created a community.

#### Empowerment

Empowerment, the giving of power, comes from the absence of the traditional hierarchical structure of creation. As an actor-centered process in an educational setting, collective creation focuses on students' experience, putting the power to create in their hands. For example, Astra had power over the creation of the set and did not have to defer to the other creative forces if she didn't want to - in traditional theatre, she would be subordinate to them. This kind of thing put the power for the creation in students' hands, if they chose to take it.

Another time, when Jack told me that he thought that

the audience was going to leave the theatre wondering what that was all about, I responded by telling him that it is just as much his responsibility as anyone else's to develop the play in such a way that the audience does know what it is about (see pp.113-4). Then, I told the group that Jack thinks that the audience won't know what this play is about. By making this problem the responsibility of the group, rather than the director's or teacher's, the group gave the play its initial structure (see pp.115-6). Later in a discussion of whether Dave is the hero, Jack takes responsibility for the meaning of the play: towards the end of the dialogue writing, he says to the group "Everyone pretend you're in the audience and think of Dave" (see p.185).

Stanislavski's admonishment, "You must play yourself" (1936, p.167), empowers the performer, makes his experiences important. Robert talked about "blunt reality." He defined it as, "what happened on stage could happen to anybody else in a longer span of time with and more happening and integration of other people" (see p.220). Kent liked Robert's expression. He called it "the blunt." He defined it as "a speeded-up process, but over

time these things do happen . . . to everybody at some point that will happen." They both saw Death Café as "the blunt." (See pp.219-222 for their discussion of blunt reality.)

Robert and Kent even managed to persuade Cameron that Death Café was about a real human experience. First, Cameron said that this doesn't happen to everybody, then "not the same way," and finally, "It happened to Greg Bahenock" (see p.223). Jack said, "The audience sees it and goes, "Hey that's me. . . It's just more extreme" (see p.236). Robert's insistence on the value of his own experience and his ability to convince the others of its value indicates a commonality of experience. They acknowledge the authority of human qualities over the structures that humans build.

Jack (with my help) also pointed out that each of our individual personalities reflects the emotional truth of our characters (see pp. 236-239). Kent explains that Jack and he are arguing, because "we've been living out these characters." They are arguing from the perspective of their characters. Jeff indicates this, when he points out that they are not being objective. "You getting into this



like you are taking everything personally" (see p.246). Jeff pointed out that group members could live out characters, because the characters were made to fit the group members (see p.249). In this way, he identified talented performances with living out the emotional experience of a character. This also connects talent with the acknowledgement of the authority of personal experience. Cameron said that each of the characters had "a large chunk of the person playing it." He pointed out that every character you play has something, but that in Death Café there was a large chunk (see p.240).

As we have seen, it is through Robert's acknowledgement of the authority of his personal experience that the group acknowledges commonality in experience. This acknowledgement values Robert's experience and empowers him to further develop his talent and to more fully examine his experiences. Some of the most important lines in the play come from Robert's experience. He identifies himself as belonging to a lower socio-economic group, and he is the one who writes, "He lives in suburbia all his life. He got a white picket fence and TWO parents. We know - okay, we don't know

everything, but we know more" (see p.132).

Just as the Living Theatre rejected the authoritarianism of the director, collective creation in an educational setting presumably rejects that of the teacher. The crucial stance of the teacher, then: she gives power to her students. But the teacher who takes this stance, frees, not only her students, but also herself from the authoritarianism that has regulated and interpreted her experience for her. Spolin (1968) says authoritarianism grows out of the need for approval/disapproval. Where "there is an awakening of a sense of self . . . there is no need for the 'status' given by approval/disapproval" (p.9). An awakening of a sense of self, however, is as likely to be frightening as it is to be joyous. Freire (1988) talks about the way in which participants in an educational training course reveal their fear of freedom: "Critical consciousness, they say is anarchic. Others add that critical consciousness may lead to disorder. Some, however, confess: Why deny it? I was afraid of freedom. I am no longer afraid!" My first action was empowering, yet ordinary. I asked students what they wanted to do.

Freedom to express his own experience commits a student to that expression and to the creation he is cooperatively creating. I was identified in our initial agreement as the director. I was also a teacher, yet when rehearsal broke down into a discussion of amplifiers, Kent was the one who steered the group back to rehearsing. He suggested that the opening be run again and it was (see pp.119-120).

Even so, the student's lack of experience is burdensome to the teacher who as she empowers him to learn, empowers him to fail. Cameron tells Jack that he can boss people around next year (see p.143). While Cameron is taking power, he is also setting himself up as a source of approval/disapproval and suggesting to Jack that Jack could have this status next year. Cameron's freedom to be autonomous becomes an opportunity for him to institute his own hierarchy of power.

If my students are free to be autonomous, I cannot control their actions. Kent pushed a boy in the corridor, after learning the body language of intimidation. He had acquired information he wanted to try outside of the play. It's evidence of personal growth. This is wonderful.

Personal growth is an educational aim and the lesson I offered in body language had transference; however, pushing people in the corridor is not a desirable educational outcome. This is the kind of behaviour that is often associated with a teacher giving up power and that makes giving up power appear so risky. Treating students as equals, giving up power – empowering them – is not saying, "I respect my students; they decide their own direction. Yes, they push and punch other students. It is evidence of their autonomy and my own lack of authoritarianism."

Freire and Macedo (1987) point out that all education is directive and thus transcendent. A teacher who abdicates the directive nature of his practice, is abdicating responsibility; she is indifferent:

The educator must help learners to get involved in planning education, help them create the critical capacity to consider and participate in the direction and dreams of education . . . The educator has to stimulate learners to live a critically conscious presence (p.139-140).

My efforts in that direction were thwarted. While I was

telling Kent that i did not consider that a legitimate implementation of what he had learned, Brian was telling him that people should know "you don't fuck with the Drama Club" (see p.208). In the end, Kent apologised to the student he had pushed. He chose "harmony with the wider community" after the stimulation of his critical consciousness by two alternate points of view.

Members of the group taught, directed, managed, coached, or counselled. When Angela and Kent were having difficulty cooperating with each other, Cameron instructed Kent to listen to Angela. Cameron, not I, resolved the problem (see p.122). Jack told Kent not to say "fucknut. It's not even a word" (see p.169). When Cameron shouted at Chris during an argument about whether Dave was a murderer, Jack told Cameron to keep his voice down (see p.185). Jeff tried to resolve a disagreement that Kent and Jack are having by pointing out that everyone is entitled to an opinion. He said, "Why is this argument going on? Everyone is supposed to have an opinion" (see p.245). With this statement Jeff empowers everyone and suggests how empowerment is related to not arguing, and so, perhaps, to cooperation.

Sometimes the group directed, collectively. When Kent had to play Ger'd in a more assertive way, everyone discussed what Ger'd could do to intimidate Dave (see pp.135-6). When Chris was assigned the part of the waiter, everyone directed him (see p.118). Sometimes the role of director wasn't filled. On page 160, I stated my concern that "we establish when gang members are gang members and when they are other characters." Robert asked, "How will we do that?" and that is the end of the discussion.

In a discussion about how Dave and Jazz can keep loving each other, I asked Robert what qualities allow you to love someone after betrayal? His answer was not only a reflection of his personal experience, but also a pivotal point in determining how to end the play - in choosing only one of a range of virtual alternatives. Later Robert said that he thought the discussion was a waste of time, because I knew the answers to the question I had asked. (Even where I have given up authority, Robert invests me with it.) His suspicion that I knew the answers or that there were answers suggests that Robert was not convinced of the uniqueness of his own experience and insights, (although at other times he appears empowered by it) or

that he viewed me as an all-knowing authority. This attitude did not demonstrate Robert empowered; however, the significance of his insights for the play did. The group saw his experience as powerful. Could it be said that his experience empowered him, although, at times, he did not yet perceive it as empowering?

Following upon this interchange, Robert and I discussed emotional history. (See pp.199-200 and 201-202 for an account of both conversations.) We talked about the possibility of knowing someone's experience by "letting" yourself know it. This was Robert's notion - it takes commonality to the level of telepathy. It suggests another reason he may have had for suspecting that I knew the answers.

Caring for students makes it both difficult and necessary to empower them, as Kent would put it, to take them seriously. The freedom to be autonomous makes them appear all the more fragile. I, like a parent, watch them fail. Their failure seems wrapped up in my own. Cameron agonizes over his behaviour. So do I. Angela behaves badly and lacks the confidence to discuss it with me. Robert wants the certainty that the teacher knows the answers;

however, in autonomy is much uncertainty. Freire (1987) says schools "should stimulate the certainty of never being too certain, a method vital to critical pedagogy" (p.57). But I want to comfort them with my authority, to protect them from choice.

Perhaps, the importance of being allowed to fail as part of the process of self-discovery is too much neglected in our schools. Kent says "Don't underestimate the importance of having an adult take you seriously. It's a big thing" (see p.203). So, I try to look at things from my students' point of views. My concerns may not be theirs. They make their choices. A small comfort: often much more is learned from failure, than success. Jack said he learned a lot about 'pausing'. "Even though I didn't do such a hot job of pausing in the play. It's just that I learned a lot more about it" (see p.250). He tells us that what he learned is not immediately evident. A big comfort: not all learning is immediately evident. Perhaps, the school should provide more opportunities for learning that does not have to be immediately evident. Perhaps, the school should encourage failure.

Collective creation is an interesting experience in



this sense, because the educational objective - empowerment - and the outcome - the play - are different. Empowerment is a part of the process, but is not the product. So failure to act with autonomy is only failure in a particular instance, during a process. The chance to act with autonomy is not gone forever and the play is not ruined because of it.

#### An individual approach

The group defined its individual approach by participating in a process that they were in many ways inventing. There was a sense of discovery. Jack describes the process as one in which you write as you "learn about." He said, "We were writing about it. We were just learning about it" (see p.190). This was exciting. So was the sense that they were creating something. In fact, Jack's description of the process suggests that creating is learning.

Making suggestions. The initial approach to creation was making a list of suggestions. Death Café began with a request for suggestions and my commitment to write the suggestions down. I asked, "What are we going to do?" and

requested, "Everyone give a suggestion." (See pp.97-101 for a description of the initial approaches to creation.) Usually, a collective or group exists because of some common concern, or, as in the case of some theatrical collectives, agrees to have a common concern. The Death Café collective agreed to exist and afterwards answered the question, "What concerns you?"

Asking these questions made the process personal and anarchical. It immediately involved every performer's experiences, emotions and thoughts as the source from which the play will be written or the event will be created. When Chris says his concern is his mother marrying Frank, everyone is intrigued. Why? Who is Frank? It's interesting, because it is real.

Of course, this procedure could become one that might be just as appropriate for a therapy group. The Death Café collective was not interested in presenting their personal problems; however, it is possible another group might tell long, cathartic stories. That might be, quite legitimately, the interest of a group, but it would still be only the interest and not the purpose of the group.

The performer's experiences, emotions and thoughts

were involved even when he disguised them. Cameron can't avoid revealing himself, because his answer: I have no major concerns is recorded; therefore, he is revealed as wishing to appear to have no major concerns. Momentarily, he modifies this by saying, "except for the day I'm expected to do something" (see p.100). A year later, I had a conversation with Cameron about things that were bothering him. I said to him that a year ago he was a person without concerns. He said that he was always a sensitive person, but that I didn't realize it.

Because I recorded all the answers, regardless of their content, I could turn a "no" into a "yes." Once Angela's I can't think of anything is recorded, it is no longer a refusal to give a suggestion or a non-suggestion; it is a suggestion. It could become a line of dialogue or a character who can't think of anything. It's a magical moment when "yes" is created so easily from "no."

This anarchical list of suggestions included actions a performer could perform, dialogue, relationships, themes, forms, and emotional states. These could be combined and in fact Cameron does this when he associates total incoherence with "my room" (see p.99) A collective

approach is born out of anarchy as suggestions are combined to create situations and locations. Robert described this process:

We started with the poet character. He was very sarcastic about everything. So what came from that was a poet in a café. . . . We took the collective process; we took a character and worked around it. We got a whole scene and from that scene, we built on and on and on. What we did was we got the original idea of love . . . comedy, and the integration of the classes. . . . The transition of characters that was a new idea to us . . . We got what we wanted to put across through endless conversations, and improves, and the normal collective process in an encertaining fashion. (See pp.246-8.)

A scene suggestion, in some instances, originated from a question. I asked, "What happens to Ger'd . . . at the end of the play?" Cameron suggested, "Jazz and Dave get engaged; Ger'd commits suicide." Chris suggested that there would be a "battle between Ger'd and Dave and the gang realizes that Ger'd is stronger and they decide to follow him." (See pp.127-8 for a description of this

process). There are at least four ideas for scenes in these responses: Jazz and Dave get engaged; Ger'd commits suicide; Ger'd and Dave fight; the gang decides to follow Ger'd.

I suggested that the group create the scene in which Dave and Jazz get engaged. Using this as a jumping off point, group members wrote lines that Dave could say to Jazz like "I want to take you and the kids and your mother to Florida on Easter vacation," and "I want to do up a household budget on a personal computer from Radio Shack," and "I want to be there when little Joey takes his first little itty bitty steps." (See p.129.)

Cameron said, "Dave cares. He cares a lot."

Robert and Chris reiterated this: "Dave cares." I wrote these statements down. They were supposed to be lines of dialogue for Dave, but "Dave cares" became the chorus of "Dave Cares," the song. The writing of this song progressed from suggestion to suggestion, because all suggestions were met by agreement or convergent thought rather than divergent thought. Cooperation made it easy to invent and the ease with which lines were created made it fun to invent. (See pp.128-9 for the description of the

creation of "Dave Cares.")

This illustrates how the integration of music and songs, like scenes, came directly out of acknowledging and developing suggestions. It was often the way of presenting what Robert later called "a follow-up statement, a commentary" (see p.249), on other scenes. Here the search for an individual approach is demonstrated to begin with the expression of the uniqueness of the individual group members and to end with the unique expression of the group. To do this they have to connect ideas. Some, like Robert, become aware that in so doing, they were creating meaning. (A discussion of the emergence of themes follows later.)

Improvising. Most scenes were developed through improvisation. Some scenes, like the initial improvisation of the "Chef Calvin Penney scene" (see pp.136-8), were improvised for a few moments. Then the actors stopped, perhaps because they were confused or uncertain how to proceed, whereupon the group suggested a line that could be said next and the scene was begun again. The idea was to keep going and see what your character would say in that situation.

Usually a scene was improvised several times and I recorded what was said. Once a scene was improvised a couple of times, and so rehearsed as it was created, some version of that scene almost always ended up in the performance. This is a specific way in which our approach was student-centered.

Sometimes the dialogue for a scene was not written down until several rehearsals after it had been improvised. Then some of the editing took place during the rehearsal of the scene. The opening scene in which the characters enter the Death Café was never written down. There wasn't dialogue in the opening scene. Actually, the scenes that didn't contain dialogue were not written down. (We did create a text, but we weren't bound to it.) Written or performed work was reviewed and decisions made about what had been done and what to do next. In this way scenes became coherent and could be juxtaposed to other scenes. So we did use an episodic structure like that of The Farm Show and the other collective creations that were discussed earlier, and improvisation was central to the development of that structure.

Interviewing. I interviewed Kent. I asked him questions

about why his character doesn't like Dave and Kent answered in character. The answers became lines in the play.

Borrowing from real life. Material also came directly from incidents that occurred during the period of time the group was developing characters, dialogue, and scenes. When Jazz said that she'd like to hear the poem Ger'd has written, Ger'd takes his poem out of his shoe. This is because when Kent came to rehearsal with the poem, he had it stored in his sneaker (see p.106).

In the song, "Dave Cares", Dave wants "a microwave oven with a digital clock with little buttons that go beep, beep, beep." Although Jack was not at rehearsal when this line was written, the group had heard quite a lot about the delights of microwave cooking and the microwave oven his family had acquired recently (see p.128).

Just Borrowing. Sometimes an idea, a form, a style, a character, or a piece of music was borrowed from another art form or theatrical production and adapted to Death Cafe. Marcia played a character in the café who was watching Casa Blanca on a VCR. Cameron used the grandmother in a Sheila's Brush production, Jaxxmas, as an



example to explain the part Marcia's character would play and the effect it would have (see p.118). Jeff describes "Just a Waiter at the Death Café" as an "Arlo Guthrie type song" (see p.117). Jack often played a tape of Motown hits from The Big Chill before rehearsal. Dave and his gang sing a verse of "Good Lovin'" to set up the relationship of Dave to his gang and to Jazz.

Cameron talked about the character, John Wayne, in Death Café: ". . . using John Wayne, somebody else's character . . . an actor, using him and turning him into a character. People thought that was really funny that there was this guy who thought he was John Wayne, going around, calling people, 'Pilgrim'" (see p.249).

Writing poems and dreaming. Ger'd's poem in a shoe was an individual approach to creating material for the play. The writing took place at a party where he had each of the partygoers write one line of poetry on the theme of death (see p.106).

Dreaming was also a method that Kent suggested for creating material. He said that he would dream an ending to the play. He didn't (see p.168). Still, this remains his individual approach to creation. It's not unique, of

course. Probably the most famous example of material created by dreaming is Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

**Themes.** Theme and form are usually developed through narration, choosing to enact only one of a range of virtual alternatives. I think it was because of the initial lack of a narrative direction that Jack, early on, indicated that he thought the audience would not understand our play. On the other hand, Cameron already saw the characters as the interest for the audience. At some point, it became evident that Death Café was more than just the presentation of characters in a café, that interactions between Dave, Jazz, and Ger'd made up a story. When I mentioned this to Cameron (see p.134), he said that that had become obvious to him weeks ago. The structure of the play changed, without discussion or agreement of the group, as a result of the writing and improvising the group had done to develop dialogue and characters. It was still episodic, but now it revolved around the story of Dave and Jazz and their romance.

Change was a major theme of the play. When Jack and I discussed making his character believable, I asked him if

he thought that Dave could be a character who could change if he were played in a farcical way (see p.113). Many of the group discussions towards the end of the rehearsal period revolved around the question: "Can Dave change?" Eventually Dave, actually said that he can change. Every member of the group, except Kent and me, believed because Dave loved Jazz, he would change (see p.163). Jeff incorporates both these views in his theme statement: "we change, but nothing changes" (see p.164).

The divergent ways of ending the play were a reflection of the individual's approaches: Dave could get a job at the café and give up dealing drugs, Jazz doesn't care if he deals drugs, Jazz leaves Dave, or there is no resolution. The collective could generate a range of virtual alternatives, but they could enact only one. So the individual's approaches must become an individual approach of the collective. These possibilities were dealt with in a long discussion about the theme of the play. What ending can we agree to? Identification of the theme is necessary to writing the ending. I said, "What is the play about? Because we have to write an ending." (See discussion beginning on p.170.)

Ellen described the process by which death became a theme (see pp.173-4). Then Cameron explained the parallel between death and monotony. He said the café was a "vicious cycle." They also tied the theme of death to the theme of change. Ellen suggested that when people change, the original thing dies. Jack said that Death Café is "just a sense, a part of everything." Cameron said that the café is monotonous and represented a vicious cycle in the lives of the clientele and "Maybe it should be called The Metamorphosis Café" (p.175). Cameron tied these two ideas together without regard for the inherent contradiction in the way he did it, and that almost unconsciously.

During the same conversation, Kent reported he had told Graham that Death Café had "a meaning, but nothing too serious" (see pp.165-6). After the performance, (in the second taped discussion) I commented that nobody had responded to the adjudicator's question about the themes in Death Café. Kent still held that this was "'Cause nobody knew" (see p.215). We presented a play with, according to members of the collective, themes of death and change, yet one of the members of the collective says

that none of them was aware of the themes of the play. It appears that, for him, our long discussion about the theme of the play added nothing to his knowledge about it. This also indicates that the members of a collective may have little understanding of the meaning of what they have created. They are truly learning about their creation as they create and perform it.

Summary. Although the approach developed by this collective group is similar to the collective creation methods Shank lists and to the collective creation methods Theatre Passe Muraille and the Mummers Troupe used, the approach is individual because it is based on individual intentions, interactions, and experience. The approach is individual because invention, acting things out (trying them out), and improvisation make the individual the source of material. The Death Café collective used some methods that they had never used before. They invented with references to outside sources, but mostly they invented with their imaginations, experiences, principles, and beliefs as a source. The collective and the individual members demonstrated creativity.

### A sense of community

A sense of community is found in the development of a common understanding. It develops from the way the community interacts: its commitment to cooperating and sharing with each other. It develops from the ability of the collective to provide an identity for all of its members. The commitment of the Death Café collective to their own collectiveness did not go beyond the performances of Death Café, but there is some indication that their sense of community did. For example, they perceived themselves as seen as a drama club that is funny. Cameron says so at one point and Jeff refers to this, when he suggests Cameron's father was expecting to see something funny. They are tough. They are "The Angels of Death Drama Club." Brian tells Kent, "people should know that you don't fuck with the Drama Club" (see p. 208). Nevertheless the Death Café collective was begun and ended in its initial agreement to create a play for the drama Festival, so to describe our collective as a community is academic and perhaps superficial.

On the other hand, some of them also saw themselves as members of an on-going drama club, a part of a school

community. Their participation in the collective was a demonstration of this identity. For all of them the collective was a place for workshopping a larger community. While this collective may not have been rehearsing for revolution, they were trying 'to get on together'. Even though I have just commented that to call the collective a community is perhaps superficial and have named the collective a workshop community, the collective members were real people and they really affected each other. When Kent, Cameron, and Jack discussed the change in their attitudes from dislike to like, they are acknowledging how they affected each other, and indicating a caring for that is necessarily demonstrated in a community.

Chris died in a car accident this year on his way to speak at a Red Cross meeting. I wonder how that affects Cameron. He certainly thought about Chris and cared about him, even if he was not able to care for him. Cameron's experience of Chris is real, just like mine and every other member of the collective. There is a sense of communion that goes on made all the more vivid by knowing for sure that that experience of Chris is all we are going to have of him.

The re-ordering, deconstructing and constructing that go on in a workshop community are real experiences in a play context. They let us explore what a community should be. We discussed social construction and class prejudices. Robert described Death Café as being about the integration of class systems (see p.215). The collective discussed at length the relationship of Dave's socioeconomic background and his lack of education to the success of his relationship with Jazz. Most thought these differences were not important. They had an ideal sense of community. One in which we are able to cooperate with each other. The role of the audience. The sense of community a theatre collective has is demonstrated in its ability to share its commitment, consensus, or experience with its audience. A common understanding extends beyond the collective group to its audience which during the performance of Death Café, at least, is the community to which the collective group belongs. The fact that this collective discussed what the audience would think represents a sense of community, uniting the group in a common concern. Cameron talked about the audience's mind (see p.190). When Robert pointed out, "The audience has not seen our rehearsals"



(see p.190), he was focusing the collective's attention on the performance as the experience shared or statement made.

An important question for the group was who the audience should consider the hero. Kent thought his character, Ger'd, was most sympathetic. Robert, Cameron, and Jack thought Dave was the more sympathetic character, because Ger'd was boring and Dave was entertaining. The performer's sympathies sometimes lay with the character he played without the performer acknowledging that. Kent delineated between his own sympathies and his character's and the occasions on which he had confused the two. He said, "I'm sorry about the position I took. I got into character and couldn't see the audience's point of view. I can now" (see p.198). He sorted out the confusion by referring to the audience's understanding of the performance.

In performance, the process becomes a thing, an event, a historical object. The collective's commitment, consensus, or experience is consolidated by performance. The thing is given significance by its context: the process and the audience with which it was shared. In this

way the process and the performance can be understood and evaluated or appreciated. Popkewitz (1984) further connects the individual's conception of how the elements of a work process relate to the product with a "self organized and self-motivated quality of community" (pp.172-173). Because of the performance of Death Cafe, the collective had a whole new source of knowledge. They made realizations. They telephoned their parents, their brothers, and peers to gain and verify information. Not only was the collective self organized and self-motivated in their efforts to understand the process and the product, but they were also broadening their sense of community.

Robert said it was during the performance that he realised that the stringpicker and the poet were "along the same lines" (see p.235). He mentioned how the adjudicator saw the relationship of the sad girl and John Wayne as contrasting with that of Jazz and Dave, and pointed out "none of us really realized it" (see p.217). Jack agreed with the adjudicator; he thought the audience saw the play as "a comparison between the two couples" (see p.217). The collective was able to discuss further

how different roles commented on each other and how the event was structured and what that structure meant.

The collective tried to find out more about the play and process by 'interviewing' members of the audience. We all chose special spectator-evaluators. I wrote about the comments of Mike Wade, Ed Riche, and Charles Tomlinson. To settle a question that arose about Ger'd's and Jazz's relationship, Ellen, Jack, and Kent selected audience members and phoned them. Cameron said that his Dad did not think the show was sad. Ellen told her parents' reactions; they didn't find it sad, either. Jeff pointed out that Cameron's father was expecting a funny show. Cameron agreed that spectators expected Death Café to be funny. In this way, the reactions of the audience were analyzed for more information and an approach to evaluation was spontaneously created.

So sometimes even though the collective appeared to hold a common understanding (most strikingly demonstrated by the performance of our play), not every member of the group shared this understanding. (It was only when Cameron and Astra both mentioned that a lot of people "got the death posters." that I realized that all the posters in

the Death Café were of dead people!) Perhaps "as a collective we hold the total knowledge, but as one person we don't." (See p.241 and see pp.166-167, 202, 217, and 211 for additional references to "collective knowledge.") Jeff seems to point to the same conclusion when he said, "Why is there an argument going on? Everyone is supposed to have an opinion" (see p.245). The difficulty is combining these opinions and determining or acknowledging the meaning of the play and here, there were varying degrees of commitment to a meaning. Robert suggested that to find the meaning of the play "we should probably look at what are the audience thinking as they are heading towards the intermission and what is their after thought of the play. Everybody reviews the play in their mind" (see p.223). But even after the performance, Cameron said that he didn't know what the play meant and that he didn't think it meant anything. Kent, discussed earlier (see p.309-310), was of much the same mind.

In The Beatles Play Bishops Falls (Sullivan, 1989), a play recently produced by Corey and Wade's Playhouse, a theatre company that Robert and Cameron are members of, Simon says, "When I'm talking, I'm the only thing that

exists" (Mercer, unpublished manuscript). Doesn't that point out the sterility of a monologue, its lack of the diversity of human possibility? The dichotomous nature of conversation reflects the need to hear the point of view and the perceptions of another person. Conversely, when Robert explained to me that his girlfriend would know if she let herself know, that putting it into words was "unnecessary" (see p.202), isn't Robert pointing out the inherent quality of communion with others in all experience?

These are the experiences that draw us together and keep us apart. Our egoism calls out for the other. Our silent communion with others can mislead and isolate us. Despite Robert's firm belief in a 'knowing if you let yourself know' kind of communion, the collective did not become aware of what an individual knew until he expressed it, if then. Robert described the play as a "take-off on cafés around town. It talks about love, but not just love, understanding and forgiveness. And also the integration of class systems: slums into yuppie-like geeks" (see p.215). Cameron immediately disagrees, even though the play, in point of fact, did, quite literally, talk about those

things. He said we were "figuring that out after" (see p.220). Figuring it out after is still figuring it out. The performance should be investigated for meaning (especially by Cameron and Kent). In school, figuring it out after (a test for example) usually means you have failed. There, there is nothing positive in figuring it out after. Here, figuring it out after is the giving of significance to what has been completed. It's an opportunity to stand back and appreciate what has been done.

Sometimes an individual member became aware of what he knew only once he was challenged to put his knowledge into words, to express it to somebody else. When I asked what Robert thought the poet's role was, he said that the poet was a filler. A few seconds later, he described the poet as an "existential extremist" (see p.216). Our understanding of others challenges us to understand ourselves. Our knowing of others challenges us to know ourselves. It's not surprising that Cameron agonizes over his treatment of Chris. His treatment of Chris wasn't any different from his treatment of Kent whom he also makes fun of backstage (p.209) or me - sometimes. But Chris, in

contrast to Cameron's description of his own behaviour, stands out among the group as a person who was extremely cheerful and kind.

A community arose from a unifying purpose, became an identity - the drama club, and now, has a history - the performance of Death Cafe. Our sense of community was our earnest commitment to creating collectively. In whatever sense the community was a play community; the play, in contrast, was a real play. Cooperation, empowerment, and the development of an individual approach were all part of creating collectively. The community was the place where these experiences were brought about.

### Teaching

"Our living with children in natural situations of parenting and teaching is much less characterized by constant choice and rational decision making. Rather, in concrete and particular contexts we are much more accurately involved in actions immediately and directly" (Van Manen, 1984a, p.19). So, the development of my understanding of being a teacher through this experience has occurred now that the experience is in the past. My

four objectives are qualities to which I am attracted and committed to bringing about in my own life; however, I only wish that these qualities always characterized my own experiences. Yet, I wanted to bring these about in the lives of my students. I believe because we are all "uncompleted beings" (Freire, 1988, p.27) living with children my development is bound up in that of my students. Lib Spry recently began a workshop in theatre of the oppressed techniques with this statement from a seventy-five year old aboriginal Australian woman: "If you are here to help me, I'm not interested. If you are here because your liberation is wrapped up in mine, then let us work together." That is what I believe was my situation when I embarked on this experience of collectively creating a play with my students.

What I experienced trying to bring about these four key qualities was a lot of confusion and discomfort. As a teacher taking responsibility for the directive nature of the experience I offer, I tried to come to terms with what appeared to me then as the antinomy of my role as teacher-member of a collective. (See pp.138-140.) I saw an irreconcilable contradiction in my role as a teacher who



provided experiences and a group member who participated in them. I tended to see it as either the teacher did things or else the students did things. (Freire might describe that as authoritarianism versus indifference: neither would have been the stance I wanted to take.) When a teacher stands at the front of a classroom looking down at students seated, in rows of desks, she is usually about to say, "I know what you need to learn" and to coerce her students' cooperation in her objectives. I organized the initial meeting of the group and identified its purpose. Students suggested what we could make a play about, but I recorded their answers. Perhaps someone else could have written down the suggestions and kept a record of the improvisations. Brian asked if he could direct; I said, "No." I thought this approach was appropriate, because time was running out, but perhaps, Brian could have helped in some way.

This contradiction provided plenty of opportunity to think about my failure either to do something about it or to make it the responsibility of my students to do something about it. (It made me see failure in whatever I did.) While the result was considerable reflection, this

antinomy prevented me from understanding that contradiction was not a matter of choosing one correct way of being a teacher, but the underlying dynamic of teaching. As I reflect back, I find I have underestimated the number of times I respected my students. I even accepted Angela's walking away, at least in practice. I told Robert to confront Cameron; he, not I, should act on his sense of injustice. Each of the things I did, mentioned in the paragraph above, were actions of expediency. So, it is my sense of contradiction more often than my behaviour that was an obstacle to my being comfortable with my experience. (Why wouldn't I have a sense of contradiction, since the collective structure is at odds with the hierarchical structure of the school in which I work?) This is not to suggest that because I am a teacher and my choices are more characterized by immediate, direct action than rational decision making, that reflection is unnecessary, but that it is more necessary. It is through reflection that I am able to uncover the philosophical and educational significance of my choices. I said (see p.157 and 165) that not only am I unaware of the significance of all of my choices, but even

of those choices. If there is need for pedagogic theory of the unique, there is certainly need for rehearsal of the practice of that theory.

Despite my discomfort with how I understood what I did (more than with doing) I think that I did have a place as a teacher within the collective. My listening to students and taking what they said seriously was important to cooperation, (although I point out to myself that listening is difficult, and that like a teacher-stereotype, I prefer talking). In my journal, I talk about how listening is wrapped up in asking sincere questions (pp.266-7). A sincere question, one in which the questioner doesn't think he knows what the answer will be, helps the questioner to take the words the respondent says seriously. I first make my intention to take what is said seriously known in a silly sort of way: I write down I can't think of anything, making it a suggestion and creating cooperation. A deeper look at this shows how I contribute to bringing about cooperation. I watch a student's improvising or his interactions, not only to acknowledge what he did, but also the suggestion in what he did. The suggestion is not limited by the student's

intention; it is outside of the student's intention - if in fact he had one. In this suggestion is the potential for his idea to be developed further by other group members. Here is a way in which the teacher by stopping an improvisation, or pointing out something that may be unintentional, or repeating what a student said back to him, acknowledges something as a suggestion and offers it to the group for development and transformation.

A peculiar thing about cooperation is that it takes two to cooperate. I wanted some students, particularly Angela, to become more intensely involved in the collective creation of Death Cafe. I usually acknowledged what she was doing or persuaded her to cooperate. But the fact that I felt I had little effect upon her and that she seemed to think she had no effect on me or the others (see p.207) frustrated me and made me angry. I thought she undermined my direction (p.124) I say I am "exasperated" (see p.124) and a couple of weeks later as "at a loss" (see p.207).

In my journal, I described teachers who act with forced generosity and students who don't act with any (see p.153). Everybody is angry. The students are in the

teacher's care. She is responsible for caring for them, but they don't appear to care back. When I apply that to myself, it's as if I'm saying I'm upset, because Angela doesn't care about me and the efforts I'm making to care for her. At the same time, I don't have the same reaction to Cameron. That is because he cares intensely about the play and his participation in the collective. Where he fails to meet his own standards, he talks and thinks about it. There is so much more going on.

I have 'failed' Angela. I'm successful because I have tried the best I know how; but I still feel the failure more sharply than the success. A teacher is a model for her student: did I model cooperation? But in this situation there is less modeling, and more an opportunity for participation, for working and learning together. When I think in terms of modeling cooperation, I am setting at odds the ideal of cooperation - which I would model - and my own developing humanness within this collective experience. Here again, I find that some of my ingrained notions of teaching are an obstacle to my feeling comfortable with my experience. Actually, Angela was given the opportunity to cooperate. She did not involve herself

in the collective creation as intensely as I wanted her to, but that was her right. There is a failure on her part to participate fully. The group wrote lines for her, instead of letting her part dwindle. Angela was propped up by the good intentions of the collective, and a discussion of the fact that Jazz was not a strong female character was avoided. Had she participated to a lesser degree, she would have no longer been a group member. That was also her right. Should I make these failures my own?

The failure that means anything is my failure to understand Angela. If I had, I could have touched her life a little more profoundly. In fact, she may have learned much more from this experience than I credit. I did not talk with her in the same way as I did with the others, so I just don't know.

Although I believe that students must be free to participate in the direction of their own education and I moved into a situation where I had the opportunity for a great deal of autonomy, there are indications that I carry with me a surreptitious sense of system where play is disruptive. It is a system where teachers and students can be overwhelmed by their 'institutional fixturedness' and

it seems inappropriate, inefficient, and embarrassing to reveal yourself. In this system, protection becomes a demonstration of maturity and self-protection, a demonstration of emotional development. These indications are not in my actions, but in the way I discredit my actions: I 'failed' a student. I should be better. I should be perfect, complete.

I wanted to be free to be autonomous. When I am not concerned with my own autonomy, I cannot be concerned with my student's. I tried to treat them as equals, because I want to be treated as I tried to treat them. (We find a place to begin to explore autonomy in the Golden Rule.) I am not perfect or complete, but I deserve respect, like any other human being. In taking the risk of giving up power, my students saw my imperfections all the more clearly. The charade of modelling is over. (I don't mean modelling is not an important part of learning, just that in modelling a behaviour, we come to be thought of as 'the' model.) They laugh at me, sometimes, and they contradict me alot. There was anarchy and disorder, because autonomy was a practice with which some of us are unfamiliar. We needed rehearsal.

It is through my consideration of empowerment that I have come to understand my being a teacher in this experience. It is here, as I have indicated, that I felt my development to be most strongly bound up in that of my students. In encouraging them to be autonomous and to develop individual approaches (as well as an individual approach), I came to sense my own individual approach and to eventually say "yes" to this experience. This yes-saying came after the experience was past and upon reflection on my experience, teaching, as I recalled it, especially in my journal. I began to understand how my own humanness was acceptable as I saw how this experience made it palpable. My students' autonomy and individuality not only encouraged mine, but created unique situations in which I could express my own unique way of being a teacher.

Within the development of an individual approach, the divergent approaches of individuals had to converge in the development of an individual collective approach. If you enjoy anarchical situations, as I do, encouraging divergency is natural. Associative thought is creative thought, too, but it doesn't feel as creative as



spontaneity. I got very enthusiastic when students made suggestions. It's a spontaneous and sincere reaction, and I'm sure it went a long way to encouraging them to create. When a student has difficulty creating, it may be that he is trying too hard. I encouraged students not to think or to try, but to be aware of what they were experiencing and to realize that that is good enough. Their experience is the best material.

One of the ways in which I encourage individuality and collectiveness at the same time is by entering the situation without a plan. (Although, I almost always have a question - a point of departure, in mind.) I think about the situation, about what makes that situation, but I don't make a work plan. If I do make one - we'll work in small groups today to give the less aggressive students a greater chance to be heard - I know I can ignore it, if I find that is the appropriate thing to do. I thought and read about and saw theatre, but, in this situation, I tried to be spontaneous, to allow it to happen. The opportunity for spontaneity encourages individuality. I tried to let the group make the plan, not me. That encourages the creation of a collective plan, and so a

sense of an individual collective approach. It created a situation where individuality could be explored within a community.

Creating a plan or a narrative was more difficult than being spontaneous, because we tried to deal with what might really happen to people like Jazz and Dave. I enjoyed the discoveries made in those conversations immensely, even though Robert said that I already knew the answers. (My sincere questions, obviously, appeared insincere or in need of testing.)

Like Cameron and Robert with whom I had previously worked on collective creations, the leap of faith for me in a yet-to-be-invented process was probably not so great as for other group members. Conversely, the trust the group felt in its own ability to develop an individual approach, to invent and improvise a play, may have been only a function of the commitment to perform. My trust was a commitment to the integrity of this process and the ability of this group to use it to create a play. That trust was important: it supported the group and the members of the group and made them confident where they might otherwise think that they ought not to trust in

themselves. The teacher is the source of this trust, even though it may be reflected in Jack's trust in Robert and Cameron or Jeff's trust in Jack.

Cooperation, empowerment, and the development of an individual approach, and my being a teacher: these experiences occurred within the community, the workshop community that we created. I tried to contribute to the creation of this community by giving up power. One student's experiment with empowerment — bossing people around, instituting a hierarchy of seniority — conflicted with the establishment of a collective sense of community. The achievement of right behaviour on my part did not always result in the outcome I desired. My students remained unpredictably human.

I also contributed to community because I liked my students and I thought they were talented. In some senses I gave them an identity because they were my students and I felt that way about them. I also was able to talk with them about their concerns, and so come to an understanding of them that helped me to acknowledge what their position in the community was. Chris didn't think he was good at improvising, but he helped to create an atmosphere of

good-will. In a talk with him, I can tell him that I'm not good at improvising either, but everyone makes their own contribution. When I didn't understand a student, I became frustrated. When I don't understand a student, we don't have a common understanding and I can sense in that the disintegration of the community. Because it can be associated with a lack of cooperation, there is a desperation in this feeling of where can we begin to build this common understanding, this community, again.

I also contributed to the performance. I was most often the director, although this need was flexibly filled. I stood in as the audience, during the period of creation and rehearsal. (Whatever our methods, we wanted a well-rehearsed play with high production values.) I also provided an opportunity for evaluating the performance. All of these helped create a public voice through which the collective spoke to a wider community. Of course, there is plenty of evidence in the collective's discussion of the performance that we did not all agree on what that public voice was saying.

Through my journal and reflections here, I have come to a deeper understanding of myself as a teacher,

especially in this process. I have learned to appreciate some of my own qualities as a teacher. Many times, I have seen myself acting in the moment with thoughtfulness and care. I can come again to teaching and to this process with more confidence. My students and I are learners trying "to live a critically conscious presence in the pedagogical and historical process" (Freire, 1987, p.140). We are all uncompleted beings in search of our own completion. We are people engaged in serious play.

## CONCLUSIONS

Personal and social development in an educational setting

My students and I collectively created a school play, The Mystery Stringpicker at the Death Café, and performed it at the 1986 Avalon East High School Drama Festival and later at our school. The instances and experiences that occurred during the creation, performances, and discussion of the performances confirmed my objectives and my approach and acknowledged the need for the rehearsal of pedagogy. I have offered my insights into particular instances of these qualities that I or my students experienced. I cannot prove these experiences affected these students outside of this particular case, or even in this particular case, except in certain examples.

These examples showed that personal and social development usually involved contradiction. (Preserving individuality while acting in cooperation with other community members was often a highly complicated affair.) This contradiction is acknowledged in Aims of Public Education for Newfoundland and Labrador where it describes what it means to be in favour with humanity. Contradiction

is a condition, not just of learning and teaching, but of all situations in which we are living with others. Giving students the opportunity to experience these qualities, whether they leave this experience cooperative, autonomous, community-spirited beings or not, is valuable, because they rehearsed living with others.

Collective creation was one part of a whole programme intended to affect these students, offered by an institution, that like most institutions, has a hard job empowering students and promoting an individual approach. Even so, I am assuming that the experiences offered had a long range impact. (If transference only amounts to the memory of success, that memory may be immeasurably important to the meaning of that student's life.) Because I taught Robert for three years, I can trace his development - he can probably trace mine. I wrote how Robert recalled that when he registered for Theatre 2200, the first year I taught him, he was so shy, he tried to 'drop' that course and substitute another one. Now, he is a confident and competent performer who performed in two professional productions, last year. His experiences as a member of the Death Cafe collective appear to have had a

long range impact on his personal development.

Whether these experiences have a long range impact or not, these are objectives to which the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has committed its educational system. This commitment stands, despite the the complexity of an educational setting that might achieve these objectives and the difficulty that this implies. It makes the investigation of experiences like this one important, because they occur in such an educational setting.

One of the difficulties of achieving these objectives is that they are at odds with the hierarchical structures of most schools. Even though the school is a community, the teaching staff is a collective, the students are a collective, and the classes are collectives: these collectives tend to be managed in a traditional, authoritarian style. The ways in which this experience attended to collectiveness suggests how these collectives might be managed and teachers might experience being a teachers governed by a commitment to cooperation, autonomy, uniqueness, and community spirit.

Folding the product back on the process



Sometimes, in my school and my faculty, there is a conflict between knowledge in the subject areas and personal development. Knowledge in the subject areas predominated as a concern simply because testing makes teaching tangible. The collective creation of a play offered a solution that may be valuable in other subject areas. One of the characteristics of this approach was that my educational objectives were different from the outcome. Any class where there is something to be done may be able to appropriate some of the ways in which opportunities for these experiences were offered. The outcome here was appropriate to the subject area - theatre - and the process was grounded in the principles and politics of a particular theatrical process which was appropriate to my objectives. Any teacher, in any subject area, is able to explore her area for processes inherent in that subject that help her identify a way of teaching or an approach that offers that subject area as an opportunity for the personal and social development of the student.

When the objectives and outcome define a process and a product that are different, the outcome becomes a thing

that is significant because of its process. In the process and product, there is a context for evaluation of the experience and what has been accomplished. The evaluation is consistent with the process and product and provides us with information to continue our rehearsal for graceful living. The performance of Death Café was an opportunity for the collective to share with an audience. In sharing, there was a consolidation of intention, experience, and behaviour. In sharing, the tension between process and performance was played out. The event became an historical object through which the process could then be valued and evaluated. Evaluation of the experience through the performance event provided an opportunity for reflection, comprehension, and realization.

The very thing that many drama educators condemn allowed the collective to realize and acknowledge what they as individuals and as a collective had learned. The essential evaluation process, applying the product to the process, is consistent, appropriate, and so, sensible. This evaluative process valued, rather than reduced, the experience of learning. In this same way, the processes intrinsic to the knowledge of a particular subject, if

they are used to do something, provide the way of evaluating that process and that something. It also gives the sense that any failures will contribute to some future success.

The secondary evaluation process, questioning selected special spectators about the event, enhanced the ability of the group to apply the product to the process. These special spectators were supposedly perceptive or unbiased, but that doesn't really matter. What does matter is that the collective member selected a spectator whose response he thought would be of value to him. Isn't it this attitude that makes evaluation significant? Evaluation has to be placed in the hands of those doing the work, so that evaluation is acceptable to them and can be used to begin work, again.

#### Collective creation in the classroom

The creation of this play was an extra-curricular activity. The group usually met after school and almost never during class time. This means that group membership was not constrained by class enrolment or class membership and that the length of time the group could meet or

rehearse was almost never restricted to forty minutes. Although my students and I have used collective creation in Theatre Arts 2200 to produce a final project and I found the experience quite similar to the one described in my journal and the tape transcripts, the logistics of time, class size and class enrolment, and the usual interruptions and restrictions of the school day do make the experience different. So, that this process occurred mostly after school and on weekends is a factor in any conclusions that are drawn from this experience about its educational value. (What I found was that when I used this process with a class, I tended to give them more autonomy. For example, often I would not direct at all. This seems unexpected, after my statements about the hierarchical nature of the school system of which I was a part, but it had to do with things like dealing with absenteeism.) A comparison of these two uses of collective creation would be very instructive.

#### Collective creation as educational drama

Drama educators have expressed concern that the school play de-emphasizes student-centered, spontaneous,

open-ended experience. The collective creation process of the school play met these concerns because it emphasized the knowledge, experience, and behaviour of the students. The method of creating the play was improvisational, and so, spontaneous, personal, and cooperative. The intention of the collective group to cooperate made the experience, for the most part, open-ended.

I was intrigued by the fact that what I would have described as an intuitive approach was described, by Jack, as learning. That the approach was personal refers to the experiential nature of theatre. That it was cooperative and improvisational defines it as playful. That it was intuitive defines it as non-rational. If John's notion is included, then the collective was engaged in non-rational, playful learning.

The collective group enlarged the understanding of how this process might be used to create and perform a school play. Perhaps because collective creation is a process-oriented kind of theatre, it did, in this instance, demonstrate the significance of performance to the construction rather than the destruction of educational experience in drama.

Inasmuch as the collective creation is theatre, students learned about theatre. Human interaction and the principle of expressiveness (the relationship of internal action or penetration to rigid signaling) suggested the purpose of the theatre. The collective creation offered a workshop for this theatrical investigation. There was some emphasis placed on the acquisition of acting techniques, but for the purposes of expediting creativity. The greatest emphasis was placed on the collective creation and performance of the play. Investigation of acting techniques, of expressiveness, of social and political interaction, and any other investigation occurred within that situation and because of that situation.

The notion that collective knowledge existed in the Death Café collective is a demonstration of how the uniqueness of each individual member of the collective is its collectiveness. Collectiveness is not democratic. There is no authority of the majority. There is a dynamic that acknowledges that everybody's right to personal freedom is that individual's right to personal freedom. That personal freedom liberates the imagination by acknowledging the uniqueness of each collective member's

experience.

## BEGINNING, AGAIN

What is discovered about something is in part a result of the way in which it is studied. My objectives are the point of view from which I analyzed what had happened and as such are part of the view - the doctrine of the landscape. These objectives, my notions of teaching, my ability as a journal writer imposed a perceptual grid which shaped and defined what could be seen. Nevertheless, since experience was the thing viewed, that the viewpoint should eschew "grids" through which its uniqueness is obliterated, cannot be over-emphasized.

That the preservation of uniqueness can be achieved is debatable. The difficulty of identifying a way of realizing an intention often has its source in the multitude of perceptual grids that are so busily describing our experience for us. A friend and I were walking to the Peace A-Chord on a beautiful sunny Sunday, and I said to her, "Look at the clouds. They look just like a painting." Then I started to laugh at myself. She looked at me curiously. I tried to explain that it struck me as funny that I would describe the clouds as a painting. A painter who painted in a realistic genre might



painstakingly try to reproduce the clouds as they are, but me, I already saw them as a painting. What I experienced of the clouds was filtered through a grid of Gainsboroughs.

So even if I didn't take a position, I would still be grappling with my desire to see and describe the experience as it was and the various structures and vocabularies that defined my previous experiences. By viewing the journal as a description of a lived experience, and the analysis as a reflection on the lived experience, the position I did take was enlarged and my own grids and those of other members of the collective were often apparent, and so could be played with and reflected upon.

Drama and theatre can offer a workshop for the heightening and expressing of individual experience and the combining and re-combining of individual and group behaviour. The various structures and vocabularies that define previous experiences can be deconstructed to reveal a range of virtual alternatives. The authenticity of the expression of individual experience is measured against human internal response, validating in enactment or

expression an intuitive process, and providing a process that can generate an infinite range of alternatives. So this experience was not only an investigation. The journal recorded mini-processes reflecting my life in motion and describing my students lives in motion. The tape transcripts are the documentation of a historical event. My discussion and reflection, the writing and re-writing of this thesis are further investigations in my ability to interpret what becomes more and more my own process of discovering meaning in being a teacher and being a writer (my public voice).

Despite the claims theatre makes to the investigation of expressiveness, expressing (writing of) experience, although it is also a tool for inquiry, often stands between the experience and discovery and so, transformation. Demastes (1989) writes in an essay on Spalding Grey's Swimming to Cambodia: "Problems arise when an art form empowers a lone presence and when it empowers a tool - language that has acquired a social or political tyranny over any liberating potential in that art" (p.75).

Since my writing stands between me and my experience, it is not surprising that my writing of the experience

would be a developmental aspect of my understanding of being a teacher. Where is the intuition, non-rationality, and imagination, and performance that I value so much? The perceptions that described for me antinomy in my teaching role and prevented me from "being" a teacher, the writing of this thesis has allowed me to deconstruct. I have redefined my experience as I have written this thesis, and it is that which has created a changing understanding of myself as a teacher that I would call learning. This learning, I consider empowering.

De-construction and re-definition of what I experienced are a result of the way I approached this thesis, because I approached it in a way that was consistent with the art form I was investigating. When I pointed out that writing about experience, even as the most appropriate approach, is a tyranny, I am establishing the essential contradiction in the study of experience. It is inherent not only in experience as description, but also in theatre as script and process as product.

In their book, Between Reality and Fantasy, Grolnick and Barkin state:

All art forms have the effect of reviving the

metaphoric power of words and forms, refreshing the senses and waking the mind to the continuous ebb and flow of differentiation within itself and outside. They bring us into a new relationship with reality or actually reconstitute it in some new way. But is this not what the ego is doing unconsciously all the time in its moment-by-moment functioning? An art form is the process of mind slowed down, enlarged, and abstracted to the point where we can glimpse some of its inner workings almost in vivo, as it were, and just within reach. (1978, p.354-355)

Just as product is the most appropriate grid through which to value the process, and so, to see the process as it was, then to evaluate it for what it was; just so description became the grid through which the experience of the collective was perceived. So, by valuing the description, I was able to reflect on the experience, de-construct it, re-construct it, evaluate it, re-evaluate it and transform it. This a process of mind slowed down to create a new relationship with reality or actually to reconstitute it in some new way. In fact it is by valuing my journal writing, rather than by dwelling on its

weaknesses, that I was able to come into a new relationship with the Death Café experience.

The description itself, especially since it was a diary or journal, is referring to Grolnick and Barkin, a kind of ego-functioning. Even if experience as description existed in a reduced state, (through the description the experience becomes a thing), it is by saying, "Yes," to the description that I was able to see it as it was and to re-experience it. In that yes-saying I was enlarging it beyond its reduced state by returning to it some of experiential nature of its source. This enlarging was not necessarily an inflation of the actual thing leading to deception, but a slowing down, a cooperation, an appreciation, that made the thing apparent, made a range of virtual alternatives apparent, returned the thing to its original experiential state and thus demanded transcendence.

Perhaps it is appropriate to reject certain things out of hand and to take a critical stance; however, this is not the way in which this experience could be seen as it was, appreciated, or transcended. Rejection or criticism might be a way of applying a set body of

knowledge to behaviour, but it is not a way of playing with the contradictory state of human existence.

I reflected on the contradictions in the role of the teacher-member of a collective. I saw a choice in the contradiction, and I saw the interaction of contradiction as confusion that made choice difficult. Individual experience and social reconstruction I saw resolved in a dynamic of expressiveness and enactment. Because of my exploration of this tension in theatre, I came to re-construct my experience. It involved many interacting contradictions. These were the dynamic of my membership in the collective. I had through reflection and saying, "Yes," become empowered.

I do not see my own incompleteness as a burden or a failure, but as the source of (and in common with my students) a critical conscious presence in the pedagogical world in which my students and I live. We learn to learn in an atmosphere where we are free to demonstrate our autonomy, thus we become empowered, appreciate and value the position we find ourselves in, and come to understand and transform our world. Of course, all this wonderful construction, de-construction and re-construction would be

useless if we were not going to begin, again. We rehearse for a graceful performance. Then we regard the performance as a rehearsal for an even more graceful performance.

The dynamics within the theatrical workshop, the workshop community, or teaching are the dynamics of play. So from the darkness of confusing contradictions, through the intensity of dynamic tensions, I come to the lightness of play. Let's play. It's more fun. Fun is celebratory. With the many ways experience can be de-constructed and re-constructed, created and evaluated, transformed and transcended, I say: "Let's play."

Let's play with the dynamics of the situation and let's evaluate as part of transformational process in order to play again. The Death Café experience and the experience description suggest that evaluation is a part of the expressing of experience, and that the most appropriate evaluation should not be de-emphasized by the application of irrelevant measurements. The most appropriate evaluation is appreciative rather than critical, because it is flexible enough to recognize the experience. In this way experience is empowering. In this way, we allow ourselves to describe our experiences and to

play with them. In this way, we learn.



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