

Effort at Speech Between Two People
by Angela Guyton
(for six performers)

This improv piece is inspired by Muriel Rukeyser's poem, by the same name. The speaker in the poem implores a second party to respond to her. The intent of this piece is to supply that response utilizing one of our performers. An elaborate machine is put in place so that a single person can act in this capacity. Each person has a very specific role to play so that the topics of conversation discussed between the speaker in the poem, and our performer, are as improvised as a conversation between two real people can be, and still keep true to the topics relevant in the poem.

TOOLS:

1. the mount: a surface on which both sides of a flash card may be seen by people standing on either side (a piece of upright plexi-glass, for example)
2. bit of twine connecting the generator to the interpreter so that they can signal one another
3. stack of flash cards: both sides of the flash card are used. One side has only a letter on it. Only the letters that appear in the poem's title are included in this set, making it a total of 15 letters that are available. Different words, or types of words, have been assigned to each letter:

parts of speech:

E F = noun

T L = verb

N = describer (adj. or adv.)

B = special characters (. , : etc.)

R = other (the, a, prepositional phrases, etc.)

single words:

H = WHY

A = WHO

O = WHAT

P = WHEN

W = WHERE

S = YOU

C = HOW

Every word and character was pulled out of the poem and categorized into one of the parts of speech categories. Words that make questions (who, what, where, etc.) were assigned to other letters just so there is a clear prompt for the performer to respond to.

4. short prepared movie: 15-20 minutes long. This time accounts for the opening, 1.5 mins. for each stanza, and an end that accounts for the closing remarks. It is a silent movie for which the interpreter supplies dialogue. During the opening the speaker is delivering the poem (again, the interpreter supplies the actual voice). During section two, the speaker may seem to mouth the poignant, often time telegraphic, statements that begin each stanza, while the interpreter again provides the voice. In the third section, the speaker in the movie should give the impression of speech, since at that time the stenographers closing remarks, which should be interpreted as the speakers closing remarks, will be read aloud by the interpreter.

ROLES:

Commitment to these roles is crucial since this piece is ideally only to be performed with the same group of people ONCE.

1. generator
2. caretaker
3. stenographer
4. speaker
5. interpreter
6. suspect
7. incubator

1. The generator has various stacks of letters on flash cards placed before him. He can only see the side that has a single letter on it. From these cards he must create new words that have some relation to the suspects remarks. He must then post the cards onto the mount in such a way that both the stenographer and the interpreter can see of the card's contents. The generator posts cards whenever he feels the suspect's remarks are sufficient or when he feels the speaker would interrupt/interject (this doesn't mean necessarily when the suspect has actually completed a thought).

2. The caretaker has the job to make the short movie. He also lets the interpreter know when its time for the next section (beginning, dialogue, ending work) so that the interpreter is prepared.

3. The stenographer records all the words the generator has created and compiles them into a beautiful work of poetry or prose that reacts to the phrase "What are you now?". This work will be read at the end the piece by the interpreter, serving as the speakers closing remarks.

4. The speaker is the persona in the poem represented in the visual. The movie itself is played just a few feet in front of the suspect and slightly above eye level so that the speaker is looking down at the suspect. The speaker is also bigger than life size.

5. The interpreter silently reads the words on the back of the cards which the generator has posted and transforms that prompt into a cohesive query, which he will then relay to

the suspect loud enough so that other performers may hear, while still remaining unobtrusive. The interpreter must be aware of when the generator has switched cards (these two players are connected by a bit of twine). Also, the interpreter must recite the poem at the beginning of the piece and provide the speaker's voice during the middle dialogue section. The interpreter also reads the closing remarks handed to him by the stenographer at the end of the piece. Preceding that reading the interpreter must say "Take my hand. Speak to me." (then continue with the work the stenographer has handed in).

6. The suspect sits and watches the movie. She responds to the interpreters questions as if they originate from the speaker. The questions must be answered and responses must be believable. The suspect cannot withdraw before the piece is through.

7. The incubator has the task of creating atmosphere. He is to compose a prepared piece that is subdivided into nine sections: the opening, the Q&A (one section for each stanza), and the closing remarks. Select words are chosen from the poem before hand, several from each stanza, and each section of the work should respond to, or be built around, the specific words given. A recording of this piece should be available to be played during the performance. And during the performance the incubator should create a sound environment that further saturates the suspect by making the space seem believable.

SEQUENCE:

1. Assuming everyone is in position this piece begins with the speaker reciting the poem, for which the interpreter supplies the voice.

2. The first question, the one that starts the suspect speaking, so that the generator may create his first word that responds to her statements is, What are you now?

3. From then the piece is set into motion. The interpreter asks the suspect questions. Should the generator signal the interpreter at the same moment the caretaker does, the generator's prompt should take precedent.

4. The piece concludes after the seven sections (one for each stanza) has been performed and the interpreter reads the closing remarks, which the stenographer has prepared.

Effort at Speech Between Two People
By Muriel Rukeyser

Speak to me. Take my hand. What are you now?
I will tell you all. I will conceal nothing.
When I was three, a little child read a story about a rabbit
who died, in the story, and I crawled under a chair:
a pink rabbit: it was my birthday, and a candle
burnt a sore spot on my finger, and I was told to be happy.

Oh, grow to know me. I am not happy. I will be open:
Now I am thinking of white sails against a sky like music,
like glad horns blowing, and birds tilting, and an arm about me.
There was one I loved, who wanted to live, sailing.

Speak to me. Take my hand. What are you now?
When I was nine, I was fruitily sentimental,
fluid: and my widowed aunt played Chopin,
and I bent my head on the painted woodwork, and wept.
I want now to be close to you.
I would Link the minutes of my days close, somehow, to your days.

I am not happy. I will be open.
I have liked lamps in evening corners, and quiet poems.
There has been fear in my life. Sometimes I speculate
On what a tragedy his life was, really.

Take my hand. Fist my mind in your hand. What are you now?
When I was fourteen, I had dreams of suicide,
And I stood at a steep window, at sunset, hoping toward death:
If the light had not melted clouds and plains to beauty,
If light had not transformed that day, I would have leapt,
I am unhappy. I am lonely. Speak to me.

I will be open. I think he never loved me:
He loved the bright beaches, the little lips of foam
That ride small waves, he loved the veer of gulls:
He said with a gay mouth: I love you. Grow to know me.

What are you now? If we could touch one another,
If these our separate entities could come to grips,
Clenched like a Chinese puzzle...yesterday
I stood in a crowded street that was live with people,
And no one spoke a word, and the morning shone.
Everyone silent, moving...Take my hand. Speak to me.