

The Pool and the Soup.

A set of rules for spoken improvisation.

By Alessandro Bosetti. © 2007

The piece is based on spoken improvisation guided by a conductor through a pool of instructions.

The piece can be played by any number of people starting from 2. I recommend a group of about 8 to 15 people.

All instruction could also be given by anybody in the ensemble at any time, my experience though is that it works better when the prompter leads most of the time. There could also be an agreement in rotating the conductor role during the piece. This is up to the ensemble.

Instructions are given through gestures and are valid until a new instruction come.

+ Before any instruction is given the conductor has to point out with a finger all the player that will be involved.

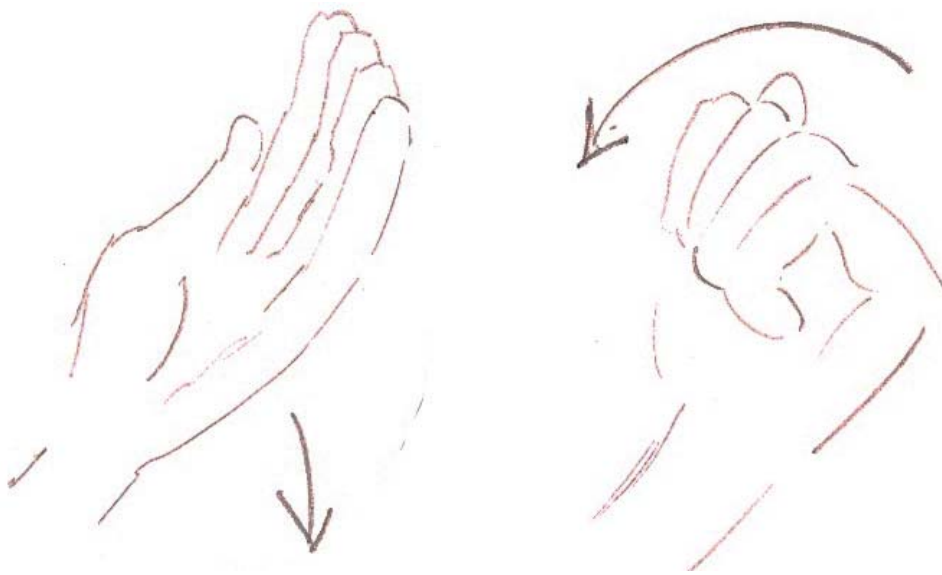
Many different combinations of instruction could be used at the same time. The conductor can experiment with them.

Almost every gesture is paired with a closing gesture.

The piece could have any duration.

Here below i describe every instruction, the corresponding conductor 's gesture and give some explanations :

☞ *1. Free speech.*



Gesture : Cut the air with the side of your flat hand, like in a karate move.

Action : The player that has been pointed out starts to speak from scratch - about the first thing coming into he 's / her 's mind.

Closing gesture : close a hand quickly as in "tacet ". This gesture can be used anytime to stop somebody.

"Free Speech " his is the most difficult one. Consider that : It 's hard for everybody to get started, don 't hurry, take your time. It hasn 't to be fast at the

beginning. You can take long pauses as well. When you start speaking you are supposed to speak alone. Don't listen to what is happening around you : it is a monologue. Until you may get a "Lock" instruction you just keep monologuing.

Rule : at the beginning it 's difficult to start talking about something. But : never use something like "Well, i don 't know what I'm going to say, i may talk about nothing..." and so on. Just talk about SOMETHING. The first thing coming to your mind is totally fine. If you are ally in trouble pick up a topic form the topic list that will be somewhere among the players.

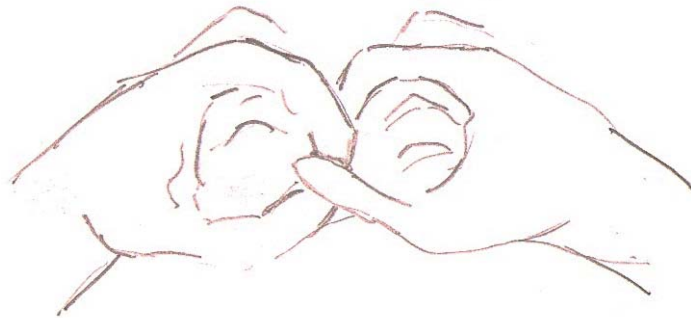
☞ 2. Free speech on topics

Gesture : Same as free speech but after pointing at a topic on the topic list, on a piece of paper or whispering it to the players. (The correct sequence is : conductor points the involved players, then points to the topic, then gives the "Free speech" gesture. Consider that the conductor could move among the players, whisper or even touch them)

Action : starting a speech flow on the given topic.

Closing gesture : as for free speech.

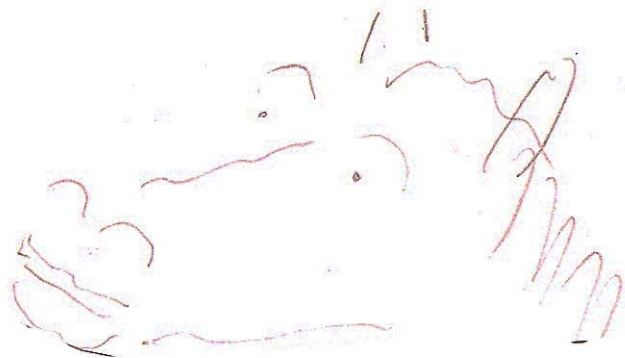
☞ 3. Lock



Gesture : create two chained rings with thumbs and forefingers of both hands.

Action : l the involved players start listening and interacting to each other.

Closing gesture : breaks the chain you are forming with fingers by removing hands from each other.



Example : player one is monologuing about cats and player two is monologuing about horses. They are not listening to each other, the speech flow overlaps freely. The conductor points at player one and two and gives the "Lock" sign. Player one and two starts talking together.



Be carefull : what usually happens is that if two players are already talking about soething and are given the "Lock " sign they stop and restart on a new topic together. This is wrong. The best thing to do is to try to MERGE the two flows of words. The two monologues about cats and horses gradually become one conversation about BOFH cats and horses.

The "Lock " sign could be given to players that are not speaking yet. The correct sequence would be : conductor points the involved players, then gives the "lock " gesture, then gives the "Free speech " gesture. Between the "Lock " and "free speech " gestures conductor may decide to give a topic or not.

Also to be careful : closing the lock gestures dosnt mean stop talking. If for example two players are locked together and they receive the closing gesture for "lock " they will stop listening to each other and go on talking by themselves until they receive the instruction to stop.

☞ 4. *Lock with the audience.*



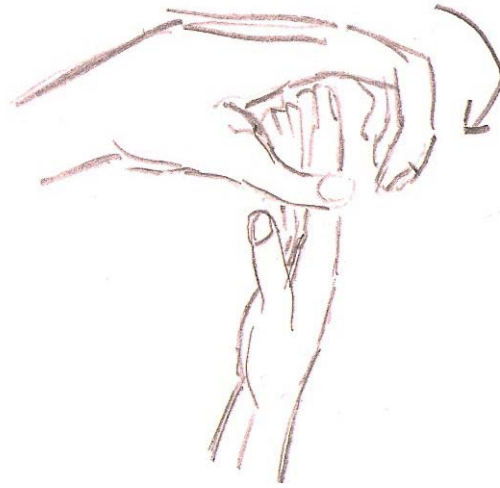
Gesture : the conductor faces the players (the audience is behind him). He raises a hand with a thumb pointing behind his shoulder. The other hand is used to point to involved players at the same time.

Action : one or more players can engage a conversation with the audience merging it with what they were previously talking about. (The audience doesn't have to follow any rule, while the player have to stick to the instructions they received).

Closing gesture : combining "lock with audience" gesture and free speech closing gesture.

Carefull : "Lock with the audience" cannot be used to start the the piece.

☞ 5. *Sample*



Gesture : one hand is on top of the other like in the basketball "time out " gesture but the fingers are folded down (it may remind a "P"). The folded fingers point to the player that would actually "sample". The player who's going to be "sampled" has been pointed before.

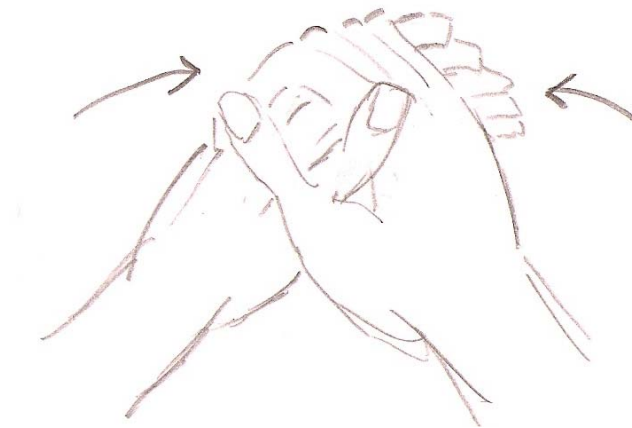
Action : the player receiving the instruction picks up a very tiny sound fragment from the speech flow of one other player which is already speaking. He/she "freezes" this fragment into a longer event : if the fragment is a pitch / vowel the result will be a long tone / note, if the fragment is a consonant the result will be a texture.

Closing gesture : showing briefly the "Sample" gesture and remove fast the hands from each other.

Be careful : this instruction inverts the usual sequence of pointing. What i suggest to the conductor is to first establish eye contact with the player he / she

wants to be the "sampler", then points to the player he / she wants to be "sampled", then gives the actual "sample" gesture to the sampler player.

👉 6. *Loop*



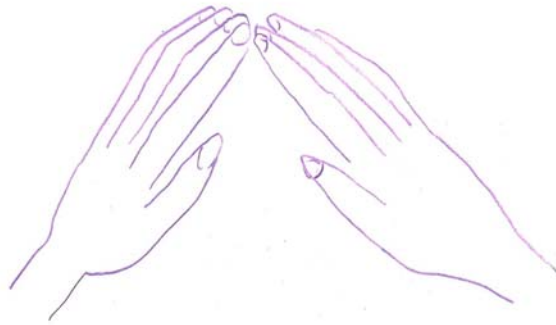
Gesture : holding both hands like in an hand shake.

Action : the pointed player keep repeating what they are doing. It can be a speech fragment of any size, from the tone or phoneme to a long phrase. Just be careful to repeat it exactly !

Closing gesture : remove hands braking the handshake.

Added gesture : the conductor can increase or decrease the size of the looped fragment by showing he 's / her 's flat hands closer or far from each other. This gesture could be given between the pointing and the "loop" gestures or while the loop gesture has already been give and the loops are already running.

☞ 7, Musical Criteria



Gesture : joint the tips of your fingers of both hands while holding them flat. It's like praying but the palms of hands are a bit disjointed so that the two hands form a triangle or a "A" or a roof of a mountain house.

Action : apply a musical characteristic to the speech flow. It can be related to pulse, pitch, texture etc. It has to be just one characteristic.



Closing gesture : push down the tips of fingers as the mountain house's roof would be collapsing. (Closes just ONE "Musical Criteria". To close ALL the Musical Criteria previously given to a player repeat quickly this closing gesture twice in a row.

Example : player three is talking about feelings with player four, the are

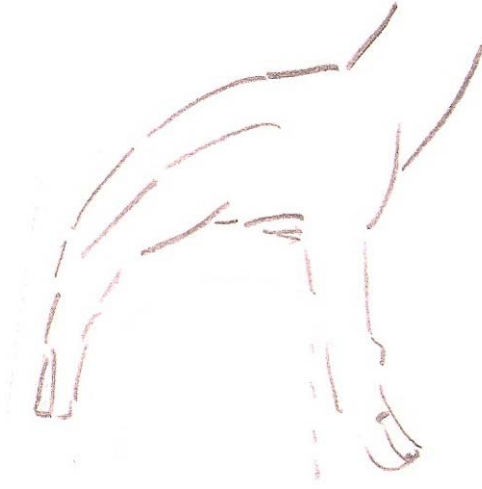
"locked" in a conversation. Once player three receives the "Musical Criteria" gesture he applies glissando all over his speech while continuing he's / her's conversation with player four. Player four keeps talking in a normal way. After a while player four receives the "Musical Criteria" gesture and decides to speak in a very rhythmical / staccato way. The two of them continue their conversation about the same thing but in a very different sounding way.

Important : it is possible for the conductor to give as many "Musical Criteria" instructions to the same person in a row as he / she likes.

Continuing the previous example : player three which is applying a lot of glissandos to he's / her's way of speaking receives another "Musical Criteria" gesture and decides to apply a stuttering pausing to he's / her's speech that will keep the glissando and will add the stutter on top of it.

"Musical Criteria" could be of any kind but just one at a time.

☞ 8. *Misunderstanding*



Gesture : form a upside down "U" with thumb and forefinger.

Action : the players start to misunderstand systematically what the others say.

Closing gesture : same as "misunderstanding" but shaking the hand.

☞ 9. *Translating*

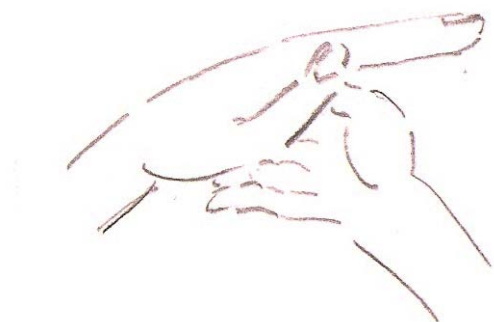


Gesture : flat hands in on top of each other as for "time out" in basketball.

Action : the player continues talking about what he was talking before but translating it into another existing or non existing language.

Closing gesture : as the gesture but the upper hand taps quickly twice on the lower hand.

10 - Translating others



Gesture : like "translating " but the lower hand is held horizontally and points towards the speaker that is going to translate.

Closing Gesture : like for "translating " but with the lower hand held horizontally.

Action : the translator does a simultaneous translation of what somebody else is saying into an existing or non existing language.

Careful : this instruction follows the same pointing technique as the "sample " one : first eye contact with the player that is going to translate, then pointing to the player whose words have to be translated, then giving the "Translating others " instruction to the player that is going to translate.

suggestion : it may be interesting to create circles of translations (A translates B that translates C etc..). it may be interesting to create circles of translations including non existing languages or languages that are not understood by the player involved.

☞ 11. *Headphones*

Gesture : putting both hands on ears.

Action : wear headphones connected to a portable radio, cd, mp3 player or similar. say what you hear (if it 's spoken, just repeat what you hear otherwise describe what you hear). choose files, cassettes, radio stations as randomly as you can. Set the volume high enough not to hear your voice.

Closing gesture : putting both hands on ears and remove them quickly.

Some instructions that have no closing gesture :

☞ 12. *Louder*

Gesture : flat hand, palm up, moving up.

Action : talk louder

☞ 13. *Softer*

Gesture : the opposite of "louder".

Action : talk softer

☞ 14, *Accelerate*

Gesture : thumb up

Action : accelerate whatever the pointed player /s is /are doing.

☞ 15, *Slow down*

Gesture : thumb down

Action : slow down whatever the pointed player /s is /are doing.

On combining instructions and closing gestures :

All instruction can be combined and superimposed in a virtually infinite number of ways (a player can receive a lot of instructions in a row without the previous ones being "closed"). It's up to the group and the conductor to find out more complex combinations.

i assume that the only way to get the whole thing started is through "Free Speech", "Free speech with topics" and "Headphones" are the only possible ways to start the piece.

On transitions :

Every-time a new instruction is given the natural tendency is to have a slow

pause to think about what to do next. I wish those pauses could be reduced as much as possible so that the speech could "flow" as fluidly as possible.

Some more notes :

Everything can be said. no topics are banned. People names could be mentioned, (the player mentioning somebody 's name carries responsibility in case of offense.).

player cannot harm each other physically on stage. it could happen that they may hurt somebody 's else 's feelings. this is not a wished by the composer though.

Rules for the speech flow are basicall the same as in a normal conversation between two or more people or soliloquy.

Even if a naturally "circular" disposition of the ensemble will happen naturally once "locked" (players facing each others in a circle and keeping eye contact with each other) I wish the players could face the audience in a sort of "talk show" like type of disposition. They should feel comfortable and could and should have eye contact (also in order to catch cues and signes) and feel free to sit or move around as they like. I wish though the speech, even if conversational, could be "projected" towards the audience.

The piece changes every time, of course.