

Physical theatre is emerging as a vibrant and increasingly popular form. Theatre practitioners such as Frantic Assembly, DV8, Ridiculusmus and Theatre de Complicité have been evolving new approaches to theatre-making which are rooted in working through the body. This new approach is beginning to impact on mainstream theatre and on the way Performing Arts are taught and studied at Sixth Form, Drama School and University.

In **Through the Body**, based on twelve years of teaching physical theatre, Dymphna Callery introduces the reader to the principles behind the work of certain key 20th-century theatre practitioners (Artaud, Grotowski, Meyerhold, Brook and Lecoq, among others) and offers exercises by which their theories can be turned into practice and their principles explored in action.

The book takes the form of a series of workshops starting with the preparation of the body through Awareness, Articulation, Energy and Neutrality. A section on Mask-work is followed by further work on the body, investigating Presence, Complicité, Play, Audience, Rhythm, Sound and E-motion. The book - and the work - culminates in sections on Devising and on the Physical Text. There is also a thorough bibliography and a contact list of training courses in the UK and abroad.

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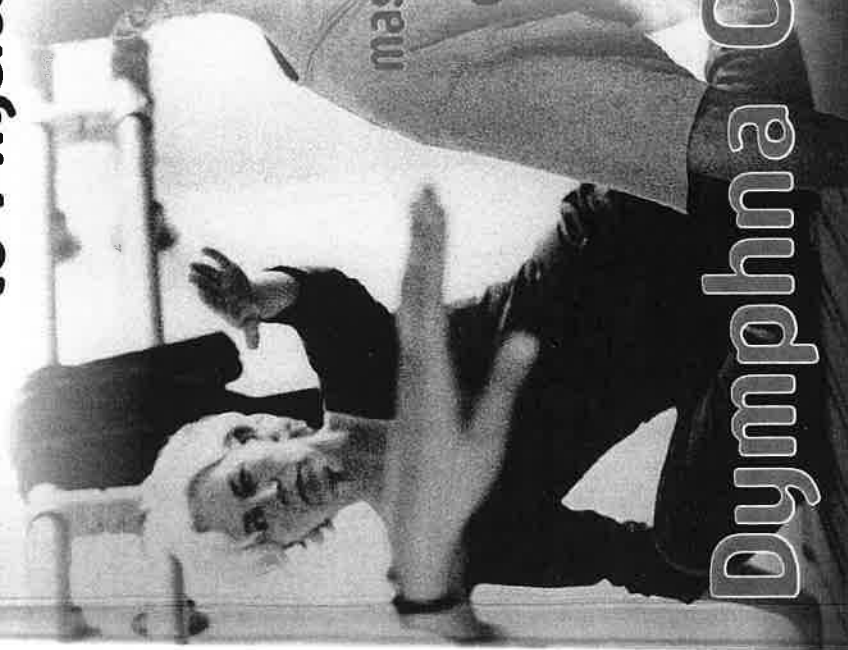
DRAMA

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# Through the Body

## A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre

Exploration  
and exercises  
in devising,  
mask-work, play,  
complicité and  
total theatre



## Dymphna Callery

## Through the Body

Dymphna Callery



## COMPLICITÉ

*It is through collaboration that this knockabout art of theatre survives and kicks.*<sup>140</sup>

The word complicité has crossed the channel via Jacques Lecoq and his one-time colleague Philippe Gaulier. The word has a deeper resonance than the English word 'ensemble', and for Theatre de Complicité the fact that it also means a shared belief between actor and spectator is of crucial importance.<sup>141</sup> Both Lecoq and Gaulier also use the phrase 'le jeu', or play. It is the essence of their work, the foundation of all their training.

There are two types of complicité: complicité between those performing on stage, and complicité between the performers on stage and the spectators.<sup>142</sup> The latter is investigated in detail in the final part of this section: audience. First we explore the concept of complicité between performers.

At its most fundamental level, acting is a living exchange between actors. Complicité amongst performers is the crux of ensemble practice, a shared belief which depends upon intense awareness and mutual understanding and produces on-stage rapport. Being fully open to other actors is not simply a matter of creating pleasant working relationships. You must be able to work as an ensemble to tell the story moment by moment.

Building true theatrical complicité needs more than playing team games, however enjoyable. Eye contact is a crucial ingredient, so is a heightened sensory awareness of others in the space. The series of exercises below is designed to foster group awareness and cultivate a collective sense of rhythm and timing, promoting an *open relationship* between players. They are followed by a further series of games and workshop exercises designed to develop a sense of play between participants. In the section on 'audience' we move on to establish a sound grasp of the potential in the current of exchange between stage and spectator, and the confidence to exploit that potential.

Firstly, players need to learn to respond to each other spontaneously, without verbalising. These games offer ways of achieving mutual understanding through mute means to develop collaborative somatic creativity. They also develop democratic working practice.

**Ball in the air**

Use a soft ball for this game, about football size. Players spread out around the room and hand-volley the ball to each other whilst counting out loud how many volleys before the ball crash lands. The idea is to break each successive record of volleys – and yesterday's record.

Try to avoid making a circle. The idea is to use the whole space. Twelve is more than enough for each group. Higher scores can be reached if you get underneath the ball (as in the stick balancing work) and tap the ball softly.

This is a good game to repeat at the start of a series of workshops or rehearsals, as groups enjoy beating their previous record.

**Lifting the glass**

Players stand in a circle, with equal spaces between them. They imagine a large circular plate of glass on the floor. They work together to lift the glass off the ground. Then they are asked to move it to a new position and replace it gently on the ground, without any potential breakage! The exercise takes place in silence. Only eye contact between players operates as communication.

This is a useful 'test' exercise. If you play this after a period of developing work on complicité, improvement in executing it can be tangible.

**Stop and go**

This is a group awareness and concentration exercise which enhances the use of peripheral vision, and builds a satisfying sense of unity. Once again, the action takes place in silence. The enjoyment comes from the sense of finding mutual agreement: no individual takes responsibility for leading but a silent consensus emerges. The assumption here is that the group know each other's names.

**Step 1**

Walk around the space at your own natural pace. Criss-cross the space, being careful not to bump into others. Notice the variety of pace amongst the group.

## Step 2

As you pass each other, acknowledge your partners by eye contact and perhaps offer a smile. Keep on weaving around the whole space without clustering.

## Step 3

Gradually moderate your pace to agree with the mean of the whole group, so you are all walking at the same speed.

## Step 4

Leader calls: 'Freeze! Close your eyes! Point to Susan' and the group follow each instruction. Then they are asked to open their eyes and discover how accurate they are in pointing to the named individual.

Repeat this stage a number of times with different names and notice how the level of accuracy starts to increase.

## Step 5

Continue walking around the space as before. When the Leader calls 'STOP' the whole group gradually slows and comes to a halt together. Try this several times until the group begins to slow in unison and comes to a halt at the same time.

## Step 6

From everyone in the still position, the Leader asks for a group decision to start, and everyone begins walking again. The call is the prompt for the group decision, which is arrived at via mute consensus, so it may take some time before the 'moment' to move arrives. Be patient. If an individual 'leads', point this out and begin again from stillness. Groups will eventually learn to sense the moment, but it requires commitment and repetition.

Practise these two stages several times until the group can slow to a halt and restart in unison.

There is no communication between players other than eye contact. Eventually, the group will become more harmonised in slowing, stopping and starting, and more accurate in pointing.

This game lays the foundation for the next one, which is a sort of imaginative 'follow-my-leader' in which leadership is constantly changing. The word kaleidoscope means 'beautiful form' in Greek, and players will find as the game develops they are making patterns similar to those seen through a child's toy kaleidoscope.

**Kaleidoscope**<sup>143</sup>

This game can be played with 12-24 players, providing the space is large enough to take two parallel lines of equal numbers. Players create geometric shapes in the space between these two lines. The game operates in silence.

These are the rules of the game:

- an individual's decision to enter the space is an invitation to others
- never refuse an invitation
- group decisions govern what happens
- group decisions govern the moment of leaving the space

Other useful instructions are: always know which group you are in, always work as a group, and be aware of the whole space.

## Step 1

Stand in two equal parallel lines opposite each other and using the convention of a 'group decision to move' established in the previous exercise, 'Stop and Go', attempt the following:

- Whole group re-form into a circle
- Whole group re-form into a square
- Whole group re-form into a triangle
- Whole group return to two parallel lines

## Step 2

- Any player can move into the space: Person X;
- Another player positions themselves in relation to X with the idea of creating a circle or square or triangle;

- A third person joins them and takes a position with the idea of continuing the creation of the shape;
- One by one, more players enter the space with the idea of continuing/completing it;
- When the shape appears complete, the group take a decision to leave and melt back into the parallel lines.
- The game then starts over as another individual enters the space.

*Always allow a point of stillness as each new person positions themselves. Never allow the space to remain empty.*

*You'll find you cannot predetermine what the shape will eventually be early in the game. The second or third person may, for example, find that whoever follows them is 'seeing' a different shape to the one they had in their head.*

#### Step 3

*Once the basic rules are understood and the group can realise clear shapes, more complex developments can be brought in, such as making two shapes/patterns, experimenting with the size of each shape and the levels of the bodies within it. These make the patterns more interesting, and players soon begin to take pleasure in becoming more inventive.*

#### Step 4

*Work develops through playing the game of making shapes and patterns in three-dimensional space, always bearing in mind the rules, and adding variants, such as when a pattern is established, one person can simply cross from one line to join the other. This can be further developed by varying the speed and types of movement used to cross the space.*

*Soon the space is filled with a variety of shapes and punctuated by people hopping, running, or snaking across the space, even through the shapes.*

#### Step 5

*Work continues to become more complex as players exploit the possibilities of creating more abstract shapes, or images related to a theme. As ideas and sequences emerge they can be used as the basis for constructing improvised performance.*

The concept of a group-decision-to-move established through playing this game and the awareness generated in responding to others, develop a common vocabulary which can be applied in choric work. It provides a useful foundation for the orchestration of crowd scenes, for example. In more advanced choral work, where there can be a tendency for the majority to fall into passive mode and move and/or speak just behind the beat and/or leader, it promotes the idea that everyone has an equal responsibility to take the initiative. So they can 'find' the moment to move and/or speak together. When this happens it's as though any sense of leadership or repetition vanishes and a collective sense of being 'in the moment' is reached.

If those on stage are not aware of each other it can look as though two or more different stories are being told, whether in improvisation or in text work. There is only one story being told, so actors need to be in tune with each other and tell the same story to the audience.

#### Frogs in a pool

This is an energetic way of finding complicité in smaller groups of, say, four upwards. Each group defines their 'pool'. One player is the stone, the others are frogs. The 'stone' jumps and the frogs jump in relation to the ripple created by the strength of the jump and the distance they are from the stone. If, for example, you are standing close to the 'stone' and the 'stone' jumps high, you need to respond very quickly and move a distance away. The further from the stone, the later and more subdued your response. Where frogs jump is determined by the strength and trajectory of each of the 'stone's' jumps. Eventually, you find the frogs have moved to the perimeter of their pool.

A development of this game which gets rid of the idea of a leader is to dispense with the stone. All players become frogs, and any frog can jump at any moment. The others must jump according to where they are in relation to the most recently jumping frog. This can get quite hectic. Make sure you wait until all the frogs have finished one response before beginning another to start with. When players have exhausted themselves, they find that moments of stillness between bouts of jumping make the game more effective.

The notion of keeping something going as a group whilst varying the rhythm and pace is integral to collaborative ensemble work. The following game was played extensively by Theatre de Complicité during rehearsals for *Street of Crocodiles*.<sup>144</sup> It is a challenging exercise in complicité.

### Shoal of fish

*This is a deceptively simple exercise. A group of players move around the room in the same way as a shoal of fish. Feet should travel over the floor with minimal sound. Shifts in pace should occur in much the same way as underwater. Leader(s) change with each turn. And occasionally fish dart off at a quicker rate and in a new direction, or lag behind the general formation. Individuals have to be aware of their relationship to the whole shoal and respond to every other person's movements in addition to suggesting a single fish.*

### PLAY

*Play: to occupy oneself in, amuse oneself in a game.*<sup>145</sup>

Play, of course, deepens complicité as much as it relies on it. Companies such as Theatre de Complicité and Peter Brook's troupe (and in the 1950s Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, in the 1920s and '30s Copeau's Les Copiaux) who play together in their training and rehearsals are renowned for the high calibre of their ensemble skills as well as the quality of their acting.

Clive Barker frequently refers to the way in which Theatre Workshop worked like a jazz ensemble, able to 'read' each other through the improvisational avenues laid down during Littlewood's rehearsal process. The analogy is a useful one. Anyone who has ever played in a musical band knows that improvisation can be 'free' in the sense of a 'jam session', and structured when it fits into an overall schema. Theatre is similar. You can simply 'play', or use improvisation in a more structured way.

Improvisation and play are often conflated, yet there is a distinction to be drawn between them semantically: although 'improvise' can be equated with 'play' in terms of definition, play has a much more expansive range of meanings. The aim of improvisation is to 'make something up'; improvise-

ation uses play to achieve an unforeseen result, whether to create something or explore parallel situations in relation to a text. Play is a much looser concept, just like a jam session. And just as a jam session is never completely anarchic because individuals observe the 'rules' of musical keys and rhythms, so in play rules apply, sometimes in relation to games, sometimes in relation to structures.

You can play with space (as suggested earlier in CONTROLLING THE SPACE), with objects, with energy, with each other, without necessarily creating any tangible product. And the exercises below suggest ways of doing so. Play is about process. It also has delightful connotations with childhood. And this is integral to the way the word is used by practitioners. To be childlike, in the sense of being perpetually open to discovery, is the aim of play.

Jacques Copeau was the first practitioner to introduce the notion of play to theatre.<sup>146</sup> Copeau searched for a broader, freer, more audacious dramatic imagination. His genius was the rediscovery of the art of play: 'In a practical way, the teaching of dramatic feeling in the actor-pupil is conceived by analogy to the child's instinct for play.'<sup>147</sup>

Observing his own children at play alerted Copeau to the powerful freedom of the child's imagination. His co-director, Suzanne Bing, had been teaching in a Montessori school in New York during the First World War and returned to France armed with a host of games.

Much of Copeau's play was allied to mask work. And Jean Dasté writes that through 'daily exercises with masks . . . Copeau wanted us to return to the spontaneity and talent for inventiveness and disguise that children have'.<sup>148</sup>

Mask work travelled from Copeau through Dasté to Lecoq, as previously noted. Copeau's legacy also resides in the countless games and their derivatives which formed the core of his and Bing's work at the Vieux Columbier School.<sup>149</sup> Through the dissemination of these games via his nephew Michel Saint-Denis (The London Studio and The Old Vic School in Britain), and son-in-law Jean Dasté (Comédie de St Etienne in France) and from him to Lecoq, the concept of learning to act through play has fed into drama training.

Children playing are utterly absorbed and focused in what they do and the world they create. They have a quality of naiveté. Watching five-year-olds, one observes how serious the process of play is, how 'sans attitude'. To play we do not have to pretend to be five-year-olds, rather we have to

find the child within us. Joan Littlewood's masterly use of games to feed the rehearsal process led her actors to 'the kind of concentration . . . that you had as a child, making something out of plasticine'.<sup>150</sup>

The *ad hoc* introduction of any old game, however, will not automatically guarantee such naiveté or high quality ensemble work. The key is in finding or creating games and exercises which have a direct relationship with the text or theme being explored, or a tangible impact upon principles of acting and theatre praxis. The game SHOAL OF FISH, for example, fosters complicité because individuals have to respond to each other and cooperate whilst also, at times, following an internal impulse. And BALL IN THE AIR can be seen as a metaphor for sustaining energy in performance and keeping the story alive. Neither of these games is competitive. The atmosphere generated by competitive games is very different to that of cooperative games, and it is worth giving this some thought when deciding which games you use. An alternative is to re-invent familiar games to serve your purpose.

Playing games remembered from childhood is an obvious route to rediscovering the child within, something Littlewood realised. Her rehearsals for *Macbeth*, for example, began with the actors playing cowboys and indians and moved on to a large-scale improvised battle before the text was introduced. Grandmother's Footsteps is a good example of a game we remember and love to (re)play. It's also a wonderful game for practising balances and lightness in footwork. The following versions are more complex re-inventions.

### Grandmother's footsteps plus a jumper

*The same rules apply as for the original game. However, a baggy jumper, or jacket, is deposited a few metres behind 'Grandma'. (The jumper needs to be roomy to make it easy to get on or off). The objective of the game is not merely to reach Grandma without her seeing you move, but to don the jumper too before you get to her. If Grandma sees you move whilst you're wearing the jumper, you not only go back to the beginning again, but replace the jumper on the floor. But you can be partially dressed in the jumper and remain in the game provided that you are not moving when Grandma turns round.*

*There are two further developments you can play. Players can compete for the jumper even when someone is wearing it. Or players can work together*

*to get the jumper on one player and 'protect' this player until s/he reaches Grandma.*

*In yet another version players work in pairs, so if Grandma spots one of them moving, both have to return to base. You can play this with or without the jumper.*

Simon McBurney talks of how, in the early days of Theatre de Com-plicité, they would 'construct a playground in the rehearsal room, and then out of the playground things would start to emerge'.<sup>151</sup> At that stage the company were producing work that was closer to the comedy circuit than mainstream theatre. Yet they still use the idea of the rehearsal room as a playground, sometimes incorporating costumes and props which the actors raid like a dressing-up box, whether they are interpreting texts or devising their own material.

Brook not only uses play as a starting point, as a basis for personal growth and self-development in his actors, but his company also regularly show their work-in-progress to an audience of children. After a show based on *The Bee Man of Orm* by Frank Stockton, nearly a hundred children joined in a free improvisation using all the props, sticks, balloons and ropes used in the play, and for two hours: 'there was a free releasing of energy, kids doing the most incredible things together. They used the sticks to invent games, create corridors and gates, become animals, make up instruments or relationships or rhythmical exercises. It went beyond anyone's imagination'.<sup>152</sup>

One of the things that emerges from this is the way children use objects to create worlds. Play is very much about creating worlds, whether individually or collaboratively. We have all built dens in the garden or the living room from blankets, or used sticks as weapons. Objects act as catalysts in the world of play. Playing with objects in a 'silent universe' is a fruitful avenue to explore. Without words we are often less inhibited, more able to enter into imaginative realms. Some companies (eg Kaos Theatre, Bouge-de-la) use background music; as long as it is non-invasive this can work.

I mentioned earlier the usefulness of having a collection of objects such as sticks, plastic bottles, and boxes, balls of string, ropes etc. For the next exercise, you can use broom handles but more preferable, if you can get them, are cardboard tubes from carpet or lino rolls or plastic piping of the type used by builders for drainage (5cm diameter), cut to size (2-3 metres

lengths). These are less harmful than broom handles if you accidentally hit someone. They also have the virtue of being playable as musical instruments à la Rolf Harris. Ask at your local DIY store!

### Tube sculptures<sup>153</sup>

*First of all, conduct a thorough investigation of your tube. Feel its weight, what you can do with it, roll it, swing it, jump over it etc. Find a multitude of things to do with it. The possibilities are legion!*

*Then, with a partner, explore what you can do with your tubes – throw and catch, roll, create shapes, etc. Let the weight of the tube or stick lead the movement, and keep the space animated.*

*After a period of exploration, select several actions that please you both and construct these units into a sequence. Work in silence until you need to choose your favourite actions. The sequences you create can be shown to the rest of the group.*

*Follow on with groups of four or five playing with the tubes, finding rhythms, noises, shapes that please, again the possibilities are endless. And eventually create a sequence to show the other groups.*

*There is no need to make anything 'literal' or realistic with the tubes. It's the pleasure in playing with them that is important. Abstract sculptures are often far more satisfying to create.*

### Jumble play<sup>154</sup>

*A simple movement can transform a banal object into something else. Animating objects such as you might find in a props cupboard or old jumble wardrobe items – even sheets of newspaper – can be huge fun. You need a large collection. And the more odd the assortment, the more surreal the play. Things such as corrugated ventilation tubes, suitcases, fur coats, feather dusters, a music stand, various handbags, and a sandcastle bucket featured in the Bouge-de-la workshop where I learnt this game, for example.*

### Step 1

*To begin with, let the actors find an object to play with. Or rather, invite them to let the object 'choose' them, so whatever seems to draw their attention is what they end up with.*

*Each actor takes his/her object and, as with the tubes, conducts a thorough investigation of it, weight, smell, feel etc. What does it do? Does it open? Can I get in it? Will it sit on my head? And so on. Weight is important when you come to move with it. If you let the weight of the object lead the movement, you find more imaginative possibilities open up.*

*You may, as with the tubes, ask each actor to develop a sequence of movements with the object which they show. This is useful with more advanced actors who aim to improvise on stage, as it replicates spontaneous playing in front of an audience. It also gives other members of the group a chance to see what possibilities there are in the objects they did not choose first time around.*

### Step 2

*The next thing to do is let actors play with the objects. If you invite everyone to join in together you are likely to create chaos. Just as games have rules, make up your own to regulate the anarchy. Setting the objects on either side of the space, and the actors as spectators in front, for example, is helpful. Then actors can enter the space one at a time, or in response to what's already happening.*

*Musical accompaniment works well in this instance; working in silence here can be unproductive, although the 'silent universe' still applies for the actors. Vary the sounds, so actors don't get locked into particular 'moods', for it is virtually impossible for the music not to affect what happens. Moving from techno to Oasis to opera and on to jazz followed by Mozart might seem an odd combination, but such variations provide contrasts which surprise the actors. Playing music they are unfamiliar with is a useful strategy.*

*You need to allow plenty of time for this. It is useful to preface it with the previous tube game, and the two together can take up a whole morning with ease.*

I never tire of watching this game. Every individual will play with the objects in a different way. And this brings to light another aspect of play, that there is enormous pleasure to be gained from watching others play, and an enormous amount to be learnt about how theatre works.

True play comes from actors who see, hear, and react fully to each other. It is found in the partnership and chemistry between actors. The following games explore and harness this.

### **No-ball tennis** <sup>155</sup>

*This game operates like a game of tennis or ping-pong: impulses are tossed back and forth between two players. Like 'Frogs in a Pool' it's essentially a game which relies on reaction.*

*X and Y walk towards each other across the space. X pauses and Y reacts, then Y pauses and X reacts and so on, reaction and pause following alternately for up to a minute. There is no dialogue. Reactions are purely physical and should be a spontaneous response to the other person. There are no limits set on what these might be.*

*Each reaction can be any length but must have a clear beginning and end, like a phrase of movement on a tennis court. Just as in tennis, you can move closer to your partner or further away depending on how the moment takes you. The crucial thing is not to think about your response. The pause comes after you move, not before. Make sure this is happening. A pause before reacting means you're thinking. Don't think. Simply move, pause and watch your partner's response.*

To some extent this is an exercise in clarity and definition. More importantly it is about the chemistry between actors, the 'alive-ness' of the moment. It is pure play.

The alchemy between different partners is evident when you play with new partners, as a different chemistry will operate. It affects your instincts, so you have to play 'off' the other person. In purely physical terms, someone slighter or faster or bigger than you forces you to change tactics. And then every person will have their own way of playing. Personalities shine through. Sometimes the way two people play, as in life, is 'more than the sum of two parts'.

You need to be open to playing with everyone in a group. The more you react to different partners the more you find out about yourself, and move into new territories. Play the following game with different partners and it will be different each time.

### **Cane dancing** <sup>156</sup>

*Use long bamboo canes (2 metres) for this. Lay one cane between two players. They should stand a couple of metres away from the cane and make eye contact, then walk towards it. Keeping eye contact, they pick up the cane at the same moment using only the tip of the middle (longest) finger. It is now balanced precariously between them. As they move around, the cane remains supported between them until one of them drops their end.*

*You can play this as a competitive game where the aim is to make your opponent drop the cane by forcing them into awkward positions. The 'dance' will be over quite quickly.*

*If you aim to keep the cane between you for as long as possible whilst still aiming to make your partner drop their end, the 'dance' becomes more intricate as you both try and find more subtle ways of outwitting each other. In soccer terminology, you are playing the ball not the man.*

Both these games explore the chemistry between different partners, which to some extent will depend on the kind of energy each possesses. But establishing and sustaining the level of energy on stage is a collective responsibility. In both improvisation and text work, it is essential for actors to be able to assess and alter the levels of energy operating between two or more partners. This means working out what energy level others are playing at and learning to sustain the same level, as well as learning how to increase and decrease the level of tension.

The following exercise is play with a purpose, play designed to develop skills in modulating energy levels. It works on escalations of energy, moving up and down through the 'gears' of tension. In top gear we all know that as everything goes faster it becomes more difficult to control. The sequence here establishes an understanding of controlling tension in relation to partners on stage through physical play.

You may find it useful to reprise the STOP AND GO walking exercise described previously in COMPLICITÉ. Play this up until Step 3, but find a mean level of energy – which is different to pace. It is about the physical intensity with which you walk, not the speed. You might find as you go up the scale you still tend to go faster. So try to increase tension in the body. This might exaggerate the walk or action rather than speed it up.

### Changing gears

#### Step 1

*This builds on the game 'No-Ball Tennis'. Distribute letters X, Y, Z etc. so everyone knows their turn. X comes onstage and establishes a physical level of energy. Make the choice of energy clear: low or high, desperate or elated. Y enters with a new level of energy. X responds and they play at the new level for half a minute, then X goes. Y sustains the new energy level alone. Z enters with a new and different level of energy. Y responds and so on.*

*By all means use an imaginative situation to work on, but a simple body gesture with no context will work just as well. For example, if you jump up and down we don't need to know you've just passed your driving test. You're working in a 'silent universe' so it's the level of energy that's important. And whilst two players jumping up and down might work in the short term, it is more interesting if you find a different action at the same level of energy as your partner's.*

*Remember to leave the energy on stage when you exit. In other words you keep it until you're out of view, rather like a corps de ballet.*

#### Step 2

*Introduce the idea of a scale from 1-10. Establish a norm of 5, and variations in degree above and below. 10, for example, should be frenetic; 1 is fairly subdued.*

*Then run the previous Step 1 again but this time X starts at 1, Y enters at 2, Z comes on at 3 and no-one leaves. In other words, once the newcomer establishes the next level, all those on stage play at the new level until everyone is playing at 10.*

*These scales of tension demand that each person has to fit in with what's already established and modify their actions incrementally. And the more people on stage the more the degree of subtlety required.*

We noted earlier that commedia operates at the scale of 10 and beyond, and it may be that you find this level promotes a grotesque style suitable for comedy. But remember too, that tension sometimes provokes slowness and silence rather than excessive noise and movement. Play the level of energy/tension, not a situation.

In all of these suggestions for play, with objects, with partners, with energy, it is the actor's body which expresses what is going on imaginatively. And ultimately, this is the medium through which the spectator will connect with the world on stage. Simon McBurney reports that after *Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol*, 'the excitement generated amongst the audience . . . was close to that of children'.<sup>157</sup> Inviting an audience into an imaginative collusion with what is happening on stage is the objective of the physical actor.

### AUDIENCE

*The art of theatre is to be able to communicate with the audience.*<sup>158</sup>

Theatre is a transaction between actor and spectator. It operates through a reciprocal current of exchange, which Joan Littlewood calls a 'continuous loop'. And the true magic of theatre lies in this alchemy between actor and audience sharing the same air. 'When you act well,' wrote Meyerhold, 'the audience breathes along with you'.<sup>159</sup>

Enabling a truly open relationship to work takes a particular kind of energy and sensitivity. Actors cannot put up defences. A defensive attitude towards the audience, as though they have come to judge or, worse, assess any particular actor's performance, is counter-productive. Similarly, an attitude of 'selling' the show by using a kind of 'kick' energy will alienate rather than engage spectators.

The goal is a real exchange, a sharing in the event. The actor's task is to provoke the spectators' imaginative participation, not to show what s/he can do: 'The actor is like the driver of the car that transports the audience somewhere else, somewhere extraordinary'.<sup>160</sup>

## A Nick Hern Book

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