

Group Work



**A Compilation Of Quotes About
Collaboration From A Variety Of
Sources And Practices**

"Together, joined in effort by the burden, they staggered up the last steep of the mountain. Together, they chanted One! Two! Three! and crashed the log on to the great pile. Then they stepped back, laughing with triumphant pleasure..."

- William Golding, from Lord of the Flies

"I like everybody workin' together. You chip in for a meal together. One guy goes to the store, one guy cooks, one guy washes the dishes. A common goal. We got a lieutenant there, he says the fire department is the closest thing to socialism there is."

- Tom Patrick, Fireman, interviewed by Studs Terkel in Working

"*Group Material* is itself collaborative, which is non-hierarchical and we don't use the corporate model which is along lines of expertise but we work together and take responsibility as a group for every aspect of the work. And then there's a collaboration or dialogue with those artists and non-artists we work with, in terms of participation in the various projects."

- Julie Ault, *Group Material*

"We care about equality and democracy within the band and outside the band. For us life is about cooperation and solidarity, not about egotism, greed, or competition. This means that we prefer to work with people and bands that have a similar sort of mentality and attitude."

- G.W. Sok, *The Ex*, from Into the Gravy

"Some [intentional communities], like the Shakers and the Harmony Society, have endured for a century or even longer. The Hutterians, to cite an extreme example, are today still strongly committed to communal living after practicing it, punctuated only by occasional lapses into private enterprise, for 450 years. The Hutterian rate of membership turnover has been only about 0.0006 per year."

- Benjamin Zablocki, from Alienation and Charisma: A Study of Contemporary American Communes

"I always worked as an individual artist even when *Group Material* asked me to join the group. There are certain things that I can do by myself that I would never be able to do with *Group Material*. First of all, they are a totally democratic entity and although you learn a lot from it, and it's very moving, it's very exacting, everything has to be by consensus, which is the beauty of it, but it is much more work. It's worth it 100%. But as an individual artist there are certain things that I want to bring out and express, and the collaborative practice is not conducive to that."

- Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Artist

"Through our experiences and the choices we made, we found for ourselves the structures within which we (co)operate. When it comes to music, this means the whole band creates the music. There's no boss telling the others what to do. Someone comes up with an idea, the others add to it. Then it's a matter of searching, puzzling and trying before the song has a definite form. Although we developed a certain style of "songwriting" with the years, in principle the music can take any possible shape or form - we're not stuck in one sacred formula (it's not fucking pop music!). It is exciting to explore one's own approaches to teamwork and creativity, to explore one's own limits and possibilities, then to move those limitations further away."

- G.W. Sok, *The Ex*, from *Into the Gravy*

"I think when a band starts out there is usually a bit of a golden period when the combination of individuals is fresh and untested so you kind of explode out of the gate with a bunch of ideas sparked from the newness of interaction. After a while you kind of get accustomed to certain tendencies from each other so you may have to work a bit harder to undercut your own expectations.....with our group I think its never been super easy to write new songs mainly because all four of us contribute to the writing, so each piece kind of has to run a gauntlet with each member taking whacks at the thing. A great majority of the songs don't survive the hazing, but we do work really hard at pushing ourselves to a different space each time - we kind of like trying to mutate the signature."

- Guy Picciotto, *Fugazi*

"Lyric writing is an interesting process in *Sonic Youth*. There's three people writing now, and we've all had a lot of interest and involvement with expression through words, or poetry or whatever. I hardly think we're the only people writing lyrics with that frame of reference or that frame of mind, but our fusion of styles in this framework is interesting. Most people can't tell now who wrote what, and to make it more confusing, I wrote some lyrics that Kim sings, and vice versa. I like that blurring of identities within the band, because it becomes a unified thing that can't be related to other forms of historical poetry."

- Thurston Moore, *Sonic Youth*

"There were various conditions and shared purposes that led to the formation of the group. A lot of us had just come from art school, where we were trained to develop a 'unique' artistic voice. We were also trained to believe that after school you then can go exercise this voice in the so-called real world. This seemed to be pretty much of a false promise considering the limitations and biases which accompanied market principles and the commercial art system, and, many of us were not interested in making objects, but in collaborative processes. We were collectively intent on combining our social and political motivations with artistic practices, which is more common now than it was at that time. Then, the lines between art and politics were more clearly drawn and that delineation was commonly supported, often with the stated interest of preventing the contamination of art with politics."

- Julie Ault, *Group Material*

"My mom had always wanted me to better myself. I wanted to better myself because of her. Now when the strikes started, I told her I was going to join the union and the whole movement. I told her I was going to work without pay. She said she was proud of me. (His eyes glisten. A long, long pause.) See, I told her I wanted to be with my people. If I were a company man, nobody would like me anymore. I had to belong to somebody and this was it right here."

- Roberto Acuna, Farmworker and Organizer, interviewed by Studs Terkel in *Working*

"We all leave together. We don't compete with each other like Daddy does. We stay a team."

- comment made by a mother to her child in the grocery store

"Voting is a win or lose model, in which people are more often concerned with the numbers it takes to "win" than with the issue itself. Voting does not take into account individual feelings or needs. In essence, it is a quantitative, rather than qualitative, method of decision-making.

With consensus people can and should work through differences and reach a mutually satisfactory position. It is possible for one person's insights or strongly held beliefs to sway the whole group. No ideas are lost, each member's input is valued as part of the solution.

A group committed to consensus may utilize other forms of decision making (individual, compromise, majority rules) when appropriate; however, a group that has adopted a consensus model will use that process for any item that brings up a lot of emotions, is something that concerns people's ethics, politics, morals or other areas where there is much investment.

Consensus does not mean that everyone thinks that the decision made is necessarily the best one possible, or even that they are sure it will work. What it does mean is that in coming to that decision, no one felt that her/his position on the matter was misunderstood or that it wasn't given a proper hearing. Hopefully, everyone will think it is the best decision; this often happens because, when it works, collective intelligence does come up with better solutions than could individuals.

Consensus takes more time and member skill, but uses lots of resources before a decision is made, creates commitment to the decision and often facilitates creative decision. It gives everyone some experience with new processes of interaction and conflict resolution, which is basic but important skill-building. For consensus to be a positive experience, it is best if the group has 1) common values, 2) some skill in group process and conflict resolution, or a commitment to let these be facilitated, 3) commitment and responsibility to the group by its members and 4) sufficient time for everyone to participate in the process."

- *Act Up* - New York, from www.actupny.org

"If consensus cannot be reached, the following options exist: 1. If only one person is blocking consensus, the group may decide to over ride the one person's block. 2. If two people or more are blocking consensus, the group may decide by consensus (which includes the people blocking the decision) to try again at a future meeting to reach consensus. If the group cannot reach consensus to try again, then the decision is considered "dropped." If the decision is dropped, then it may not be raised again for at least six months and the opposing collective members must be notified before the meeting in which it will be discussed again so they have an opportunity to raise their objections. If consensus is reached, then the decision must be written down and sent to the *Paper Tiger* email discussion list. If a member who was unable to attend the meeting opposes the decision, they may request that the decision be reconsidered at a future meeting, at which point consensus again will need to be reached on whether or not to alter the decision. "

- *Paper Tiger Television*, from the Frequently Asked Questions section of www.papertiger.org

"The decisions have been mainly mine but this is getting to be less and less. Originally all the ideas were mine, but I'd taken them from other people. Now we have meetings, whenever anyone thinks we need one. Several times people have disagreed with me and we did it the way the majority felt"

- Kay Stepkin, Director of a Bakery Co-op, interviewed by Studs Terkel in *Working*

"Like, when we did *Parliament* and *Funkadelic* and *Bootsy*, it was actually one thing. But there were so many people that you could split them up into different groups. And then, when we went out on tour and they [the record companies] would see us all up there together - we had five, six guitars playing at one time, not including the bass! -, they said: "Wait a minute, that's just one whole group, selling different names!" But it wasn't - we had enough people in the group that each member would have a section to be another group. So now we're finally starting to get them to understand that."

- Gary Snyder, Musical director of the *P. Funk All-Stars*

"At the end of this first year that we had the gallery space there were various factions and arguments that had developed in the group and we decreased from a group of thirteen to a group of three. Although we started with a lot of energy and enthusiasm, as we more clearly identified and refined our ideas and interests, in terms of what we wanted to do individually and as a group, the original configuration basically fell apart. One reason we then identified was we had fallen into the trap in setting up an alternative space. We were feeding into the commercial system and accepting the role of being overdetermined by our alternative status. We were waiting for people to come and see what we were doing rather than taking ideas and production to the streets and other places, rather than taking our own question to heart, "who is culture for and where should it be seen".

- Julie Ault, *Group Material*

"Over the past 10 years, we've come to resemble a large, crazy, but caring dysfunctional family. We argue, shout, whine, complain, change our minds and continually threaten to quit if we don't get our way. We work the phone lines between meetings to understand our differing positions. We rarely vote and proceed by consensus most of the time. Some drop out of the group, but eventually most of us come back, after days, months and sometimes years. The Christmas parties and reunions are terrific. We care a lot about each other, even if we don't see things the same way. Everyone has a poster she really hates and a poster she really loves. We agree that we can disagree. Maybe that's democracy."

- Alice Neel, *Guerrilla Girls*

"It hardly needs saying that such mutualistic communities will also be plagued by conflict. Conflict is at the very heart of life, resulting not simply from the malevolence of others in the struggle for place or portion, but also from the fact that men of the best will in the world seem to suffer incurably, so far as one can tell, from what William Jame called "a certain blindness" in perceiving the vitalities of others."

- Benjamin Nelson, Sociologist

"There were also certain rules you had to obey and if you broke any you had to go in front of this tribunal and explain your actions to these fuckers! Even when I wanted to buy a new pair of stockings I had to ask the 'cashier' for money. This is why we split from Amon Düül I; they were too involved with this political shit."

- Renate Krotenschwanz Knaup, *Amon Düül II*

"I think I have an obligation, to the people who have consented to be in the film, to make a film that is fair to their experience. The editing of my films is a long and selective process. I do feel that when I cut a sequence, I have an obligation to the people who are in it, to cut it so that it fairly represents what I felt was going on at the time, in the original event. I don't try and cut it to meet the standards of a producer or a network or a television show."

- Frederick Wiseman, Documentary Filmmaker

To be a Radical Cheerleader, you do not need to be an actor, a singer or a dancer - you just have to want to yell! (Sign Language included). Each Radical Cheerleader decides for themselves which events they will participate in. There is no more commitment than each member is willing to give. Most of us wear skirts, boots and hooded sweatshirts, but there's no uniform - you can wear what you want. No restrictions, just bring your fantastic self! There's no tryouts or popularity contests (sorry)."

- Radical Cheerleaders, from www.geocities.com/radicalcheerleaders

"We are not leaders or experts - and never will be. People who expect everyone involved with the network to be able to know about every aspect of space travel are deluding themselves. We cherish the learning process, the dialogue between interested individuals. That is how all of our ideas have developed, and that is how we will achieve our aims. Our training methods reflect this approach - they are as much about social interaction as they are about acquiring skills. Those who project their hopes and desires onto us must understand that they are involved - they are astronauts too."

- John Eden, *Raido Association of Autonomous Astronauts*

"Most people think our marriage is just an excuse for freewheeling sex, but that's not true at all. If sex was what we wanted, why go to all the trouble of marrying in a threesome, which makes almost everyone think we're weird? The real reason we married is that we all love each other, and we want to stay together, sharing our lives. Sex is just one part of that sharing, although it's a part we usually enjoy."

- a 26-year-old man involved in a triadic marriage with another man and a woman

"The normal citizen looked at us and saw a mixture of gangster, hippy, criminal and ape. Once somebody rang us up with a nice voice and asked if they could do a feature article on us about how a commune works. They came and asked us questions, took our photos and disappeared. One week later the article appeared and it said: 'This kind of community stinks and if this is the future of Germany then we need Adolf back.'"

- Chris Karrer, *Amon Düül II*

"In the United States, there is no end which human will despairs of attaining through the combined power of individuals united in a society."

- Alexis de Tocqueville, author of Democracy in America

"Societies change and the arts can be a powerful way of expressing these changes. However, the arts are essential for helping individuals find their place within society and for shaping a collective cultural identity. "

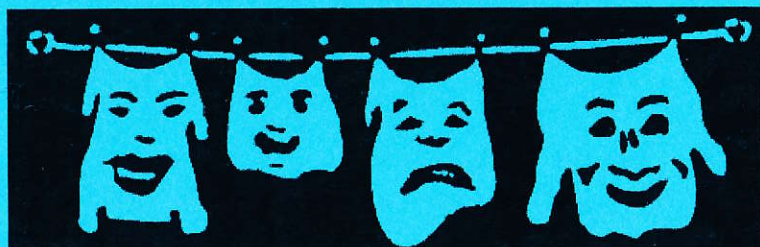
- REPOhistory, from www.repohistory.org

"My reducing club is a great success. We've lost 148 pounds. However, none of it was mine personally."

- one matronly lady to another, from Reader's Digest

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