

## **7 The participants touch each other**

The actors touch with hands and feet, while moving around the room, no one ever remaining completely separate from the rest. The Joker says 'Stop' and at that point everyone stops on the spot, but each person should be able to touch other people with both hands and at least one leg, without anyone being left isolated in a corner of the room. The result is like a spider's web.

## **IV SEEING WHAT WE LOOK AT**

There are three preliminary series of exercises which help us see what we are looking at – the mirrors sequence, the sculpture or modelling sequence, and the puppet sequence. The exercises develop the capacity for observation by means of 'visual dialogues' between participants; obviously the simultaneous use of spoken language is excluded. In Image Theatre the use of words would interfere with the language of images or superimpose itself on top of that language. Symbolic gestures, such as those used to signify 'OK' or 'yes' or 'no', should be avoided, as should any sign corresponding exactly to the word(s) it replaces.

Sometimes people find the silence required for these exercises difficult – however, the more the participants concentrate, the more they discover the fascination of this work, and the richer the dialogues become.

The exercises can be done in isolation, each having its own specific function and application. Nevertheless, when they are done in sequence and without interruption, the participants are stimulated not only by each exercise in itself, but also by the transition from one exercise to another; this transition sometimes bears more interesting fruit than the exercises it links together. This is particularly the case in the three 'exchanges' of exercise 8 in the mirrors sequence (p. 133).

### **The mirrors sequence**

Each element of this sequence can last one, two, three minutes, or even longer – it all depends on the degree of participation by the group and what the objectives of the work are. The important thing about the work is that it be as meticulous, detailed, exact, and rich in discoveries, as possible.

## 1 The plain mirror

Two lines of participants, each person looking directly into the eyes of the person facing them. Those in line A are the 'subjects', the people; those in line B, are the 'images'. The exercise begins. Each subject undertakes a series of movements and changes of expression, which his 'image' must copy, right down to the smallest detail.

The 'subject' should not be the enemy of his 'image' – the exercise is not a competition, nor is the idea to make sharp movements which are impossible to follow; on the contrary, the idea is to seek a perfect synchronisation of movement, so that the 'image' may reproduce the 'subject's' gestures as exactly as possible. The degree of accuracy and synchronisation should be such that an outside observer would not be able to tell who was leading and who was following. All movements should be slow (so the 'image' may be able to reproduce and even anticipate them) and each movement should follow on naturally from the last. It is equally important that the participants be attentive to the smallest detail, whether of bodily or facial expression.

## 2 Subject and image swap roles

After a few minutes, the Joker announces that the two lines are going to swap roles. He gives the signal, and at that precise moment the 'subjects' become the 'images' and vice versa. This changeover should be carried out without affecting the continuity or the precision. Ideally the movement which was happening at the moment of changeover should be continued and completed, without any sense of breakdown or hiccup. Here again, the outside observer should not be able to perceive the change of roles, and this invisibility of changeover can be achieved if the synchronisation and imitation of actions are perfect.

## 3 Subject–image, image–subject

A few minutes later, the Joker announces that when he gives the signal, the participants in both lines are to be simultaneously 'image' and 'subject'. From that point on, each partner has the right to do any movement he wants, together with the duty to reproduce movements made by his partner. And this must be done without either partner tyrannising the other. It is absolutely vital that each feels completely *free* in his movements, but at the same time *in*

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*sympathy*<sup>26</sup> with his partner, so that the partner's movements are followed as faithfully as possible. These qualities of *freedom* and *sympathy* are essential. In the whole of this sequence, the aim is not to make movements which are difficult or impossible to imitate; going fast does no good, quite the reverse. The key to the exercise lies in synchronisation and fidelity of reproduction.

Up to this point, communication remains exclusively visual, and everyone's attention should be *concentrated* on their partner – first on the eyes, then taking in the whole body, in concentric circles. It is not advisable to watch hands or feet; in the act of looking into someone's eyes and following the movements of their body, hands and feet will enter naturally into the field of vision.

#### 4 Everyone joins hands

Once again the Joker gives first a warning, and then the signal for everyone to join hands with their left- and right-hand neighbours. The two lines are still facing each other, each person fixing their gaze on their partner. But in this stage a new element comes into play; if, thus far, communication has been exclusively *visual*, now it becomes *physical* as well. Each partner receives visual stimuli from their facing partner and physical stimuli from colleagues on their left and right. Suppose one of the participants does a movement which is accepted by his own neighbours to the left and right, but which cannot be followed by his opposite number because *his* neighbours are physically stopping him from echoing the movement; in that case, the originator of the movement must go back a step as quickly as possible, so as not to break the synchronisation and the perfection of the imitation. If movements are slow and continuous, the process of visual and physical 'consultation' which enables the two lines to be identical will not be interrupted. One person will always be the image of the other, and within this image, each actor will retain his own freedom of movement together with his responsibility to imitate the opposite number's movements (within the limits of his physical capability).

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<sup>26</sup> The French word used in the original, '*solidaire*', combines the senses of solidarity and sympathetic action. A.J.

## 5 The two lines form a curve

The Joker takes the person at the head of one of the lines round the space, in such a way as to make the line into a U-shape. The other line will form a matching curve opposite.

There is still a *single, long mirror* between the two lines. When the participants move away from the imaginary mirror, in the process of making the curve, those facing them must also move away. And when they approach the mirror, the same mechanism applies. The worst thing that can happen is for an actor to bump into the actor opposite on the way in to the mirror – the conceptual space must be respected. (It's a mirror – people don't usually walk into mirrors!) The participants must keep up their eye-to-eye scrutiny.

The fact of forming a curve adds a new and essential element to this progression for the participants. Having passed through the stages of direct, individual, visual communication, followed by visual and physical communication (with opposite number and neighbours respectively), now the actors become aware that each line forms a group; in other words, the actors bring into play the whole space of the exercise, though their scope for invention is still limited and defined by physical contact.

## 6 Symmetrical groups

The Joker gives a signal for the players to release each other's hands, without letting this break the continuity of the exercise. Now free of physical contact but aware of the whole space, and all the while having regard for the imaginary mirror bisecting the room, the participants try to form a collective, symmetrical image with the other people in their group. Sometimes all the members of one group develop a single image reproduced by the facing group. (Remember, the two groups are simultaneously *subject* and *image*; just as no tyranny was exercised on an individual level by one person over another, so a group must act with the same freedom and sympathy towards the group opposite.) Sometimes each group divides into subgroups; it is important that they do not then further fragment into separate individuals – at least two or three, if not all of the members of the group, must be involved in the mutual reproduction, always with great attention to detail and careful synchronisation.

## 7 The mirror breaks

When the mirror breaks, we are again left with pairs of facing partners watching each other. They exactly reproduce each other's suggested movements, without either person tyrannising the other. But now each couple has their own little piece of the mirror. The large central mirror, which was dividing the room in two, has shattered into small pieces all over the room. Consequently, each couple can evolve as it pleases, moving closer to their bit of mirror, or backing away from it, or turning round, but always staying in the same relationship to each other. At this point, a redoubling of attention and concentration is required – an awareness both of one's partner and of the whole space, a space which is continually being modified by the evolution of each pair and their piece of mirror; a space no longer limited by the huge, long mirror, now for ever broken. The space becomes more dynamic. It requires a higher level of care and concentration. It is important that each pair moves and evolves using the whole of the room.

## 8 Changing partners

Three times the Joker gives the signal to change partners. On the signal, as quickly as possible, each person abandons his partner and tries to find someone else with whom he can establish the same mimetic relationship. Sometimes this person is quickly found, but sometimes it can take time. Whatever happens, the actor must continue moving at the same slow pace, without interrupting his rhythm, without interrupting the movements he was doing with his previous partner till he finds another. At the first signal, each person must choose one of his neighbours. At the second changeover, a more distant partner must be sought, and at the third, someone who is as far away as possible. It is important that the continuity is not broken, that an actor doesn't (for instance) suddenly cross his arms while looking for someone else who is partnerless. His own movement is the force attracting his future partner.

During this part of the sequence, it often happens that two partners choose the same person and believe for some minutes that they have established contact with that person. However, if they had both kept their eyes on the chosen colleague, if all their attention had been channelled into that eye contact (even though the whole room might have been within their field of vision), they would have been able to tell straight away whether or not their contact was being reciprocated.

Each time a new partnership forms, a fertile dialogue must be established between the two players, each 'observing' the other's gestures, sensing the

difference between this person's movements and the previous person's. The idea is not to move rapidly from one thing to another, but to conduct a dialogue on a visual and a physical level, to get to 'know' the other person.

### 9 The distorting mirror

The Joker should always forewarn the group before giving any signal to move the sequence on to its next stage. In this case when the signal is given, the relationship between the two partners changes completely. Up till now all movements, facial expressions and gestures have been reproduced in an identical, mimetic fashion; now there is commentary, response. Each person is allowed to do whatever feels right, and at each new stimulus, their partner answers, comments, enlarges, reduces, caricatures, ridicules, destroys, relativises – in sum, produces an image responding to the received image, but in a contrapuntal relationship to it.

There should be no sense of adjustment between the image (gesture, movement, expression) and its response; on the contrary, they should be simultaneous, or virtually so, and continuous. The idea is not to do something and wait for the other person to repeat it, and then respond to that while he waits; there should be a continual dispatch and reception of visual messages answering each other, distorting each other. Of course, absolute simultaneity is impossible, but any period of waiting (and loss of concentration) should be avoided.

### 10 The narcissistic mirror

After distortion, criticism, corrosive commentary, the attempt to destroy the partner's mask, caricature, now the mirror becomes narcissistic. And this is perhaps one of the most wonderful moments in the whole sequence. Here, each participant looks at himself in the mirror and sees himself beautiful. However, the image he sees is his partner. Each person must try to display, as precisely as possible, all the signs of pleasure we give out, all the joy we experience, when we feel happy deep down, when we are glad to be what we are. I feel happy, I make a gesture of happiness, and I look at myself in the mirror; but what I see is my own image in the body of another. At the same time, this other looks at himself in me; in me, he sees himself happy, he sees himself contented. And it is I, with my gestures and my movements, who must offer him this happiness, this satisfaction.

A Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa,<sup>27</sup> wrote these wonderful lines:

One never loves another,  
 One loves what there is of oneself in them  
 Or what one thinks there is.

That is partly the idea of these exercises: we seek ourselves in others, who seek themselves in us.

### 11 The rhythmic mirror

Gently, in this loving search for oneself in the other, the dialogue becomes one, changes into monologue – both participants seek movements which have rhythmic affinities. Both must find rhythms and movements of the body which both find pleasing, movements which can now be slow or fast, gentle or vigorous, simple or complex, staccato or glissando. The most important things are (1) that both partners feel good, at ease and happy in the execution of the movements; (2) that these movements are rhythmical and identical; and (3) that the whole body is involved in them.

### 12 Unification

Finally, the Joker gives the signal to attempt unification – ‘attempt’ meaning that there should be no obligation. Sometimes at the end of this sequence the whole room is totally synchronised, totally united in one rhythm, one movement. But equally it may be the case that the room is united in complementary rhythms and movements, which are different but harmonious. A third situation can also occur, in which the different groups do not become unified, and end up as several small groups and subgroups, continually returning to and re-creating their own particular rhythms and movements.

It is vital that this last stage be properly understood, without ambiguity: this is not a competition, it is not about imposing one’s own rhythm and movement on others – more than anything, it is about seduction. The aim is to undertake a rhythmic study of the participants, and to try to unify the group at least on a

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<sup>27</sup> Fernando Pessoa, 1888–1935, a man of many literary identities, the so-called ‘heteronyms’ under which he wrote poems and prose in several languages.

minimal basis. But this can prove impossible. This phase of the exercise brings out the violence, the volatility and aggression of each member of the group; it also reveals the degree of compatibility, of dialogue, the capacity for collaboration, within the group. The Joker must be careful not to force anyone, not to manipulate the group to bring it to unification at any cost. It is a matter of *analysing, studying* and *not imposing*. It is up to each individual to express themselves freely so that the results of this self- and group-study may be truthful.

A great variety of forms of visual communication appear in this long sequence, though all have a common base – *mimesis* (with the exception of the distorting mirror where *mimesis* is present but not dominant). Throughout the sequence people study their partners, in order to imitate them down to the smallest detail and as simultaneously as possible. In the sequence which follows, the modelling sequence, the dialogue takes a completely different form.

## The modelling sequence

If in the mirror the dialogue was mimetic, here it must be translated. The actor 'sees' what her colleague does, and translates the action or gesture she has seen, by changing her own position. She does not reproduce the gesture with her body, she extends it, she shows what results from the gesture. This becomes clearer as the sequence unfolds.

### 1 The sculptor touches the model

The participants arrange themselves in two lines facing each other. One of the lines is made up of sculptors, and the other of statues. At the beginning of the exercise, each sculptor starts using her hands to model the statue she has in mind. To this end, she touches the 'statue's' body, taking care to achieve the effects she is striving for, down to the smallest detail. The sculptors cannot use 'mirror' language, they cannot use their own bodies to show the image or expression they want to see reproduced; here neither *mimesis* nor reproduction comes into the equation, this is no longer a dialogue, this is modelling. Consequently, it is necessary to touch, to mould; each action on the part of the sculptor provokes a corresponding reaction, each *cause* produces a different *effect*. In the mirror dialogue both partners are always synchronised, carrying out the *same action*. In the 'modelling' dialogue, though synchronised, the partners' actions are complementary.