

# Ten days with Keith

Workshop in London of October 2018

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# INTRODUCTION

The [first part](#) of those notes is comprised of chapters depicting days by days what happened during the workshop.<sup>1</sup> Most of the times, I mention the exercises that we did, and Keith explanations about and around them. Keith also talks about a lot of things, that I tried to include too. This is not meant as an introductory book to Keith's methods, and I encourage you to pick up his first book. However, whether you know or not about his ideas, I believe you can find inside them a lot of interesting tidbits, either about details of Keith's methods regarding a particular exercise, or about acting in general, or more broadly, about life.

Though I mostly try in the first part to reproduce Keith's teaching, some remarks are my own. Exact quotations from Keith tend to be in italic, and things coming back often are in bold. Things already in the books are sometimes skipped, sometimes not. I try to capture the moments where Keith is acting as a good-natured teacher (but I probably missed most of them).

Even though it is difficult to render it inside those notes, it is worth noting that this workshop was not a dry and technical experience. This workshop was something truly alive, shared between many people from many horizons. It was a melting pot of 14 nationalities, with professional actors or directors, clowns, doctor es improvisation, but also random people driven by passion, coming from a jewelry, or computer science related corporations.

In the [second part](#), as a conclusion, I provide my current thoughts about all that and some more.

In some [Appendix](#), you will find a sample of some of the best quotes by Keith. Some may sound quite odd or make no sense at all. But believe me, some of them are just nuggets of wisdom. If you ever went to a workshop with Keith, you will probably hear him reading the sentences. I also provide some references, books and movies, recommended by Keith during the workshop, and some of my recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: those notes are my retranscription of what I believe happened during the workshop. They are in no way a faithful retranscription, and some citations or thoughts may have been distorted. Keith may not be held accountable for any thoughts or citations appearing in those notes, and I may have hallucinated the whole thing.



## Part I

### THE WORKSHOP





**Begin**

Fear and excitement. Going into the room after grabbing a name tag is a bit like going on stage I guess. Will, the organizer, starts to talk, and I can see through the door Keith appearing: he's got a cane, but does not rely too much on it. Nice beard! He looks his age and moves slowly. Once Will finishes with the boring stuff, Keith sits down and takes a long breath. He has thought about stopping to teach. He said he would five years ago, but hey, here he is. He started feeling like his mind was slipping. But then he realized, he just has to tell his students. If sometimes he gets sidetracked, we can put him back on course. Already, I get a feeling that I like his philosophy. Truthful, simple, and efficient. Evident.

**I want this to be a safe place. Do not do your best.** Those are his first words. If we try to do our best, we are already in the wrong mindset. We won't accept to fail easily. We won't accept to take risks easily. We won't be there.

**Exercise.** *A first player is on stage. A second player enters the scene and must have thought of who is the first player. Nobody is allowed to talk until the first player does say something. The first player can only speak once they have guessed who they are.*

**Idea**

At first, everybody only does basic things, my mum, my boss, a doctor. I am seeing other people do it, and I'm like okay, if I have to get up, what would be my idea. It is, of course, the moment where Keith tells us not to look ahead for ideas. We must get on the edge of the stage, try to let go of everything, like a **blank state** and wait two seconds. Now, god, the universe, your brain, whatever you like, it will provide you with an idea. And if it does not, yeah, don't freeze, just copy something that was done previously. We have nothing to lose by going up without an idea, or by accepting to drop our ideas. This is very difficult; for me, it might be the hardest thing to do. When I have an idea, I cling to it and refuse to let it go. It is probably because I am afraid that I won't have another one. And I am afraid to fail if I don't have another one. Why can't I just go up there, and accept to be judged by the others? More likely, they won't judge me. And if I get without an idea and it works, it might be good. Like really good. Nothing to lose and all to gain, yet my brains do not want to let it go.

The worst part is that, even if we start getting ideas, most often there is invisible censorship made by our brain which takes place. **We only think about ideas easy to do.** Why don't we see the first player as a pie, which would say "Please don't eat me". A talking chair. Winston Churchill. We

should not try to think of ideas that are easy to do, else we only do easy things and we go around in circles. Remark that most impro people do not improvise, but recycle a very basic set of classical ideas and scenes.

We have to try to accept our first idea, which may be triggered by anything. It might not even be necessary to look at the person. Just close your eyes for two seconds, and you got it. Then, once you have your idea, try to make it happen. It might be crazy hard to do but simply try. The worst that may happen is that the first player will guess incorrectly, and you just have to follow along with his guess.

Keith, while explaining that we just have to accept ideas coming to us, reaches out with his hands, and goes *Oh, a tit. I did not know there was one here before I caught it. It is quite a nice tit.* Here, I think that Keith is both trying to illustrate the fact that we just have to accept ideas, but he also picks something sexual to reduce our feeling of censorship. If the teacher can accept that his first idea is about tits, I may accept that my first idea is about them.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Blind actors***

*A terrible thing to have is blind actors.* There is this play, where some woman is on a couch. Suddenly, she hears some noise in the back, looks scared, the lights switch off, and we hear wrestling. The light comes back up, the woman is dead on the floor, we hear someone coming up, open the door, see the body, and scream. One day in the theater, the lights did not switch off as it was supposed to. Improvising on the spot, the actress armed herself with something, and went to check out the noise. Once she is at the edge of the scene and partially hidden, she makes it look like she is assaulted by strangling herself. Finally, the engineer wakes up and the lights go out. The lights come back up, the second actress opens the door and screams. However, there is no dead body on the scene. She stops screaming, jogs a bit around the scene, goes to a corner, and screams again.

This is the story of an actress who for many shows, has opened the door and screamed. Yet, she should not have opened the door to scream, she should have open it simply to see what was the noise about. The first actress was good, the second one, not so much.

You cannot be blind on stage. **You must be there.**

**Exercise (Hat game).** *Two people have hats. They practice in a friendly manner how to steal the hat of the other person as fast as they can, without hurting the other player. Then, they play a scene, and the one who can steal the hat of the other win. If you try to steal it but the other player avoids you or protects themselves by putting their hand on their hat, you lose. You only have one try.*

It is important to have the players practice stealing the hat beforehand, we don't want to hurt each other! You catch from the top, not the side. The hat game is nice to practice being there, as you can see instantly when somebody goes into another universe. The Hat game must not be played just to be funny.

<sup>1</sup> Something similar happening to a student of Keith in a Workshop is told by Theresa.

## **Status**

**Exercise.** *We are at a party, half of the people maintain eye contact for at least five seconds, and the other half wants to look in the eye but cannot stand it.*

I am quite uncomfortable talking with someone who is also maintaining eye contact. I was probably not high status at this instant. An important point is that the position of our muscles induces emotions and feelings. Smile if you want to feel happiness, frown if you want to feel anger.<sup>2</sup>

If we go a bit further than this first simplistic idea about smiling and frowning, the truth of the matter is that the state of our body influences both the state of our mind and the way we are perceived by other people. If your body claims that you are “weak”, both other peoples and yourself may start to consider that you indeed are. This is an important experience for improvisers, as this is something that you have to feel for yourself. Further, it pushes us to accept one of the truths of the world: interactions between entities have almost always a domination component.

## **Imagination and partners**

Imagination is like this big giant animal in your head, that you sometimes pat on the nose so that it stays calm. Picture a house on a hill, look through the window, what do you see? Your brain probably gave you many details that you are not even aware of. How was the sky? Was there anything else on the hill?

Make your partner happy. Being nice is not enough, you have got to keep your partner interested. Change your relationships, change him! *Lower your standards, don't do your best, copy people*

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<sup>2</sup> The book “Thinking fast and slow” expands quite a bit on this, and other cognitive bias). As mentioned in the reference section, a part of this book is however false.



## 2 | DAY 2

### ***Positive choices***

You should make positive choices, and most importantly, you should not make negative choices to protect yourself. Negative choices make you safe, probably because it reduces the opportunities and the possibilities. It reduces the unknown.

### ***Joining***

When you join a person (i.e. completely agree with their ideas, or mimic their behavior), you often kill a scene. You need resistance for drama, and you may sometimes need to kill ideas.

**Exercise.** *Two players play a scene where they always join.*

Somebody must announce to the other that she is an alien. In the scene we see, at first, she starts hinting at it slowly. *It is like dropping pebbles in a pond, versus dropping a boulder in a pond.* Sometimes, you just need to say “I’m an alien”. But then, the other say, “Yeah, I am too”. And then, they are born at the same time, they come from the same place, ...

*Against a stranger, you change more.*

**Exercise.** *Two players play a scene in Japanese where they always join.*

It is funny, but it quickly becomes boring.

**Exercise.** *Two players play a scene in Japanese where they stop joining.*

*We can see the interactions.* We can see the exact moment where they stop. It is amazing to see that we do not need the text to see what is happening, we see all the small details. We see it in their bodies. /footnoteNote that this works best with people that are using their bodies when acting. If you want to demonstrate the effect, try to avoid complete beginners.

When people stop joining, they have to **change**. *When you zap on TV, you look for change.*

We do a joining scene once more, with two future fathers waiting in the hospital. As soon as they stop joining, something happens.

### ***Do not do your best***

There is a book titled “Something wonderful right away”. It should have been called “Something average right away”. *You do not want Robin Williams in your improvisation group. You can work for him, but not with him.* This may be one of the most difficult concepts to grasp. Doing our best is what we have been told all our life to do. We should strive for the best. But the truth of the matter is that, when you are thinking about doing your best, you are

not there anymore. And if you are not there anymore, you won't do your best.

This does not mean that you should not strive to always be better at what you do. This does not mean that you should not persevere, and work on all this stuff. This means that there are times to think of your goals, think about the future, think about what you can and want to do. And they are times where you need to be here, in the present, fully invested in your body and your actions. Try to not mix them up together.

### *On Blocking*

Blocking is when you refuse an idea from your partner. There is a difference between say no to a question inside the scene, and saying no to your partner as an actor. The character can say no, but the actor must be careful to not always say no. For instance, in a scene, if one tells you "I love you", you can answer "I don't", and deal with the consequences. But avoiding the difficult implications of the question is blocking, and so is diminishing the stakes. Saying "I'm gay" diminishes the stakes. Saying "It's a beautiful day out there" and is simply running away from the question and saying no to the idea implied by your partner.

Blocking for fun can be good (*I'm gonna fuck you up*), blocking for fear is not.

The difference is slim. With the previous example, there is a good way to say "It's a beautiful day out there.", which is that the character should look terrified by the question asked, and do everything in his power to run away, and the audience must see it. The bad way is when the player is trying to run away and panicking, and the character just looks frozen, or like he did not hear the sentence.

To take away: you can say no, there is no absolute rule, but you must be aware of what you are doing, and not running away by fear.

### *Being obvious*

Is it obvious to have a talking chair? **Obvious is not boring.** We have to find the circle of expectations and fit in. If we try to be original, we are overthinking. We can say something weird if it is the first thing that comes (as long as we keep things coherent).

*I want you to be calm on stage.* We have to slow down, and then we can think more. Slowing down makes us more intelligent!

### *Keeping things back*

A wrong assumption is to think that keeping the good stuff back makes for better scenes. In some theatre, they once had a crocodile that could come out of the floor. Before the show, they would display it to the children and have them play with it, be eaten by it. They would always get huge reactions when the crocodile appeared. One day, they forgot to show the crocodile beforehand, and there were no screams.

## Stress

To reduce stress, you can stop wondering about “What’s next”, you can just do it. Keith might, if he does not have an idea, just say “4 people on the stage” and then he will find something to tell them to do. *If you have no idea what to do, start something.* I feel like starting something reduces the field of possibles and helps your brain choose something.

**Exercise** (Word at a time). *Players can only say one word at a time.*

At first, Keith makes the players sit down on the sofa next to one another, they are disconnected and it does not work. Then, once they are connected, they lack energy, so he makes them play the game while jumping.

**Exercise** (Word at a time, v2). *During the game, if you don’t like the story, you can say “again”.*

Again should get rid of part of the fear. Yet, we resist quite a lot and we do not want to say it, probably because of a complete education by idiots, not wanting us to recognize our failures.

**Exercise** (Word at a time, v3). *Have a panel, which can say again instead of the player if they are bored.*

Surprisingly, the game gets more lively. *By making nonsense out of it, we can bring vitality.*

**Exercise** (Word at a time, v4). *The players must say “we”.*

*Do not judge the story, judge the relationship between the players.*

Note that the jumping part is just to kick some life back into the player. With experienced players, this game should not look like from the outside like people jumping around and trying to go as fast as possible. It should flow smoothly like a river, between players that are connected, and involved in what they are going through. Final words of advice: if you are bored on stage, people watching you are also probably bored. Do not accept to be bored on stage!

## Audience suggestions

Keith wanted to avoid bad suggestions, so he asked for “Something that inspires us”. But then, you have to ask the improvisers if it inspires them. Keith never got an improviser to say that something inspired him. It is out of fear: we think that if we fail after claiming to be inspired, we will look like fools. When we say that we are inspired, we may look brave, and get sympathy if we fail. Failure makes the public like us more.

## Fear

The stage is a dangerous social place. It gets a lot of un-training to go there just to see what happens. *Don’t do your best. Make other people look wonderful.* Work is different than the stage because you cannot have a failure. But here, you are **free**. We always think that we might not be good enough, and we

do not know how to fail. *In martial arts, the first thing they learn is how to fall.* If we can screw up happily, miracles can start occurring. There are many scenes about throwing up because fear makes us want to throw up. Actors must own the stage. If we can turn the audience into one big gentle monster, it is perfect. Individual laughter is bad because it split up the audience, we must not use them to judge. But one big laugh from everybody can be a good indicator.

The first time an improviser goes on stage, they might get sympathy from the public. Then they think, oh, there's nothing to it, and they get cocky. Then, the audience expects them to do good things. Then it becomes bad.

It is not about the laugh. You are a creature on stage, *you must get the audience to like you.* The stage is your place, you own it. If you are doing your best, **you will be afraid.** You put in **too many efforts.** Athletes who do their best often actually go slower. A Bulgarian weight lifter broke the world record without knowing how much he was lifting. As soon as somebody ran a mile under 4 minutes, many people could do it after him. *He had given them permissions.* Do not go on stage to look good. Do not worry about yourself. *Go on stage to make your friends look good.*

### **Mistakes**

*We must make mistakes.* Some Pixar genius said, "it is easy to do what I do, you just have to make a thousand mistakes". Most people cannot do that. To learn to draw faces, Keith drew (see references on drawing) **five thousand** faces (he was afraid of going blind). We have to do mistakes, so we might as well make them as fast as possible!

**Exercise.** *Take a small comic strip, remove the end (without looking at it), and provide 5 different possible endings.*

It's got to be five. Then we lower our standards, and we allow ourselves to make mistakes.

### **Status**

*With friends, we play status game. With acquaintances, we don't.*

**Exercise.** *Players do a scene where they must match the other person's status. One of the other players is going to announce a problem to the other, which does not know the problem in advance.*

I play it, and I deflect the problem when it is imposed on me, rather than reacting. I refuse the proposition so that I do not lower my status. I should have been affected while keeping my status. It is important to be able to match status without copying the other position.

*If an actor thinks the other has a piece of secret information, they are better.* Stanislavsky said that if things on stage are exceptional, it is probably that something is going wrong behind the curtain. For instance when the lights do not go down, or an ashtray is missing, or ...



# 3

## DAY 3

### *Irrationality*

*Personalities is not where it all comes from.* There is something more to us, and an example of that is hypnosis. People still do not believe in hypnosis, while it seems that there have been many examples, like a surgeon operating live on somebody hypnotized. Rational people want to refuse hypnosis, but in fact, **we are suggestable**. I did not believe in hypnosis. Yet, it seems obvious to me that we are highly suggestible, I should probably think about that.

This explains in part why we should not try our best. *I want you to look good, but I can't get it if you try, you get all tight up.* Our state of spirit is probably most important. *If you try to make your partner look good, you don't care whether you look good.*

To reveal a bit of what the brain is thinking, adding **sounds** is a great way.

**Exercise.** *Have everybody in the room touch their neighbor. Have them do it a second time, with sounds, for instance of sighs.*

It is quite surprising how adding the sounds transform the experience. It turns sexual, and most of us laugh. *We have to laugh to show that we don't mean it.*

### *Status*

**Exercise** (Status 1,2,3). *Three players on stage. Each of them chooses a number between one and three. One should be the higher status in the scene, three should be the lowest, and two should be in between.*

We do the exercises several times with the following set up: two parents on a couch waiting for their child who should have come back a while ago. The child is supposed to arrive, and go to their room as fast as possible. Unrelated to status, it is clear that improvisers do not like to **move**. We are on the couch, all is well and nice. *Do not ignore accident!* If the child knocks, why do they knock, it's their home? They may have forgotten their keys. During the first scene, Akira arrived late (in real life at the workshop), exactly when my son was going to his room. It would have been awesome to scream "Why is there a girl in your bedroom son!".

The core of this game is status, it is important to practice how to lower or raise your status with respect to somebody else. Status is a simple **model of human behavior**, it can make the scenes more lively, and also free improvisers as it makes communication easier. *On the scenes, we should know our number.* If at some point we get stage fright, it is probably because we have lost focus on what is our job, what is our status.

We see the game played several times, and everybody does it in groups. I do feel like the scenes are getting more credible and interesting as the

statuses start to be correct. I also notice that I still am most comfortable being number three, but it can be quite **fun** to fight for your status.

### ***Inhibitions***

**Exercise** (Growling family). *Play a scene while constantly growling.*

The growling must come from the teeth, not the throat, it avoids injuries. The set up is the same as previously, but we can see instantly that the players are transformed. They move around, they are louder and braver.

**Exercise** (Fear family). *Play a scene while constantly being afraid of everything, and making sounds of being frightened.*

*You don't have to know how to move the body for it to move.* (this is also related to mask work) It is impressive to see that as soon as somebody stops making the sound, it stops the energy. Might be worth checking out "The Body Has Its Reasons" from Therese Bertherat.

In school, in society, we have learned to be smaller than we are, to not make waves, we are inhibited. The two previous games may set us free, or rather, set another version of us free. It is as if somebody else permits the other self to express himself. *Here you can be monsters.* Can we bring our bodies back to life?

### ***Props***

Props are great, they can help your creativity, and audiences love them. They used to have many things such as a sofa, a golf cart, a boat, a wheelchair, . . . . 98% of impro groups don't have these things and it's stupid! *Why not have lots of things?* Audiences would never get tired of seeing someone sucked into a Sofa through a hidden hole.

### ***Fear***

As a kid, we tend to develop a fake self to survive. *The secret is to be yourself, not your fake self.* Fear is what we must get rid of. It is probably the reason why so many people give up acting.

### ***Competitive impro/matches***

Wrestling is the working-class theater. If something is cultural, you must like it or you lose status.

At the time, I had not read Bourdieu. Yet, statuses are a faithful and practical approach to the domination hierarchy outlined by him, where in addition to domination based on money, you may have symbolic and cultural domination. Some examples picked by Keith in his books clearly outline this multi-facet aspect of domination.

### ***The partner***

**Exercise** (What comes next). *Two players on stage. One asks the other "What comes next?", and the other provides an answer. If you like it, you go with it and*

*play it, if you don't, you say no. If you go with it, you ask at the end "What comes next?", if you say no, the other gets to ask "What comes next?".*

We must try to make our partner eyes brighter. We should try to find what our partner wants, and aim to have fun with them. Some old improvisation groups always accept ideas but have no fucking clue about what their partners truly like. This game could by the way be a *good sex game*. We can in some scenes see that the two players are having fun, and completely forget about the audience. We must say "no" when we do not like it, else we are not training the other correctly, and thus not helping them. *It is unkind to be kind.*

At some point, the games get crazy, with two groups of two people playing it at the same time. It is quite fun and works pretty well! One of the game finishes with somebody alone on stage, which leads to the next version.

**Exercise** (What comes next, psychotic version). *Only one player, giving themselves "what comes next" in a sneaky voice.*

To get a sneaky voice from people, Keith asks for three voices, and make the audience vote. He never leaves somebody stuck without anything. Of course, I'm stupid and afraid that I won't be able to make a sneaky voice, I don't go. This is, of course, a stupid excuse so that I do not risk revealing myself. A few people try it, but I don't feel like they truly let go. The sneaky voice might be a way to have somebody else permit you, and might help bring down some **ensorship**. When I tried it on the way home, it ended up with dead bodies <sup>1</sup>. Might be a while before I'm ready to go on stage and try this game fully.

I should anyway practice having several voices, which might always be useful.

### **Kinetic Dance**

**Exercise.** *Suddenly freeze a group. Remove people one by one.*

The remaining people looks weirdly out of place. They had adjusted their positions accordingly to the people surrounding them. We can see some paintings where it is right or wrong. On stage, if we don't involve our body, we will look like those weird paintings.

**Exercise.** *Four players. Each one chooses somebody they desire, somebody who makes them laugh, and somebody who frightens them.*

This game also captures a bit of **human behavior**: in real life, we project onto people. During the scene, we can always see the kinetic dance, with people going to or running away from other people, adjusting their space to accommodate other people. . .

<sup>1</sup> I am in a room, alone. I see blood dripping from the wall. I touch the blood with my hand. I taste the blood. I recognize my own blood. The wall suddenly breaks towards me. It is broken by a huge wave of dead bodies coming toward me. They are all my own body. Everything turns black. I wake up and can't move. I am surrounded by bodies, my own. Something breaks and we start moving. We crash down on another me. . .



# 4

## DAY 4

### *Teaching*

When teaching impro, you can't make a list of everything you are going to cover. You have to react to your students. Keith had to write down a syllabus when he was in university, but it was a bit pointless. In front of a group, try some stuff until you put some stars in their eyes. Once you have captured their attention, take them on a journey.

This is of course difficult. *Actors stop having a cold when they play.* It is all about focus, *you need to be in the zone.* Keith stopped having a cold for a bit there.

### *Spont*

*You don't practice spont, you remove obstacles.* Our brain have more abilities than we think, we must learn to let it do what it wants. Some people having brain damages sometimes suddenly discover new abilities. Most probably, the ability was already there but repressed. We should ask ourselves the question *Why isn't everybody a genius?* It is mostly about censorship. This is why trying to find 5 new ending to a cartoon is a good exercise. To find 5 of them, you must lower your standards, and break free from something.

**Exercise.** *Find 5 different metaphors for something.*

**Exercise.** *Switch off the sound of the TV and dub it.*

To practice spont, a good way could probably be to try to find new games to practice spont. . . *If you want to master spont, you do have to invent games and be playful with your friends.* Kids are great at spont, they don't have yet all the censorship that we do. (Word at a time is great with them)

### *More interesting*

If you ask an actor on stage "What are you doing?", they rarely speak using the present tense. "I am going to sit down" would be a classical answer, and you have to fight so that they are in the moment. If you can get one in the present, they may finally say "I am sitting on the sofa". Now, we can try to tell them "Make it more interesting", and sadly they will start doing something else.

**Exercise.** *A player decides on an action. They must make this action interesting for a time.*

This game is very difficult, while it is very tempting you must not change the action. As it is difficult, Keith gives lifebelts to the improvisers so that they do not feel trapped. Once a stage, you can always:

1. have a volunteer from the audience;
2. change emotions;
3. tells us about it.

It is also important to add a time limit, else the actors might feel trapped. The point of this is not originality. Originality is required if you want to do ten different actions in a row. Here, you have an action, and you just have to find ways to not finish it. Mr. Beans is a great example of this, and most silent movies are actually. See the references at the end. *If you ask an improviser for a Christmas scene, they've got to put burning nuns inside it.* It is all about making **one action** more interesting. We have to stay in the moment. In tragedy, it is the same mechanism, *you get to the moment, and you stay in it.* This is the moment where you have the catharsis. If we think this way, in the present, then we may get comic ideas. If we live in the future, we won't.

Whenever an improviser gets an action, he wants to finish it and tends to be three steps ahead. We must be in the **present**, without panic, using lifebelts if we are stuck. If we are proud, we will learn more slowly. *I don't pay to see people more intelligent than me. I pay to see good-natured people.*

### **Master Servant**

**Exercise** (Master Servant). *Two players do a scene in which one is the servant and the other the master.*

The master should always be called "Mam" or "Sir", and the servant should have a stupid name, that the master always uses. Using names can be powerful. We can notice how politicians use the interviewers' names. Servants tend to panic, but a master would not say to slow down. The servant can beat the master up and still be the servant, it is all about respecting the space and the status. Old servants are so used to respecting the space that they can be like ghosts.

**Exercise** (Snap Master Servant). *The master can kill the servants by snapping their fingers.*

The servant is here to make the master's worlds perfect. A servant should not say "Don't you want anything Mam?". The master is not only the character, but also the improviser, and the servant is here to make them feel good. Asking a question to the master obliges them to think of something. Serving the master is nice, but it won't save your life for long. If the player gets bored, you die! It is a bad idea for servants to say "Of course". It is a put down to do this, try it! The masters we saw were too kind, and it is *unkind to be kind* in training games. The servant must be able to involve the master in something which interests them. Maybe the master likes to get beaten up? Beat him up!

To liven things up, provide some balloons shaped like long clubs to the students, so they can use them to beat each other up. A secret shared by Keith is that when you tie the balloon, you can leave the tie slightly unfinished, and then there is a small probability that at some point, the tie will loosen, and the balloon goes flying around the room.

## Changes

We want changes! When something happens in a scene, saying “you do this every day” cancel the changes. We don’t have to know why we are changing, sometimes we can **just change**, and make sense out of it afterward. Start crying on stage. If somebody does that, state the obvious, ask why they are crying. Change does not have to come from a good idea. It is the alteration that makes an idea a good idea. *Just by being altered, you can create the material.*

**Exercise.** *Two improvisers. Each sentence must alter the player’s states.*

It gets quite over the top of course, but it still is quite funny. We may need to change our standards, and not be stuck in some way. A young Jim Carrey would probably have failed to enter an acting school. But he would be amazing at this game.

We must use this to feed the following master servants’ scenes, try to maintain the interest of the master.

## Control

*Every scene can’t be your scene.* Sometimes, we have to be able to accept losing or giving up control.

**Exercise** (Dubbed master servant). *Two players. The master does both their voice and the servant’s voice. The two voices must be easily distinguished. The servant must move their lips when they are (not) talking.*

Surprisingly, people go on for longer in this game because one person is in **full control**. We have some nice scenes of crazy balloon hitting. When you hit with a balloon, it is important to not just hit the surface. Hit hard! Even if we don’t do it at first, the master does not have full control in this game. The servant can still help the master, by proposing physical actions.

## Connection

Keith must feel like we are disconnected during our master servants’ scenes, he makes us do once more the hat game (exercise 1).

**Exercise.** *A master-servant scene while playing the hat game.*

We finally get the improvisers to look at each other, it is so nice to look at! When somebody is trying to recall the title of a play, we can see them being disconnected, and the hat is beautifully stolen. *You don’t need plans.* We must just be there. The goal is to take the hat quick and light, not to play some trick.

However, we must still be a bit stuck up, Keith makes it more absurd once more.

**Exercise.** *A master-servant scene, while playing the hat game, and with a sports commentator and an expert.*

*You’re beginning to play. Fear turns it into work.*





### ***Audiences***

It is harder to perform in front of an audience, as we are more frightened. This is one of the reasons why we should perform a lot in public. *You should not be content until the work in public is better than the work in the studio.*

### ***Quality***

At first, when you have a theater, the most important thing is to get the room packed. Then, you should wonder if what you are doing is worth it. The show at the comedy store has the room packed. They should however probably wonder if what they are doing is worth it.

Second city is one of the most famous improvisation group in the U.S and is based in Chicago. They only did 20 minutes of improvisation after the actual show, and they asked for suggestions before a break, which they would spend trying to have good ideas for the suggestions. It is not the kind of improvisation I want to do, yet they are quite famous... It is also worth mentioning that once, Del Close was invited to tea by Viola Spolin, who got him fucked up by putting drugs in the tea. I just thought I'd say that.

Once, there was a drama critic, who after a show phoned its journal to give a bad critic. When exiting the phone booth, he meets the journal chief editor, who exclaims "What a wonderful play!". The critic went back in the booth and called to change their critic. The thing is, the critic had already gone to the press, they changed it in the middle. So journals which went to the North of England got the bad critic, the ones to the South the good one. A bit later, another journal published the two critics side by side. If you are wondering what the drama critic is doing today, well, you guessed it, *he is still a drama critic! Sometimes, you get to see through the small cracks in the reality.*

What is quality? Now that is a philosophical question if I ever saw one. Probably worth thinking about it.

### ***Fuck your brain up***

**Exercise** (Wrong Names). *Point at objects and shout the wrong word.*

**Exercise** (Wrong Names, v2). *Try to shout disconnected words.*

Does the world appear brighter or sharper to you after you try to do this game? Surprisingly, I can see the effects when he is asking about them. It might be an autosuggestion, but in the end, does it matter? It is probably a good idea to use this game regularly to affect ourselves and try to interfere a bit with our classical brain patterns. Anything that interferes can be a good exercise, 3-word sentences, gibberish...

*There's no gap between thinking and speaking when you trust somebody.* Rebecca Norton said that when you love somebody, you behave like a good improviser towards them.

Our brain wants to protect us, it wants us to follow the norms. *People want things done the way it was always done.* Creativity breaks with the norms, and can often be confused with insanity. People told Keith that his work might make people insane, for instance with Trance masks or the Life Game.

### **Forward**

**Exercise** (Word at a time, v5). *No adjectives are allowed.*

*Improvisers hate nouns.* As soon as we stop using adjectives, we are forced to say what we meet in a forest. It is not some big and terrifying and green and frightening and ... It is a dragon!

At some point, Keith asks for two more volunteers, who do not have to act. It is impressive to see that as soon as it is said to the volunteer that they don't have to act, they relax.

### **Teaching**

When he was young, Keith saw a movie in which the music just stuck to him. So here he was, a 6-year-old kid asking his parents for piano lessons. They set him up in front of the piano, on a big pile of cushions, and Keith goes like "I want to play this music." The teacher then told him, "This? It is not real music. You are going to play this." Of course, at this point, Keith just wanted to go home, but the teacher made him stay; after all his parents had paid for the class.

*It is good to know personal bits about your teacher, it makes it less mechanical.*

### **Heroes**

Most stories are about heroes who get into trouble. It seems that we can't even think of a story that is not of this kind. The thing is that, *you don't get heroes in improv.* Stories are about heroes who suffer and try to get out of situations. *Heroes are changed, altered.* A guy in a hole is a hero only if he tries to escape, and digs a hole with a spoon.

**Exercise** (Word at a time, v6). *You meet a monster, and you cannot escape.*

*I like it when you can't escape the bad things.*

We all do the exercise in pairs, and at the end, Keith asks if we did well. I don't know what to answer. But Keith tells us that the actual question is *Did your partner have fun?*

### **Games**

Games are fun for a bit, but it might not get you anywhere. If Keith was able to tour Europe with his group, it is because games were only padding between the stories. *We made jokes, but we did not rely on it.*

**Exercise.** *Improvisers make a scene without pronouncing the letter s.*

The first time we see it, the improvisers are not losing. *The nature of the game is that you have to lose.* If you lose with good nature, it cheers us up. As soon as this is said, people have fun losing. It is interesting to see that as soon as you have the last player alone, they lose instantly. *Nobody wants to be left alone on stage.* This is too bad because it is wonderful to see somebody alone on stage, we think you have courage. You just have to realize that you are not trapped at all.

At Stanford, they did it with the letter e, as it was supposed to be harder, and thinking that if you did something intelligent on stage, the audience would be amazed. *It was awful.*

This game is great to explain the relationship with the audience. It tells us quite a bit

### ***Warm up***

A 1h30 warm-up is useless. You need a few minutes for the voice, a few minutes for the body. What you need is to have the fundamental theories right.

### ***Teaching***

Students bring all kinds of fear and tension. The teacher should try to free them. *When teaching, if you see people on the floor, that's good.* Some teachers are frightened of their students, so it might be a bit difficult for those. *I'm probably less incompetent than I appear to be.*

Keith is glad he did not know of the work of Viola Spolin. *Break the rules!* We should try to make some new things. If we don't know how to do something, get out there and do it, we might find amazing things.

### ***Touring Europe***

*You can do all kind of stuff on stage as long as you don't give a signal that the show has started.*

To get the audience in the right mindset, Keith tried to play the shy MC. *Try a lot of things, and keep the good ones.*

In the shows, as soon as he said *this is not culture* to the audience, he could hear the sound of a thousand arm unfolding (he had to send an actor into the audience to know what the sound was).

### ***Stories vs Clowning***

The basis is to *present things that interest the audience*, you don't always have to have stories. You can be interested in a lecture on black holes, or you might pay money to see Madonna juggling. As soon as in a music hall the singing start, we are pleased, almost as if our brain switched to some other mode.

*In improv, if you spill a cup, people keep going on, they don't mop or deal with the consequences.*

Stories and clowning are at the core the same thing, both are about **relationships and changes** (the trouble causes changes).

### ***Blind actors***

**Exercise (Making Faces).** *Three players on chairs. The boss is in the middle with a balloon, the two others must stick their tongue out to the boss, without getting caught. If the boss sees it, they must hit the improviser with the balloon.*

It is important for the boss to hit hard, and to have the improvisers yell. It gets the improviser into the fun of the game. Then, the players must start slowly, testing the boss, using only their tongues. Surprisingly, when you stick your tongues out, you tend to lean in. It contracts the social space.

**Exercise (Making Faces, v2).** *The players can also start to make faces to the boss. If they are caught, they are fired and replaced.*

It is important to continue to **start with the tongue**. The players can involve the audience, wave at them, look them in the eyes. In the beginning, to make it truthful, the boss is not trying to catch people making faces at them.

Keith says at some point *I should have told you, I'm such a bad teacher*, which is again a pretense to make him more good-natured.

This is a game to fight against blind actors. It is important to have in mind the purpose of the game and keep different rules for different games. **Don't bend the rules** of the game, else you may ruin its purpose. There was a group who added at the beginning of the hat game a thirty seconds safe period to be able to build scenes. It's stupid, if you play the game right, people can't catch the hat in three seconds, and you get scenes. The game autocorrects itself.

This game is nice to train improvisers to be **disobedient servants**.

### ***Fast food Stanislavsky***

**Exercise (Fast food Stanislavsky).** *Improvisers are given a list of instructions on "How to be ...". They should regularly pick an instruction and do it.*

When Keith yells, it means that we should look again and pick another instruction. Improvisers tend to get fixated on one thing. When you get comfortable, you can start making several instructions at the same time, accumulating them. *Take anything you can make truthful.*

Here, we had a bit of difficulty getting the scenes right, the instructions were not executed clearly.

**Exercise (Fast food Stanislavsky, v2).** *The players must tell the audience which instruction they are making*

*Don't pick the best one, pick anything you can do.* At some point, a student had a bit of trouble finding a possible instruction. Keith asks to see the list so that he can provide a suggestion. Then he goes *Mmmm... It is indeed difficult.* Once again, he is trying to make the student feel comfortable on stage.

Then, we all practice an instruction, which is to seduce somebody.

**Exercise.** *Experience talking to somebody while maintaining eye contact. Experience maintaining a bit, and looking down. Finally, experience maintaining a bit, looking down, looking right, and looking back at the person but from the corner of the eyes.*

We all experience this in pairs. When looking down the first time, the effect is so powerful that my sentence dies on my lips. Normally, the eyes move and then the head follows. If the head does not follow, it means that somethings up, that something intellectual is disturbing the classical process.

**Exercise** (Fast food Stanislavsky, v3). *We have shadows who provide the suggestions to the players. The players can say less or more, to ask for or refuse suggestions.*

Now, we are also training the shadows into providing helpful suggestions, suggestions that the player wants to do. It is important in those kinds of games to switch between the shadows and the players so that they can both experience what it feels like. A student realized he was being a bad shadow once he played and needed help.

*First you do the list, and then you try to make it truthful.* The lists give you **permission** to do crazy stuff. At first, we might only do lists we are comfortable with, but then we can get tempted by others, and go onto others. It is all about giving ourselves permission. Kids do not have the permission to be playful in school. It would probably be a good idea to make **more lists**.

The problem is to give yourself permission. It is all about fear. The stage fright, the teacher fright, those are **universal phobia**. Then, to fight those, we can go at it using Volp's hierarchies of terrors. We fight it bit by bit, trying more and more frightening things. In the hierarchy, if you push too far, you cannot get back at the same level, you have to start again several layers down.

Keith is interested in teaching because he thinks that everybody can do anything. We can teach those games, and it is important to say "Good", "Thank you".

## Predictable

It can be good to try to change your body image on stage. One way to achieve it is to try to place your mind in different body parts (cf. Chekov).

**Exercise.** *Place your mind in your torso. Place your mind in your jaw. ...*

This changes the group when we try it. Change is good! In real life, people want us to be predictable, they want you to be always the same. Improvisation allows us to try other things. We should try other things to do improv.

Keith does not only say things, he wants us to experience the effects of different things. This might be important to remember when teaching.



# 6

## DAY 6

### *Props*

*Take your wallet on stage.* It is probably good advice for actors, we should also start to play with our cellphones. Phones are now everywhere, and yet we see so few of them on stage.

### *Teaching*

Keith makes us once more experience status changes in a group, I think he wants us to feel it, and remember it. So repetition is key.

### *Interesting*

Keith bought a gyroscope as a teenager. Those behave very weirdly, if you push them down they go sideways. He was amazed the first time, set it in a cupboard and forgot about it. When he found it back a few months later, it was normal, it was like *of course* it goes sideways. This is quite universal. I took an airplane to come here. About fifty tons flying into the sky just to bring me here. I even barely thought about it. We assume reality. We don't understand it, we just get used to it. It might be worth caring.

### *Meaning*

*It is very difficult to have scenes that have meaning.* Most scenes turn into comedy, and *comedy is often a withdrawal of sympathy.* You are not gonna laugh about your grandfather slipping on a banana peel. You will laugh if it is Trump. So when comedy comes in, sympathy goes out, and it is hard to give meaning to the scene. Once again, silent movies are a good example. We can see that Buster Keaton didn't care about meaning, he just played with the environments. Charlie Chaplin however did try to add meaning: "City lights" and "The kid".

### *Ego*

Chaplin deeply disliked the actress for the blind girl in "City lights", she was an old-time Paris Hilton. At some point, he kicked her out and was ready to refilm half of the movies with another actress. He started to audition, and couldn't get anybody else. All the candidates just cared too much (co-starring a Chaplin movie was a very big thing). He just had to go back to Paris Hilton. . .

If you bring your ego on the stage, you are in trouble. Students at university disliked old plays, but it was just because they had seen it done at the university. The actors would fall in love with the text, trying too hard to sell it. In *Godot*, you have one of the final speeches which you can feel sum up

the play. But if the actor knows that, it doesn't work! Keith had an actor who didn't understand the speech say it, all the audience wept! The actor could never do it again, he had attached his ego to it.

Good actors allow you to **project** onto them. But if you go up there with your ego, it becomes impossible. We don't want to be exposed on stage, and we want to protect ourselves. Game over.

### *Relax*

Keith launches a scene where two co-workers, one who just started working in the place, are meeting over a coffee break. The first one is weird, they just stand in front of the couch. *Human beings tend to sit down. Improvisers don't.* Improvisers also tend to retain sounds that they would naturally make. After Keith says that, one of the improvisers goes a bit over the top like "Ahhh, so good to sit down". When Keith asks about it at the end of the scene, turns out most of the audience didn't notice it. Making **sounds** is natural. If we stop repressing them, it feels more real. It is however important to **synchronize** the sounds and the movements, else it feels forced. If we don't have any fear and are completely relax, sounds come out by themselves. Try to mimic anger (or have somebody do it), by yelling an insult and hitting a table at the same time. Try multiple timings and rhythms, with the insult slightly before or after. You should see some striking differences.

Keith tried to direct a play with an actor who, while he was supposed to sit for 5 minutes, kept sliding off of his chair. The actor always got so tensed up by the fear that he would straighten up and start gliding down. Keith asked another director who had directed the same actor in a play where the actor sat down the whole time how he had done it. They tied the actor to the chair! But what if there's a fire? Bah, we'll just grab him, it will be fine!

### *Tilt*

We can watch nothing for 30 seconds, so it can be good to bore the audience a little. It is simply because we like mystery. *There's a mystery, why are we watching this?*

**Exercise.** *Two improvisers play nothing for 20 seconds. Then tilt.*

*Fill the cup!* In the first scene one of the players is discovered as being a spy. This is what is called a rational tilt. It can work, but irrational tilt might be better. In comedy, we can start with a big irrational tilt, and then try to make it truthful. *We're not trying to be funny, we are trying to explain it.*

A good way to force ourselves to come up with explanations is to say "There are three reasons". Then, come up to the challenge and say something. We just have to come up with something, and we look brave no matter what we say. We don't even need a "good idea". *Is it a good idea? It is if he changes!*

It is all about change. *If an improviser sees a ghost, he'll say something to stay unchanged.* It might be for instance "not you again".

In a scene, if somebody is not changed, you can just keep adding more and more until your partner reacts. We had a nice example with:



1. I'm an alien
2. I've come to inseminate you
3. *Touches the other* There, it is done.
4. *Touches again* And, twins!
5. The babies should arrive any second now.

Teachers can use this knowledge about change. There is no fun for the student in miss behaving if the teacher is unchanged.

Emotions are a good tool for changing. Just scream. Or just cry. We'll sort it out afterward. It is difficult because we feel weak when we are altered.

### *Laugh*

Laughing on stage can tell the audience that *we're just doing jokes here*. On the other hand, resisting to laugh on stage can bring very interesting effects.

### *Scene 2*

Most people stay on stage trying to get a laugh. If I start to get into talking, we should go to scene 2! It is important to know that we can do that.

### *Tilt*

Actors job is mostly to be **altered** by the others lines, and also their lines. We've got to make the text alive. There are no wrong ideas when it comes to tilting. You should *respect your brain* if it gives you an idea. Don't dismiss it instantly! Sometimes you should kill ideas, sometimes you should accept them. At first, we kill way too many ideas, without even knowing it.

*Would you throw a stick for me?* A bad improviser may answer yes, and say something like "Only if you throw one for me". This is joining!

Keith uses the words "positives" and "negative" because they are the best we have, but positive means forward-thinking, and negative means shrinking back.

We don't have to be original in the idea, we don't care. It is how we deal with the idea that is interesting.

**Exercise (Tilt).** *Two improvisers play nothing for 20 seconds. Then tilt.*

We all play in pairs and then with different people, and then back again in front of the class.

We see a scene where a guy first has high blood pressure, which suddenly allows him to make miracles, he then turns the other player into a woman. The secret is that *you don't have to be intelligent, you just have to change*. The ideas were indeed stupid in this scene, but it still looked good!

### *The art of incompleting actions*

**Exercise (Tilt).** *Two improvisers play nothing for 20 seconds. Then tilt. One player is bringing the other one home.*

Keith chose this set up because universally, the first action the people will do is to click the glasses with the other. As he expected, the improviser gets settled in, propose a drink, and then click. *On the stage, whenever you finish an action, you feel unintelligent.* It is not a problem to finish an action! We must however understand the dynamic involved. “Should we finish it in the bedroom?” can be just fine if we just see two improvisers go in and go to bed. But only if there is a scene 2, and some changes in it.

*Bad improv is all introduction, we fight the change.* We may see one scene, two scenes, three scenes, all about different actions, and no changes! Up to the change, it is an introduction. If we finish an action without any change, we should go to scene 2, or we might get stuck in the talking zone.

Sometimes, we spend a lot of time trying to think of intelligent actions to do. It is completely pointless if we complete them! Completing an action corresponds to an introduction. If an action is left uncompleted, you begin to have storytelling.

**Exercise (Tilt,v2).** *At some point, an improviser can ask the other “Do you have anything?”, referring to ideas or tilt.*

This game reduces a bit the stress of the improvisers, they are not both fighting for ideas.

During the scene that we see, Keith tells an improviser to say “There are three skill-testing questions”. It is the same as the “Three reasons”. Take risks! Don’t look for a good idea.

We have a nice scene exposing the “no need for good ideas” concept, where an improviser is left alone waiting for the other to bring tea. We can suddenly hear coming from the sofa “I’m in the sofa” (somebody in the audience did the voice). It’s a completely stupid idea! But by reacting, the player on the sofa can create a whole universe. Maybe he gets sucked too in the sofa. Maybe he can free the person. What does he do when the first person comes back? You can take a stupid idea, and see where it leads you!

### *Story telling*

We should do things we don’t know where they lead. We should do them wondering where they might lead. It’s risky, it’s fun!

You get structure by **feeding things back in**. *Go forward into the darkness. Bring back the past into the light.*

In his youth, Keith used to go out at night to tag messages without meaning on the walls. It was not political, it was just to baffle people. Just to make people wonder, and realize that there are people you don’t know about.

*You pump out the material, and then you make sense out of it.* You don’t have to know the destination, you just know there will be one if you get things moving. We must not plan ahead, and trust our mind that he will be able to make sense out of it. The brain creates the universe around us through perception. If it can create a whole universe, it can handle creativity. If we

struggle, it is not because we cannot do it. It is probably because we are rejecting an idea.

It is difficult because we have to fight what we learned in school. We have been told all our life “Don’t jump until you know where you’re gonna land.”

**Exercise** (Thank you). *Two players. One takes a position. The other just look for two seconds. Then, they either put back the first player into its starting position, or they start a two seconds scene based on the position. In both cases, they conclude with “Thank you”.*

We all try it in pairs. I find it difficult to actually say “Thank you” in all cases, as it seems a bit silly, but once you do it once or twice, you can feel that the general pressure of having an idea diminishes. I think it is important to not pressure your brain for an idea.

**Exercise** (What comes next with scenographers.). *Shadows provide props, accepted or refused with more or less.*

We have a scene based on a flying wig. *I wouldn’t pay to see safe improvisers. I’d pay to see good-natured people being happy doing stupid things.*

We can see quickly that the scenographers are a bit too active. They want to be in the scene, which is quite natural. It is then very important that the players accept to say “less”. *Say no to the other!* We did not have the time to deal with a seashell that something else appears. We need to deal with what is already there, it is useless to pile things up. The scenographers should only bring things that are needed.

We all play What comes next in groups of four. It appears that indeed, *You can’t deal with two ideas at a time.*

This game is about training one player to please the other player and training the scenographers to please the players.

## ***Journey***

**Exercise** (Guided journey). *An improviser closes their eyes. Another, one tells them a story, trying to make them go on a first-person journey by describing the scenery. Sometimes, the teller should ask a question to the traveler, to trigger their imagination.*

You can release the imagination of somebody by having someone asking questions to them, triggering your mind. The questions are asked to kick-start the imagination of the person. We should not ask for details that the person already knows. Keith is extremely calm when he does this to somebody, almost hypnotizing. You ask questions, the other player report, you adjust, and nudge them a bit in some directions.

It feels very nice to experience this. In the end, the question “where was the chair you were sitting on in real-life?” is worth asking, because if it was done right, the chair disappears. Very important to have your eyes shut.

It could probably be turned into a sex game. More seriously, when in bed, we feel **safer**. We might then be more open to having an adventure.

At any moment, you start one of these games, you may go on an amazing adventure. If you do safe choices, you will stay safe. If you make wild and dangerous choices, then it’s worth seeing.

**Exercise** (WAT, one player with eyes closed). *One of the players closes his eyes.*

*It's nicer to have your eyes closed. You can see the details.* We see this twice, once in Japanese and once in Norwegian. It is quite surprising how effectively we can see the changes occurring, even without understanding the words. We look at scenes differently when we cannot understand the players, I feel more attentive.

### ***Yourself***

*Consciousness is so bizarre.* The mind works by itself without you, there are many different experiences where we can see the brain deciding before we know it.

If you are acting, you should always play two characters at the same time. In real life, people are divided, and we just suppress some parts of ourselves. In improvisation, we should try to suppress less, or not at all. *You look inward, see what's there, and use it.*

### *The other*

When should we resist or join? When should we kill an idea, or let it live? *When it is fun for the other person.* You can see bad Micetro directors who don't pay any attention to the players. A director proposes something, and if he can't see the players' eyes light up, he should propose something else!

*Here, we start a process in which you become experts in other people.* I feel like there's an epiphany in waiting around there, but I just don't quite see it for the moment.

### *Circle of expectations*

**Exercise.** *Two players, one off stage. The player on stage walk through the park, on meets a small creature. The voice of the creature is made by the player off stage.*

You start with a small creature (it is less frightening to the improviser), and then you add something stupid. A frog with a bible, a bunny with a pen, a snake with a cowboy hat. As soon as you add the extra bit, you set a circle of expectations in the mind of the audience.

Some improvisers try to be creative and are stuck thinking "What's impossible?", trying to find what seems like a good idea. It is completely stupid!

Here, Keith asks for two volunteers, ask them to sit down on the sofa and start telling a fun anecdote. He does this quite a lot, probably to give the improvisers time to get used to being on the stage, and relax a bit. Once, Keith was in a hospital and talking to a doctor followed by three interns, he is suddenly quite surprised. The doctor claims to have found a cure for penis cancer. Well, that's amazing, what a revolution! When Keith says that, the interns go red in the face, and start laughing, hiding their head behind their clipboard. "Oh yeah, we have a quite simple solution, you just have to remove the penis."

We just have to stay inside the circle, there's **no thinking** involved.

Keith wants us to work on the circle of expectations, but also add a bit of truthfulness in the mix. If we are walking in a park, we should be walking with a purpose. The first student to try it walks slowly as if she was thinking poetry. She is probably a bit afraid, and not trusting her partner to yell "Stop" before she is gone. We then see a crappy scene, and Keith lowers a bit our standards by going *I don't usually start with this first thing in the morning.*

We see a scene with a drunk frog, which offers a cup of tequila to the man, and the man accepts but he was trying to stop alcohol. This fit rights into the circle of expectations of a drunk frog. Then, we know it is not enough because the action has been completed, we need a scene 2. Then, we have a scene where the man meets his psychiatrist and tells him about the frog. *You're in the scene if you're needed.* The frog appears and is killed (after many

efforts, as it is always difficult to kill something on stage). Now, if we do another scene, the circle of expectations is open, we could have the ghost of the frog, the husband of the frog...

This is a good exercise to work on the circle of expectations and to teach the concept of "scene 2". It is important to make scenes that are different!

Side remark, its nice to have three microphones on stage, one on both sides and one on the front.

### ***Fear***

In theatre sport, it is very difficult to get the judges to kill scenes. They worry, look at each other, play with the button, but won't do it. A nice thing to help them is to have a red light at their feet, unseen by the audience, and controlled by improv in the audience or the technicians. If they are bored, they can light the red light. The judges don't have to obey the red light, which causes the people to press the button. It is once again a question of fear. Because the judge doesn't have to obey the light, technicians dare to trigger it, because they don't feel like they are killing the scene. And now, the judges dare to listen to the light, because it kinds of give them **permission**.

### ***Ego***

*It's the sticky stage.* It is difficult to get improviser of the stage if you don't have anybody to kill the scenes. When things are going well, they want to keep doing it, and if things are going bad, they want a chance to make it alright. We should not put our ego into this.

The same thing goes regarding improvisers joining a scene. If the scene is going well, you want to be in it. But you must not! It is when things are not going well that you should join the scene, to help your partners.

### ***Circle of expectations***

The title of a book is very important because it raises **expectations**. The original name of "The girl with the dragon tattoo" was "Men who hate women". The new title is way better because you are waiting for the girl, which is not that important and only appears in the middle. The original title does not raise any expectations and is a bit crappy.

We try another scene, and we can see that beginners tend to delay the seeing of the small creature, it keeps us safe. The scenes are not extremely truthful this morning, but *You don't worry about truthful yet*. At the beginning, it is a storytelling game.

We see a karate mouse. If you have a karate mouse, it must hit you! I delayed it, don't delay it! A mouse with a fire gun must fire it.

### ***The other***

**Exercise.** *Two players. One takes the other home for the first time. One can snap at any time, causing the other to be dragged off stage while yelling "But I'm a good improviser".*

It is important to yell when you are dragged away, else it could be cruel. In the following scene, we don't dare to snap enough. So Keith tries something new, by adding three people, who must hum when they are bored. It is quite funny, but a bit distracting for the audience.

*If possible, all ideas should be tried and not discussed.* Keith is a bit suspicious about discussions, where it is not the best idea but the best speaker who wins. "How many red cars are there in the street?" "According to statistic, bla bla bla" "I parked my red car outside this morning, so one." But in the end, you've got to get up and go look in the street. And only then, you may discover that "My car has been stolen!".

### ***Kinetic dance***

**Exercise.** *Four improvisers. It is a party, where you decide on somebody you want, somebody you fear, and somebody who makes you laugh.*

In this game, it is important to try to make it truthful, or it turns into a big mess (still comic, but that is not the goal). What we practice is the basic way to be on stage. In real life, we project things onto people, and we react accordingly.

### ***Move***

*Improvisers sit where the furniture is, but it's wonderful to see them move.* Improvisers also tend to say "come in", still because they don't like to move. Move! Change! *I want to unglue you.*

### ***Try***

People come into the audience to see things done that would be killed in real life. They want to see things taken forward. We want to be safe in real life, but we must take risks on stage. We may make mistakes, but it can be good! *We like people who makes mistakes because it makes us feel better* (concerning our own mistakes).

People don't want to try things. After reading Impro, somebody said that it was stupid to shout the wrong names for objects. Keith thinks they probably didn't even try it.

### ***Status***

**Exercise.** *Two players try to have the same status on stage.*

**Exercise.** *Two players, with one high status.*

*We love happy low status because they won't attack.* An interesting (but depressing) example is about slaves singing blues while working.

We see a good example of a high status whose very **calm and contained**. It is interesting to see how it can be done with confidence and without a lot of yelling around.

Small instructions can make a huge difference, Keith tells someone to stop blinking, and they are suddenly louder.

We all try to match status by pair, with a committee. It is very interesting to watch the small changes happening between the people. Not moving your head is a sign of high status. If someone has trouble keeping their head still, a method that seems to be working is to have a shadow place one hand on their head. Now, if they move their head, they will feel it. It might be worth checking out “The naked ape” book.

### *Art*

Some famous dude said that *Art is anything you can get anything with*. Keith interpretation goes like *Art is anything you want to steal*. If you want to take it home with you, it’s probably art.

### *Sentiments*

We should be looking for something thrilling, for **orgasms**, for things that strongly affect us. We should look for impro like this! A way to do this is to bring back a bit of emotion into the scenes. So, it’s time for love scenes!

**Exercise** (I love you). *Two improvisers make a scene. They are both trying to say “I love you” to the other, but can’t do it.*

We want to see a huge **resistance**, the sentence should always be on our mind. We want to screw up speech, it makes us look vulnerable.

Always pay attention to the voice level!

Beginners are afraid to not know what to say, and then speak all the time. Not talking makes you listen, which is a risk because you might be changed. Not knowing what to say can be very interesting. Thus, it is quite nice to give instructions to mess with people’s speech patterns.

### *Cheap trick*

**Exercise** (I love you, v2). *One of the players receives secret instructions.*

I watch the scene and feel more interested, just because there is a secret. Actor with a **secret** instruction tend to be more interesting.<sup>1</sup>

The secret instruction was to alternate between wanting to love the person and wanting to hit the person. It leads to quite funny scenes! If you are filled with hatred, it may look like love and intense passion. I could not tell what was the trick when I saw the scene. We all try it later, and, well, hatred can feel quite intense!

On stage, we can have something happening inside us, it creates mystery.

### *Mantras*

Once again, Keith asks for volunteers, has them sit down, and then keeps talking until they are comfortable. He does this all the time!

If you make your life difficult on stage, you become interesting. At some point, I guess you just can’t keep thinking about the fear, and it automatically goes away.

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of thoroughness, I will say that this was not a double-blind experiment.



Repeating a mantra can make time go by much quicker. We spend most of our time in **trances**, constantly expanding and contracting time. A well-known effect is “the medical stage”: as soon as you get on stage, you stop having a cold.

We all experience how mantras can affect you, first looking at the group all thinking “I love you, I love you, ...”, and then once again with “I hate you ...”. It is surprising to see that we naturally change when thinking the mantra.

The difficulty is to keep the mantra while you speak. But it is kind of the point, we are trying to get the mantra to screw your speech!

**Exercise (Mantra).** *Two players. Each chooses either the love or the hate mantras, and keep it for the whole scene.*

Here, we can start with any platform, a boring one is better I think. We are working on the relationship, not the story!

**Exercise (Alternating mantra).** *Two players. Each alternates between love and hate mantras.*

This gets some interesting results, and it is quite funny. *I’m not trying to be funny, I’m trying to stir up the relationship.* Don’t try to be funny. Change, and see what happens. However, the scenes are not smooth, we need to **train** about keeping a mantra in our head.

### **Feedback**

After every scene, we start to have a bit of an automatic clapping thing going around. Keith does not like it very much, because then we have to clap for everything. We should in general not clap, and only clap if we can’t hold it.

There is an interesting question about how to get feedback from the audience.

A poetical way (I think) to do it is to have each member of the audience with a narrow beam flashlight. Then, the audience can light up when they are interested. If it starts going dark, it is not a good sign...

They also tried to have instant feedback using a machine displaying a counter from 0 to 72, and each audience member would have an off/on switch. If you are at 72, everything is fine, and if you are at 0, you are in trouble. The issue is that you need to have a switch for everybody in the audience, 72 was just not enough.

### **Fun**

Keith must have felt that we were a bit low in energy in the mantras game (which was indeed difficult), so we end the day on lighter things!

**Exercise.** *Four players. Two players put their arms in their backs and are provided arms by the other two.*

It is important to get the arms comfortable with the rest of the body, so with every new set of players, Keith tells them to “touch the face”, “touch the hair” and “adjust the clothing” of the other player.

It is of course funny. What catches more my attention is that the arms can propose quite a bit of thing. The arms tend to be hyperactive, touching the other, and they take the scene forward. Also, even if we were already quite comfortable playing together as a group, this game can be useful to break the body barriers.

**Exercise** (Party hat game). *Many players. It is a massive hat game, while there is a party.*

It is quite nice to watch, and get more and more interesting the fewer players there are. Keith says it is a good way to end a show, you give people one final laugh, so they don't feel heavy when they leave.

### ***Filling the theatre***

When the theatre is not full, you must do something! Keith used to invent new games so that the critics would come back. Most of the games in Keith's books were invented so that critics would come back to the Loose Moose. He would also sometimes give all the tickets to a charity like Greenpeace or amnesty international.

Sometimes people can be a bit stubborn. He went to a city and saw a group who had trouble filling the theatre. "How many groups are there in the city?" "16" "And what do you do?" "All the same thing". He came back a year later, only 4 groups where left, but still all doing the same thing ...

***Good natured***

*I was given a medal by the queen, the box was wonderful.* The medal was cheap looking, they must have made a thousand of those, but the box was wonderful. The sad part is that his son threw away the box when Keith looked away. Keith can make receiving a medal from the queen so trivial, once again, good-natured teacher.

***University***

Whether it is for children or graduates, teaching as it exists today seems quite unsatisfactory. Some studies show that if you look at people twenty years after university, there is no relation between grades and the work they are doing.

There was a department head in UoC (University of Calgary) who never left his office, and was awarded by the students the “Invisible man prize”. Keith started a rumor about him being a mountaineer, that his wife would drop him off at the weekend so that he would go climb and disappear in the mountains. Two years later during a field trip in the mountain, the head of the department had completely accepted the myth and told Keith that he was a mountaineer. How we perceive reality alters reality. Sometimes, we see through the cracks.

This workshop is not an actual training, we don’t have enough time. It is more an exhibition of all the theories in the improv system. It is the shotgun effect, Keith tries to show us a glimpse of everything, hoping that some bullets will hit home.

***Fear***

*You must not be afraid to come into this space.* Everybody is afraid of everybody in the theatre, and nobody speaks about it. Actors are afraid of the audience, of the critics, of the directors, and it goes both ways. *This is your space.* Many actors quit because of the fear.

***Women***

It is especially hard for women to be an actress because there is a lack of roles. This is quite depressing because, in theatre classes, you tend to have a 50/50 proportion of men and women. In improv, it should be a bit different, but we are still behaving quite badly. Women wanting to survive in mostly men groups must act like men. To survive the men being aggressive, most of the time without even knowing it, they have to get as tough as men. This happened for instance to Rebecca Northan, who had to wait a long time before being once again able to be a woman.

Regarding the stand-up comedy scene, a shift seems to have happened in the last twenty years, allowing women to be women and not fake men.

### ***Performing***

You're not going to get any feedback from your mom or a group of improvisers. A packed house of strangers will tell you about what you are doing. You can start by going to schools to entertain the children on Friday afternoon, as Jim Carrey once did (you can entertain the kids before they leave school for the weekend, but teachers won't let you do it another time of the week). If you are a group of women, don't just go on stage to show improv made by women. Go on stage and have a purpose. It could be to fight for women's rights, to fight against men who keep women down, or it could be about homeless people. Have a purpose.

If you ask for suggestions from the audience, you can usually predict them, so what's the point? *We want to create benevolence.* At Loose Moose, they once were able to get a theatersports team from the audience. Of course, they were not good, but the audience was supporting them crazily because they were their own.

### ***Fear***

A teacher should be a happy idiot. They two main jobs: they should make clear that they are not going to punish people, and they should create an atmosphere where we go on stage to see what happens. We should realize that volunteering is not a big emotional thing. Our ego tends to get in the way, so we don't want to volunteer, but it slows down the learning process. We could draw a nice cartoon where people are trying to get uphill while pushing big boulders labeled "ego".

If you're trying to be wonderful, you can't see nor feel the other actors on stage with you.

Surprisingly, most acting books do not talk about fear. They talk about relaxation, and ways to relax, but you can't say to people to relax. If you remove the fear, you don't need to. Keith went to Sweden for a while, and was told by an old Swedish actor "you're the first ever to talk about fear". Keith was invited to NLP (NeuroLinguistic Programing) conferences. When asked why he was here, he said that he honestly did not know. The president of the conference had once seen a presentation by Keith, which started by *you have to get rid of the fear.*

Keith then goes to stand up, saying that he spoke too much and lost track *I can still do it, I'm qualified..* Good-natured teacher.

### ***Status***

**Exercise** (1,2 Status). *It's a 1,2,3 Status, with three players, excepts there's no 3.*

This means that somebody else will have your number, and we get to see the improvisers fight for their number. The set up is fixed so that improvisers don't have to worry about it. We have an exchange student who is 55 minutes late. The timing is important, it's not yet time to panic, but it's time

to worry. The student goes in, dominate the space, and goes to his bedroom. Keith then wants a scene 2 with the student in the bed. We bring an actual bed, cause props are awesome!

It is nice to see people fighting for their number. You don't have to succeed!

*The voice is to control the audience.*

Sometimes, you can start a scene in the middle. The idea is to get the improvisers in positions where things happen.

When you volunteer without knowing and are enthusiastic, it is good-natured.

### ***Being mysterious***

**Exercise** (Love/hate/laugh Party & 1,2,3 Status). *Start a scene with the love/hate/laugh relationship. At some point, pause, introduce the status and keep the previous relations.*

We often forget the laugh part. It is a shame because we can transform somebody dull by endowing them with the fact that they are funny.

Keith tells one of the volunteers that she'll be the mom, she answers "I know". She then started laughing a bit and shaking herself, we can see that she is worried about it, and trying to shake it off.

It is a good idea to be mysterious on stage and have something happening inside you, the audience can tell that something is happening, but can't put their finger on it.

We finish the scene with a gag. Gags tend to destroy the story, so they are good for ending.

### ***Gibberish***

When you have several volunteers, a teacher must always find a nonpersonal criterion to select one. It must not get personal.

Gibberish is a technique that may allow to remove the gap between thinking and talking. It is important not to cheat, either by always using the same word, or going word after word slowly. Gibberish should sound like an actual language. You could try to go a full lunch at a restaurant in Gibberish while having to convince the waiter that you are talking in a foreign language.

**Exercise** (Gibberish cards). *Prepare gibberish cards, with gibberish sentences. Actors use the gibberish cards to say sentence after sentence.*

As always, Keith gives enough set up to the actors so that they can relax, and focus on the exercise. Somebody hears a noise at night in their house and discovers an unknown person on their couch.

When removing the speech, we see more deeply the interactions between the actors. *It's great changing yourself, but the best is to change the other.*

We seem to be a group pretty good at gibberish, Keith goes good-natured teacher *I don't need to teach these people anything.*

**Exercise.** *Gibberish cards, but sometimes add lines of your own.*

We see that sometimes repeating the last line that was said can be quite powerful, and work pretty nice in the scenes. If some player is having difficulties with the card, a shadow can give the next card to them.

**Exercise.** *Play 1,2,3 Status in Gibberish*

Keith asks the player to do it badly, where nobody changes. Well, it is indeed a bit pointless. This is also true about an actual text, it is the change that the text causes which is important.

Keith's way to do gibberish is to say something and let the other decide what you meant. Some acting dude was telling people that when doing gibberish they should try to make their partner understand what they are trying to say. Dumbass.

We want the Gibberish to sound like an actual language, if it starts to degenerate, don't hesitate to go back to the cards (failures, seatbelts, ...). At some point, the cards get boring, it's normal.

The Gibberish helps to pump physicality into the scenes, which sounds quite natural. It can be applied to many exercises, Master/Servants for example. It is always about the relation anyway, not the words.

### ***Street***

A rule for working in the street is to leave the people in a better state than they were in.

**Exercise** (Back&Forth Gibberish). *Players alternate between gibberish and actual language by pairs.*

Keith asks the players to start with something different. I guess we were starting to be lazy and copying too much.

If we push the game, we can change mid-sentence between the languages, and it looks amazing.

We all play it by pair. For once, I felt the first and obvious idea coming out of my mouth after having done a big mess.

### ***Ending***

A first way to end scenes is simply to make gags. Another one, more about the story, is to try to make a loop so that we have a feeling of completion. There is nothing left hanging.

The idea is that if everything in the story is connected, it appears to make sense, and there is nothing to explore.

**Exercise.** *Take three random disconnected things and connect them in a short story.*

### ***There***

Back to the 4 Exercise, trying to make an action more interesting.

Keith asks for a volunteer, and seat them down so they can relax. He then reminds us of the life belts and the time limit, chosen by the volunteer. The exercise takes the improviser on a stress test, where you have a lot of life belts and you can relax, but you still get to be yelled "make it more

interesting". It is quite difficult to keep the same action without changing it. You can often interrupt it, but if you stop for too long, you are probably changing it. The teacher must tell the improviser if they start something else.

We tend to rush, and we feel like we don't have enough idea. It can be twice as interesting when we go half the speed. We start doing it with two people on stage. Keith makes us notice that we are actually "stretching and compressing time here". Laurel and Hardy were very slow. Even more so as they were filmed in 16 fps, while we see them at 24fps!

I have quite a bit of fun doing a scene with two other people, and in fact, playing a Master-Servant scene. We last quite a while, but I still feel inside me a bit of panic during the scene.

It is a storytelling game. We must stop the improvisers from planning too much ahead. You thought you were going to put a cup on a table, but you're trying to move the table. It allows you to play ZigZag on storytelling, and not be stuck and fixated upon an ending. It can also provide some confidence, an actor should be able to go on stage with an object and just start something. We all play it in threes, one of us telling the time.

### *Shyness*

**Exercise (Fingers).** *Improvisers act a little scene, where their fingers are used to depict people.*

We have a nice scene where some banana is used as a couch, and people have sex with sheeps. Quite nice indeed. It is a nice game for shy beginners and can lead to improbable scenes. It would be awesome to have little finger props!





# 9

## DAY 9

### *Attitude*

There was a woman, an actress, who had a small limp. Once, she had to get an MRI and it turned out she had a big part of her brain missing, you could see the hole right in the middle! She was lacking a big part of her brain, and all you could see was a small limp. People asked her how could she possibly do all she did. When somebody told her she could not do something, she simply thought “I’ll show you”.

### *Going back*

How should we go back to our improvisations group? We should keep quiet, and not tell them everything. We should exercise tact, and be more good-natured.

The thing is that people like to work with the knowledge they have. People don’t like to change and don’t like to learn. We are victims of cognitive dissonance, which happens when ideas don’t fit together. There’s a BBC show called “knowledge or certainty”. If you want certainties, you go to religion, not science.

### *Pathos*

What should we present on stage? There are many unexplored territories. Nobody knows how to handle pathos. Nobody knows how to make political theatre.

### *Forward*

Advancing is an important skill. We should practice taking things forward. Ask yourself, what’s next? The issue is that when something might go forward, people will kill it. We are afraid of the future, possibly because it has death in it.

### *Eyes*

Looking in the eyes is powerful. You don’t look bodyguards in the eyes or they will kill you. It can express either love or dominance, strong emotions. Babies have big eyes and look us in the eyes. Having big eyes can make us more expressive, it is surprising how we can emotionally connect more strongly to a puppet with bigger eyes,

### *Railways*

Keith once had to work in a theatre which was next to a railway. You then have two choices. You can ignore the noise when the train passes, and your audience becomes disconnected. Or you can play with it, and have fun with the train. Everything can happen, and it's awesome.

### *The other*

What should we start with if we want to teach based on Keith's work? We should simply say things to them until they light up. Give them what they want and need. Look at their works and see the holes. I find it surprising how every question can become way simpler when you just think about the other, and lighting them up.

When you go on stage, you don't and can't have everything in mind. We must stop thinking sometimes! Don't plan until you see the students. You have so many strings to your bow, just try something. If they still look dead, try something else!

We should teach people what they want and need. A young girl at school was supposed to read a book on penguins, "this book told me more about penguins than I wanted to know".

Keith then asks for volunteers, who look extremely tense: *Why don't you sit a moment?*

### *Here*

**Exercise.** *Two improvisers gossip for 30 seconds. Then, they should bring the action back into the scene.*

We had a bit of gossip about the royal family fighting. Keith then brings back the action **on stage** by turning one of the improvisers into the king. The king is then given royal underpants, which makes a joke and a nice way to end the scene.

If at some point in time you have put the action outside of the stage, bring it back. If you feel uncreative, just realize "oh, we're gossiping!".

We then have a scene with some nice sex gossip. A woman is cheating on her husband when somebody rings at the door. The improv then knows it's her husband. The improviser plays it that way so that when he does appear at the door, **she won't have to change**. We should not overplay a door ring, and not foreshadow the change. If we do this kind of thing, we only dilute the change. It's nice to see an improv answer the phone/door and be wrong and be forced to change on the spot.

We all try in pairs. This exercise makes me work quite a bit. First, we must not care about the idea, just let the other react. I might start feeling it a bit and accept to take my first idea, not the best one. Then, I also discover that both people can **share** the responsibility of the change. We start a scene where we say that football is complete crap. Then, the other can admit that they are a famous football player, or I can recognize them.

We want scenes where when one player changes another. But on stage, our instincts make us avoid that...

## Techniques

There is no magical method to get us to be good improvisers. *Theresa calls it the Johnstone method, to me its methods.* The **uncertainty** might be part of its **magic**. *It's fantastic and bizarre.* We know nothing, but we have techniques to try and discover new things. It is like in quantum mechanics, or those astronomers who randomly pointed their telescope to a tiny patch of nothing before going on holidays, and discover hundreds of new galaxies when coming back.

## Change

We do once more the previous exercise but without advice from Keith on how or when to change. The scene appears to be stuck, nobody wants to take the risk or the lead. He makes the player do a mirror exercise.

**Exercise.** *Two improvisers mirror each other movements.*

It is important to go slow. At some point, we don't know who is following who. This is what should happen in improv, nobody and everybody in control.

We often see improvisers fight for control on stage: "Would you like some coffee?" "No, tea".

## Crap

It might be worth it sometimes to ask ourselves "Do we like this scene?" If you have a bad beginning, the scene will mostly be a repair job. We should accept to throw away bad scenes. If you do, you learn faster!

## Completion

When you feel uncreative here, it's because a piece of action has been completed. Don't worry, just pick an option:

1. change the relationship;
2. start some gossip, and then bring it on stage;
3. exit and go to scene 2 ("should we finish it in the bedroom?").

If you want good ideas, you are in a panic. You can simply say "Four people on stage", and then see what you will do with them. If you are nailed to the wall and look like you know exactly what you're gonna do, you look brave!

Put yourself in a situation where your mind has to think, then it will. When Keith said "Four people on stage", four people came, so he gives them something to do. He first simply says that it's a Master-Servant scene, with two people on the side ready to enter. They should come in when a unit is finished and only when they are needed. The players need to have balloons, it cheers us up.

As it turned out, Keith introduced us to the clown pecking order.

### *Playing with status*

**Exercise** (Clown pecking order). *Four players armed with balloons are next to one another with decreasing status. The lower people obey the higher-ups. Higher-ups always prefer to address the one directly below them.*

The players should make small steps so that it looks like just one creature moving. *In improv I describe all this shit, but I don't say you should be close.* As soon as we see the players move in one group, we start laughing. If you separate the group, you lose the power. If you drop your balloon, have your servant fetch it. If it explodes, steal one of your servants.

If you teach this, it takes a while to get the group to move as one creature.

The scenes get a bit messy, Keith tells the player to only hit once with the balloon. We can try to add variety, by changing the type of hit. Most players when hit makes an "ow" sound. It's a word, not a sound!

We had four men the first time, Keith asks for "Four women".

**Exercise** (Clown pecking order with Hat). *The players also have hats. You can throw away the hat of your servant. Your servant can fetch your hat for you. If you do not have your hat on, you scream.*

Beginners tend to throw the hat far, which breaks the rhythm, it is better to throw it at the feet. Once again, the ultimate truth is revealed to me during the scene: **balloons are awesome.**

**Exercise.** *Hat games with a pecking order with balloons. In the scene, the improvisers must be as silent as possible.*

In the hat game, people can protect themselves by taking their hats off. *If you take your hat off, I guess you have to scream.* This game purely revolves around a visual effect.

Keith made corporation people play this game, with the boss being number four and some random employee number one.

### *Jail*

Keith sometimes performed in jails. *It's amazing to hear the prisoners laughing.* He noticed the guards don't laugh, probably because they are still working. Once, people played Godot in jail, but there never was a second act. Everybody escaped at the break!

### *Status*

To warm people up, you can have them try to keep many balloons in the air.

**Exercise** (Master Servant). *Two improvs, one is the master, the other a servant.*

The balloon should still be a sanction, else it becomes pointless. Master tends to hold the balloon in a phallic position, it's fun to have the servant say "You promised you would not hold the balloon in this position Sir."

We want to stir things up. The beginning of scenes is often equivalent to gossip, we must bring the action in. If you try a tilt and the other stay

unchanged, you can keep piling up. “My family is here to see you, Sir.”, “They want to kill you, Sir.”

It is nice to not know who is the master at the beginning. It is about not knowing who is in control.

We then have a scene with one of the player dying. *It’s amazing to have someone alone on stage.* However, here Keith quickly sees the discomfort of the player alone and cuts the scene.

**Exercise** (Master Servant and making faces). *The servant makes faces.*

*Masters think they are nice people, but still beats their servants.* The game would be so stupid without the balloons.

### **Masks**

Somebody is wearing a nice Mr. Beans mask. When you have a mask, you should not move too much. If you move, it distracts from the mask and removes its power. We see the difference when Keith says to stay still. *Acting is the elimination of unnecessary gestures.*

### **Theatersport**

Some people put blind judges on stage for theatresports to show that who wins does not matter. It’s stupid! The players should not care who wins, but the audience must care a lot!

### **Dubbing**

**Exercise** (Dubbing Master Servant). *The servant is dubbed by the master*

The servant must move their lips when the master speaks. You can get to surprising scenes because the master can ask the servant to make things the servant would not have dared. We have “Cut off my balls”, which is one way to end a scene I guess.

We have a demonstration of the game in Japanese so that we pay more attention to the relationships.

### **Talking to audiences.**

**Exercise.** *An MC comes in and announces tonight’s show. He must also announce that somebody forgot their light on in the car park.*

Somebody does it once, and Keith then gave them a secret instruction. We are trying to get it with a less abstract audience. *In improv, there is no fourth wall.* Actors have been taught not to look at the audience, which is catastrophic for some plays (cf. sides in Shakespeare). When we see somebody in the street it is very different if you know the person or not. *Look at the audience like they are your friends and you just recognized them.*

The trick is to look unpredictably at people in the audience and raise your eyebrow. If you open the top half of your face, you look more alive and people may feel as being seen.

**Exercise.** *Somebody tells a story in front of five peoples. Peoples start with their hands up and slowly get them down. If they feel seen by the teller, they raise once again their hand. If their hand reach their knee, they start to make a bip bip sound.*

We first have a demonstration, and then everybody does it. I can feel that there is a difference between being looked at, and being seen.

Another trick to talk to the audience is to think that the audience is erotic and sexy. But they can't catch you! Don't get fixated on anybody. You can replace eroticism with anything nice which you like.

When you look at the audience, you should feel that something positive is coming from each person. You can fantasize about the audience. Then you give them some nice and positive energy.

There was a child, Shirley Temple, who was very famous. Her mother always asked her to "Sparkle" before going on stage. So, we should sparkle, and give out positive energy. *I want them to want to take you home!*

### *Eyes*

**Exercise.** *Players play a scene with small eyes. Then, with big eyes.*

We can see a big difference between the sensation sent out by the players, and the kind of scene it creates. When you have big eyes, you release positive energy. I should practice how to have **wide eyes** without it looking too unnatural.

Keith tells us about a movie in which an actress has big eyes. *She's wonderful in all the sex scenes, you should have a look.*<sup>1</sup>

Closing our eyes is defensive, we cut ourselves off from others. We experience looking at each other with big and small eyes. With big eyes, you have more energy, more connection. You look alive!

### *Alive*

If we do our best, we're gonna get stage fright. This is the place where we look alive, filled with good positive energy. When you say an obvious line, people will laugh. You can be a happy idiot!

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<sup>1</sup> Reading those notes back after a few years, I must now apologize that I did not take down the name of the actress.

### *Get off*

Keith just had to make one of his actor *get off while he was still winning* to make him great with the audience. We should not stick to the stage too much.

### *Status*

*Now, you have to get back to real life.* Keith tells us he starts with status games in workshops because that's what you do with friends. It quickly makes **the group friendly**.

### *Masks*

Actors when wearing masks can sometimes have amazing abilities, like acting out some Shakespeare. There must be a way to **transfer** the skill from the mask to the wearer, but Keith did not find it yet.

### *Attitude*

With Micetro, Keith thinks he found a format in which there is always something at every performance: it is better at the end than at the beginning. However, one Micetro was complete and utter crap to the utmost desperation of Keith, with nothing from the start to the end. Keith only discovered afterward that casting agents were in the crowd (pretending to be casting agent might be a good way to get free tickets by the way), and that the actors knew about it. A girlfriend of some actor had said to him "Do your best".

If you try to impress, on stage you get cut off from your real self, you wonder if you're doing your best.

*Don't try to change. If you understand the insights, your brain will change.*

It is often a matter of noticing the **obvious**. There might be simple ways for instance to make a magic show more interesting. *I've never seen a magician who's afraid of what's coming out of the hat.* We often forget the basics. *If you can look at the basis of things, you can improve.*

*There are a lot of defenses inside you, I hope you've met some of them.* Those defenses come mostly from our education. It is difficult to remove them, or even sometimes to discover them. The key is to keep experimenting. If we fail, it's no big deal, we stay happy. And we **try again**.

In the intro of Improv, Keith speaks about his attempts as a teacher to make children want to write. His approach was simple, try something new every day, until it worked. He was given 46 students, while he was just out of college. When it comes to young teachers, that is the best thing to do

*if you want to turn them into assholes.* We could try to think about how we would approach the same problem for Arithmetic. *Can you get them to do it?*

Many people refuse to change or try to think about new things. For a time, Keith was taking some pills and got very ill. The doctor was not very optimistic, but Keith stopped taking the pill, and two weeks later was told by the doctor “You’ve made an amazing recovery.” It was discovered twelve years later that those specific pills killed a lot of people. Why didn’t the doctor report what happened with Keith? He had put himself in a box, he was not creative anymore.<sup>1</sup>

*Always pretend you don’t know how to do it, you might find something new.*

We should be interested in everything. In any situation, there is always something to take away. If you have a child who’s trying to learn guitar, but plays badly in class, you might say to him “It’s fantastic, you’ve got all the songs wrong! We’ve found something you can’t do at all.” It is fascinating to see that children learn faster from other children.

When Keith went into early retirements, somebody wanted him to go back to college and was persuaded that Keith would be bored. Keith received a call from him someday, and was asked “What did you do today?”. Keith had read 5 new Danish plays this day, and the guy at the end of the phone was left speechless. He had forgotten that *learning is for pleasure*.

*I’m arguing for the importance of attitude over intelligence. If you stay with the problem, you don’t need to be intelligent.*

Many people don’t want to learn new things. Keith took only two mornings off at the university. The first one was to watch the decision of the committee charged to investigate why Challenger blew up. The committee was saying they didn’t know why it exploded. A guy at the end of the line before some break asked for a glass of ice-cold water. At the end of the break, everybody had to have a glass of course. Then, this guy stands up, takes out from his glass a piece of metal. “This is the same material as challenger.” He then dropped it on the floor, and it exploded. On launching day, it was cold, and the engineer had said it was a bad idea to take off, that the materials would break. Management said that it was impossible to delay the launch. The committee did not want to learn this truth. The second morning off was to witness a Cuban captured by the US and accused of being a spy. He was supposed to give a speech to say he was well treated to avoid some revolts. He came to the podium, took off his shirt showing scares and said “they’ve tortured me, and they will do it again if I tell you that”. Of course, the US then had to free the guy. Sometimes, we can see through the cracks of reality.

*It’s not IQ guys, it’s attitude.*

### ***Why everybody is not a genius?***

This is the last day, Keith has saved the best things for the end. It’s simple. For instance, if you want to be a writer, you could try to write things that please you.

<sup>1</sup> In most cases, it is a good idea to listen to doctors, and scientist. But do remember that nobody has any absolute truth, you can always think by yourself, and ask for second advice.



*To get through the world takes so much ability. Look at mice, flies, spiders. Their brain is so tiny, and they get by. Why can't you press the right button and do it?*

*You should look inwards, for the demon who's stopping you. The education wants everybody to be tame, it is a bad attitude. We should question everything.*

Keith is not a huge fan of light entertainment when there is only this. *Entertainment pisses me off.* Stress has been attached to learning for most people. If light entertainment taught you something, you would be stressed. Some guy was saying about his show "If you learn anything from our show, we've failed." This is sad. We should be able to provide interesting entertainment, but we almost have to trick people to do so.

Culture, the society, doesn't want artists, it wants normal people. We are repair jobs, but we can get better. One of the keys is **curiosity**.

### **Status**

**Exercise.** *Three improvisers. Two parents waiting for their son to get back.*

The son should enter when he thinks the scene is boring, and simply go to his bedroom. We see the effect of the previous day, the actors kind of already have numbers. Of course, if the son goes directly to its room, we want a scene 2!

**Exercise** (1,2,3 Status).

When you teach this game, you can at some point remove number 2, and then bring it back. Keith is always very attentive to the **voice** of the players. *When you talk, you want to control the audience.*

We have a nice accident, when somebody comes back from the toilets during the scene, looking like he just came out of the late teenager rooms. It is a bit messy but so nice! We have 4 players, so, we start a new game live. . .

**Exercise** (1,2,3,4 Status).

It is the number 1 job to prevent chaos and hold the scene together. There are a lot of techniques to get you up or down (breathing when you speak will take you down).

The teenage years are difficult because it is when we start wanting to change the established numbers.

### **Others**

**Exercise.** *A big group of improv. They can propose actions, which you can follow enthusiastically, or go sit down.*

We see a house in the forest, and we go in. If you see a house, *most of the time you just enter.* Why is the door opened? It is so that we will not have to meet anybody, and risk being changed. The audience unconsciously wants us to meet somebody. We unconsciously don't want to.

When looking at this game being performed, we should ask ourselves "How many people is this suggestion going to lose?"

**Exercise.** *Make two big groups (boys and girls?). Each group must speak in one voice. Two people meet together.*

When put inside a big group, actors look nicer, they know they won't be singled out. It sheds anxiety.

We should still take risks. If we know what we're going to say, we can speed up. We should not always lead or follow. If we don't know what to say, we can just make a sound, somebody will complete it.

It can be fun to get the audience to do it, but it is not easy. It needs a crowded venue, without too much space between people.

Keith puts 8 people together, and make them ask in one voice to the audience "Can you play this game?" We say yes, but an actual audience would say "No", in one voice. Keith then asks the one-8 "Would you like to be the audience blind date?" "Yes, ding dong". The audience could say "Go away", and the one-8 could reply "we have whisky", and then on. . .

This is one way to transition from players to the audience. In the group of eight, the actors are open and look like they are having fun. *Look how beautiful they look. I want to take them back to Canada!*

### **Laugh**

Some games only produce laughter. It's ok, we can see that, but you need to have another **purpose**. *It's dreadful to see people only trying to get laughs.*

### **Self improvement**

Giving a hot cup filled with boiling water to an improviser can be a good idea. You split the attention, and you can instantly see the body adjust. Keep in mind if you try it that one of the main instructions should still be "don't die" though.

Theater taught in school should teach you how to move and how to speak, but it is usually just trying to get a show at the end of the year. The teacher is not teaching, he is just exploiting what is already there.

Keith had a speech defect when he was young. When you have a speech defect, you don't know, people just nod at you. I feel a bit like this sometimes in English. . . The school was not responsible for Keith's voice. Only one teacher ever told him "You should get speech lessons". It was a good start, but when Keith asked "Where?", he said that he did not know. Most educators are not concerned with the whole person, they often just care about one subject.

Keith went to teacher training hoping to get speech lessons. Yet, they taught nothing about voice. *You're responsible for your own learning. If you're not getting help, find somebody else.*

### **More than laugh**

*If you don't understand why the game exists, you go on stage and you don't do things that can create stories.* Word At a Time can take you anywhere.

Some games are just filler games, for instance, the "no s" game. It is stupid for instance to learn to play "one voice" without mistakes. In this game, you

go faster, you do mistakes, and thanks to the group you don't self punish. It looks **brave and courageous!**

It is possible to get stories from the one voice trick.

**Exercise.** *Many people act as one person. They write a story in the spirit of Word At a Time.*

This is an open-ended version. No one should lead the group! When you start this game, if you have problems, you should look at each other. But later on, if it's fun, that's what matters.

When you are stuck in this kind of game, or anywhere actually, you can use a trick to trigger the actors. For instance, you can simply point to something, or say "suddenly".

In stories, we should wait a bit before putting something on stage. *Go on stage to be a happy nothing.* Calm.

Keith met some improv completely stuck on stage. He asked him about his methods: "I go on stage, try to find an ending, then relax and postpone". *It's like never leaving the shore.*

We should not know where we are going.

### **The audience**

**Exercise.** *An MC announces a show and a small piece of information.*

We want a reaction from the audience, we want them to light up. We see the first try. It was a bit pressured. Keith to relax the player says that it's fine, everybody does it. The advice is that you should look like you don't exactly know what you are saying and that everybody is incredibly erotic, but you can't show it.

We have a new demonstration, it is much friendlier, but a bit much on the erotic side, we must hide it.

Keith makes several people pass. At some point, he asks one to do it first badly, and then with the tricks. When the sex trick does not work for somebody, he easily says *forgot about the erotic part, it does not work for you.*

### **Emotions**

**Exercise (Happy Snap).** *Two improvs, and three guardians. During the scene, an improv can snap, the other one is then dragged away by the three guardians waiting in the back, and must say "but I'm a good improviser".*

We instantly have volunteers for the three people in the back. It is so easy to get volunteers for the back because they don't have to act, they don't have to show emotions. It feels false to try to show emotions because we only do this when we lie. *It is not the actor's job to show emotions, it is to do stuff. If it happens it happens.* Keith reminds us of the woman who came on stage to scream, while she should have come to check out what was happening and suddenly see a body.

*To hell with emotions, it screws up so many people.* We don't have volunteers for acting because it feels fake. In some great movie scenes, when questioned about their acting, some actors say that they were trying to repress emotions. Then, you can **project** onto them.

We finally have a demo of the exercise (improvs are relaxed after so much talking!). We don't snap enough! When it gets boring, we should snap.

**Exercise** (Boring Happy Snap). *Nothing important should happen in the scene.*

The expelled player can ask "Why did you snap?", and the other can say "I don't know". You repeat the game until you can stay alive.

### **Debrief**

How to debrief a show is a difficult question. If you do it just after the show, people get emotional and angry. Then, you try to set up a date after the show, people forget about it and don't show up. Then, you try to do it before the next show, and you go on stage in a bad mood.

Keith has a very detailed technique for debriefing. You should have someone take notes of all scenes during the show. Then, just after the show, have a debrief. But everybody must agree that you're not gonna discuss anything, if you want to discuss, you wait to be in the pub.

Then, you ask about each scene. You want only remarks, **no discussion**. If somebody says "We did not want the waiter to come in", this is where everything can go downhill. The waiter can only say thanks for sharing.

We should only say things that have to be said. Discussions can be poisonous, they are mostly for status. It is however important to make the feedback. If something is really serious, you can have a special meeting.

Things can be different when you have a trusted leader in the group. Of course, if the leader is not trusted, he should not lead.

Several English teachers were invited to give a week of acting lessons in Denmark. They were told that everything would be done as they wanted, but that every day would start with discussions... Keith was quite suspicious, however, they had nice rules for discussions: everybody should be heard, and if you get emotional, we don't listen to you.

### **Permission**

**Exercise** (Fast Food Stanislavsky).

You only need 8 instructions, we could add some of our own.

Some instructions should be kept the whole scene, like "Endow them with humor". Then you transform the person.

Candlelight dinners are romantic because the low light makes the center of the eye bigger, which is the same as when we are interested.

When picking volunteers for this game, Keith asks if they like the list. We then have a scene, where the set up is that somebody arrived early at a party, the host went to take a shower, and another guest arrives.

It is important to frequently say "Look again!" to the players, or we do not do it enough.

Keith had the list printed in some newsletters, and some people in England told him that the list did not work. When he asked for a demonstration, it was like slow motion impro. They were trying to find the best instruction. You just look, and anything you can make seems truthful, you do it.

Lists do not have to match the setup, they can go on any scenes.

We have an FFS scene in a brothel with a computer-like human as the Madam.

Then Keith asks for a murder scene from the same players, and want them to keep the same lists. It looks like he does not want to change both the setup and the lists at the same time so that we can see continuity. We get a scene, but *this is not a murder scene*.

It is hard to have murder or love scenes. In the murder scene, you are changed a lot (well, you are dead...), and in a love scene, you are exposed.

**Exercise** (Death in a minute). *Two improvisers, one of them must kill the other under a minute.*

The set up is a blind date in a slow service coffee. We take too long, and the minute is over before anybody is killed. We can just come in and die. This is teaching us not to wait till the end. It's fine to be alone on stage. We witness time distortion with this game.

Beginners want to know who's gonna kill who. Then, they look at each other, which is nice. We should not add more timing information, like 30 seconds, it is part of the learning process.

Some groups forbid to be alone on stage, which is a bit sad. This game seems *good to introduce beginners to the stage*. One of the players has to take the blame, else it is nonsense.

**Exercise** (Fast Food Stanislavsky).

We go back to FFS, with a parent meeting the new girlfriend of their son sitting on the couch. We see somebody answering the phone with their finger, I think it is not good to mime the idea of the thing, we should mime the thing.

During the scene, an improv touches the other, and then suddenly goes back and crosses their leg the other way. It seems like it is a way to defend himself, they are afraid to bore the other.

**Exercise** (Multiple Fast Food Stanislavsky). *Three improvisers. Each has two lists, one for each of the other improv. We have a scene between each pair, and then a scene with everybody.*

We have a cheating wife trying to seduce a best friend of the husband and the best friend who is in love with the husband. It can be difficult to make some instructions truthful, but we can do it. *Somehow make it real*. At some point, the woman tells me she loves me, and I answered "but I'm gay". This is a deflection, I don't want to be changed. **Be changed !**

### **Mantras**

Mantras were not very successful in the workshop, nobody got deeply involved. It is however an ancient way to mess with speech capacities.

### **Destiny**

Dario Fo was once playing in a big stadium when a big storm arrived. With the crashing sound of thunder exploding around him, he started to have a debate with god on whether he exists or not. *He should have died on the spot, struck by lightning.*

*Goodbyes*

Keith lived two years with a photographer, Roger Maine. He could not speak to people, and made beautiful pictures, speaking of loneliness. Keith got him to talk to people, and he stopped being a good photographer.

If you are not a fan of some type of art, pick a socially acclaimed piece (a great Picasso for instance), print it in big in your bedroom, and don't pay attention to it. If you pay attention, your brain goes "it's crap". If you don't something is slowly happening, and unlocking.

We can try to unlock bits of what lies behind our consciousness. When you have a bad feeling, you should listen to it, it is your other brain telling you something.

*The game where you shoot wrong names is important, you should remember that.*

Most of what Keith has seen, *It's just common sense*. We must accept the simple truth.

*If you do anything, do a lot of it.*

Art is important. We should care about what we do. Have a purpose. *Hitler thought art was important. What if those guys in Vienna had accepted him in their art school...* Keith feels strongly about what he did. *Because it was a comedy, people thought it was unimportant.*

*Thank you for entertaining an old man.*

*I wore my new shoes, and nobody noticed.*

## Part II

MY CONCLUSIONS, FOR NOW...





Those are some of my current thoughts about the workshop. And some more.

### **Raw emotions**

I will keep a very warm feeling about this workshop. I feel like there was a combination of improbable things that turned it into a unique experience. I was actually surrounded by amazing people, and I was lucky enough to learn from most of them. Thank you, folks!

Surrounded by those amazing people doing amazing things, we were lead on a journey by an incredible teacher. Now eighty-five, I believe that partly thanks to his age, Keith radiates even more than before good-naturedness. I think he hadn't taught for a while when he arrived before us, and he was as excited as we were. He talked a lot to us, something which according to his biography he consciously wanted to avoid in previous workshops. I feel like he shared a lot with us. In those 10 days suspended in time and space, he lit us up and we lit him up.

### ***Teaching***

Keith

- does a lot of things to appear good-natured;
- introduces one day a subject quickly in the middle of an anecdote, and then tells what was actually behind it another day;
- repeats a lot;
- makes us do a lot of things until we light up;
- makes people be on stage while he talks before they have to act;
- makes us experience changes;
- dare make sexual references;
- loves balloons and sofa;
- reveals personal things about himself.

Keith tries to fight against our fear of being exposed.

*My dummy reminder list*

- Be changed.
- Keep my voice up, don't move too much, breath.
- Accept the first idea, trust that it is gonna be ok.
- Be interested in everything, curious.
- Try, fail, try again.
- Light the other up.
- Be there.

*We are afraid of being exposed.*

If I try to provide a unified view on Keith's methods, I would say that everything goes back in the end to the fear of being exposed to others. Stage fright is the universal phobia of being in front of people, of talking to people. We fear what we might reveal about ourselves.

- Fear of failure is the fear of being judged by others, failure reveals what we can or cannot do, and failure may reveal how much we care about something. Failure may reveal that we are not, in fact, good-natured.
- Fear of change also comes from the fear of being exposed. When change happens, we tend to react honestly, thus exposing ourselves. We have built a social shell in order to survive and to protect ourselves, removing it is equivalent to revealing ourselves.
- Fear of the unknown is the fear that we may have to react to it. Going into the unknown implies that we may change when faced with what we discover there, thus we fear it.

I am afraid of failure, of change, and of the unknown, because I'm afraid of being exposed. If we can get rid of the fear, or recognize it and accept it, we can free our brain.

**Status** is a small model of human interactions. A status transaction is an unspoken revelation of ourselves, are we higher or lower than the other? *Status is a small model of human interactions. Mastering the status is a way to feel like we may control a bit of what we reveal on stage unconsciously, and if we understand it, we might be less afraid of it. Playing with status removes a bit of the fear. We play status games with our friends, people who we are comfortable with. If we understand how human interactions work and how we expose ourselves during them, we may lose a bit of this fear.*

**Spontaneity** is terrifying in this model. Spontaneity strongly implies to expose ourselves, to expose our hidden self. We are all at least a little bit monsters deep inside. But, *here you can be monsters.*

**Story telling** is about going back to what you did, and about changing relationships. To do some good storytelling, you have to give some importance to what you did, and you have to accept to change. If we accept to

change, we may be exposed. If we go back on things, we take the risk that some things we say might actually be important. To reveal nothing about ourselves, we try to always invent new things and pile them up, all of them finally not important. If we accept that some things we do might be important, if we remove the fear, we accept to look backward and reuse stuff. *Go forward into the darkness. Bring back the past into the light.* If you accept to change as an actor, and accept to give importance to things, you can naturally write a good story.

**Don't do your best.** "But I did my best" is the best excuse that somebody can say to avoid the blame, and avoid changing. *If you do your best, you are the prisoner of the audience.* If you do your best, you get afraid of being exposed as inadequate, not good enough.

**Care about the others.** If everything you do is about the other, about trying to light them up, you may forget about yourself, and about being exposed. *Did your partner have fun?* If we take this further, we may also extend this to objects. Don't care about what you are doing, do care about the relationship that exists between you and the person or the object you are with.

We must resolve the issue of fear. Putting on an armor is not the solution, we only hide the fear. I am not sure of what is the solution. We must accept the fear, and accept to appear as human beings. A good place to start is obviously all of Keith games, as long as you understand their purpose. Anyway, as with any problem, the first part of the solution is always about accepting that the problem exists.

*I'm afraid, and it's ok. Thank you Keith.*



# 12 | BEYOND KEITH

Working on improvisation, especially with the help of Keith, opens a door to many paths. It is a path of Philosophy, Neurology, Psychology, Sociology, Theater, Poetry, Learning, and many other things. I only started this journey quite recently, but have already discovered many interesting things. Let me briefly share some of them with you. This is a snapshot, taken on the 19th of December 2020, two years after the workshop, of what I hope will be an ever-changing philosophy.

**It is unkind to be kind.** This is a quote by Keith that many people should take to heart. *it is unkind to be kind*. I wrote it twice, I know, but oh damn it's important. In the french improv community (and probably all around the world), many people started to develop a confusion between benevolence and complaisance. Some communities have put the rule that says that you have to be benevolent at the top of their list. Yet, being benevolent does not mean that you have to build a group based on self-congratulation, and telling to your partners that some crappy stuff they are doing is great. Do not become complaisant with bad work. Be a person that makes people better, not complacent. To break some dogmas about improv, a good reference is:

- *Impro from the inside out* - Mick Nappier

**Fighting our habits** The Exercise 5 where you shoot out the wrong name for stuff is important. There are a million ways to do this exercise wrong. One of the goals is to break the automatic patterns and associations that we have in our brains. You have to actually look at the object, have your brain recognize it as what it is, and then force your brain to call it something else.

You may experience the same feelings with the book *Drawing on the right side of the brain* (cf. Refs).

**Improv as a way to understand the world** *Sometimes, we see through the cracks of reality*. I can only encourage you to read some sociology, notably by Bourdieu. Then, try to see how its notion of habitus, or social domination based on money, culture, and symbols, ties with some of the tidbits that Keith is telling us.

**Fear** You have to put yourself at risks. Mammet says that if a writer can arrive at a point in the story where he has no clue of what can happen and how its characters will handle the situation, then this is where you want to be. Further, Mammet says that *Drama is about ordinary people doing extraordinary things*, and that the actors going on stage are exactly doing that, ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Interesting read:

- *True and False* - David Mammet

**Make it more interesting** Recall Exercise 4. I cannot stress how important this exercise is. It was for me the first foray into clowning. A clown may simply be an expert at "being there". Truthfully. When you are advancing

in a story, and being affected, you are storytelling. When you are there, you are clowning. If we can do both, we may go for a wonderful ride, and take the audience with us.

Note that I do not make this distinction to try to define what is acting, nor what is clowning. I am trying to use words in their common and classical meaning, to try to give you an idea of what I'm talking about. But in the end, there may be no difference between theater, clowns, dancers, poets, . . . . All this is about one thing, art. The art of being. The art of being there. The art of being alive.

### Life Philosophy

Before ending those notes, I'll indulge in a bit of philosophy. All that follows are just crazy thoughts going around my head. But, it has ties with everything that has been discussed previously and may offer you some things against which to confront your own thoughts and experience. So here is the big question.

What does it mean to be alive? For me, something which is alive is something that evolves and changes consciously. Something that does the same thing every day is an automaton, it is not alive. Something that simply changes randomly is not alive either. Life is what moves consciously, both in mind and body. Saying this might be the saddest thing ever: due to the world that we live in, it is incredibly hard to be alive, and few people do have the opportunity to try.

Then, it is obvious that we have to fight this. But how?

**Being alive** First, it should be a constant effort to try to understand the meaning of being alive. I do apologize, but for this part, I will recommend some french authors:

- *La horde du contrevent*, and *Les furtifs* - Alain Damasio
- *La poésie sauvera le monde* - Jean-Pierre Siméon

The first one, tells us that in a sense, being alive is being lively. "Vif". Two quotes come to mind on this "Live every day as if it was your first". Then, you may be truly affected and changed by what is happening. And you may actually pay attention, be conscious. Another one, which echoes nicely with the first chapter of Keith's Impro, is "Man's maturity: to have regained the seriousness that he had as a child at play." (actually a quote by Nietzsche). Children are in the moment, focused and conscious.

The second book tells us that that poetry is what goes beyond the established and fixed sense. It is what makes us think, confront us with things that we do not understand instantly, and broaden our horizons.

**Education** Keith tells it many times, education, as it exists nowadays, makes us fit into society so that we do not stand out. It kills creativity, and it thus kills change. Alternative educations are possible, and Keith is the impersonation of a teacher that tries to emancipate his students. Some interesting read on this would be:

- *Le maitre ignorant* - Jacques Rancière

- *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood* - Alexander S. Neill.

Education is learning new stuff, always. Education is learning to learn, learning to change in a meaningful way. And yet, paradoxically, education is also repetition, doing the same thing over and over again before we get it right.<sup>1</sup>

**Art** A clown is one who is actually there, inside the moment. An actor is one who embodies conscious physical movements. A dancer is both in his body and in the space. A painter is one that actually sees around him. Practicing most arts teaches us, in one way or another, to be once again conscious. Further, practicing some art is often linked to being creative. In short, we practice conscious movement. Art is life.

But, is Art reduced to what I mention? For me, the separation between rationalism and romanticism is a stupid one.<sup>2</sup> We can go further, by claiming that science is a form of art. As a single example, being completely focused on a mathematical proof and trying to further human knowledge, this is both a highly conscious and creative activity. So why can't we call it Art?

There are many ways to start experiencing this philosophy of conscious movement. For instance, I've played around with clowning, following ideas from Ira Seidenstein and Caspar Schjeldred. *The six viewpoints* by Mary Overlie tries to teach us to go back to the basic, fundamental pieces of the living arts, and thus to the foundations of life. I'd highly recommend that you start to rediscover consciousness. This of course has a lot of links with Japanese Zen, or yoga.<sup>3</sup> But you don't have to have your head upside down to be conscious. It can be done during any kind of activity. Knitting, walking in the street, dancing alone in your room. Just do something consciously, to see what happens. And then, pick an Art, and practice.

**Others** For many, I may have described something which may only encompass self-development and a solitary journey. This is not what I have in mind. This is not some dry technical journey. A prerequisite to conscious movement is to have feelings about what you are doing, and about others.

You cannot pursue the path of conscious change alone. Others are one of the best things, to push you further. And in turn, you are one of the best things to push them further. Quoting "Les Furtifs", we should probably strive to, in French "*Porter au point de fusion nos puissances. Et en offrir l'incandescence à ceux que l'on aime.*". This would roughly translate to "*bring our strengths to their melting points, and offer their blinding light to those who love.*". Conscious change is sublimed by the encounter with others. And has the speech in the book goes on, others are required so that you can meet them, and be affected by them, and change.

*"Et puisque c'est la rencontre, le fait actif d'affecter et d'être affectés, passionnément, qui va nous hisser au vivant, il devient crucial d'aller à la rencontre. À la rencontre aussi bien d'un enfant, d'un groupe, d'une femme que de choses plus étranges comme une musique qui te trouve, un livre intranquille, un chat qui ne s'apprivoise*

<sup>1</sup> The need for repetition, or discipline, to allow for some creative stuff, this is an idea that has been around since ages. I am still looking into it, notably with works by Foucault, Deleuze, Stiegler.

<sup>2</sup> On this, see *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance* - Robert Pirsig (the sequel is crap, however).

<sup>3</sup> cf. *Zen in the art of Archery* - Eugen Herrigel

*pas, une falaise ; côtoyer un arbousier en novembre, épouser la logique d'une machine, rencontrer un cri, la mer, un jeu vidéo, une heure de la journée, la neige. . .*" I won't try to translate this part, in fear of losing its poetry. But rather, inspire myself freely from it, in order to conclude.

**Conscious Change** A true encounter, which is the fact of actively affecting and being affected by something else; this is the core of Conscious Movement (recall that the movement shall be both in mind and body). The encounter with something, whether it be a play, a book, or a mathematical proof. It may be the view from the top of the Himalaya or the most beautiful flower in your garden. But also, the encounter with someone else. Friends, lovers, teachers, family, . . .

This is hard to discuss. This is both science and poetry. This is both solitary exploration and emotional gatherings of people. This is a promise to keep learning all your life. To update your belief when needed. To create new things. To be there. This is conscious movement.

#### **And so what?**

Those are the foundations on which I stand, to claim that we need more arts in society. We need to allow people to be more creative. We don't need some entertainment to be able to bear through a miserable life of dull work, we need the opportunity to be alive. It means I'd like to change society so that everybody could have a go at conscious movement. There are so many incredible people around there, if only we let them be incredible. *Why isn't everybody a genius?*

I will strive to follow this path of conscious movement. To give you an idea, as of now, I am looking at the work of Bernard Stiegler, a French philosopher. Fascinating bits. I do hope to learn to draw soon, while in parallel, I am learning German and how to play the ukulele. I am also writing a bit, mainly for Role Playing games with some friends. So many opportunities for creative things to do, for practicing being.

But, as I see the state of the world, I have to admit, I would like to be of some help, push a bit towards what I feel is the good direction. All of this raises two terrifying questions, which I guess are part of the Conscious Movement:

*What do I want to do? What can I do?*



## Part III

## APPENDIX



- *Lower your standard! Don't do your best! Copy people!*
- *I think improvisers lose more fear than actors.*
- *It is better to cut off a bad scene. The audience knows its crap too!*
- *If you do your best, you are the prisoner of the audience.*
- *I am an alien.*
- *Status are a small model of human interactions.*
- *We play status games with our friends.*
- *Improvisers should know everything.*
- *Do not ignore accident!*
- *Breath!*
- *Here you can be monsters.*
- *Why not have lots of stuff?*
- *The food is disgusting but the chief is improvising tonight.*
- *If every game is a wild success, you are in deep trouble.*
- *Balloons turn people on.*
- *It is unkind to be kind.*
- *Knowing your purpose is not enough, trying to achieve it is.*
- *I thought about beginners actually eating during the scenes. It works for the airlines.*
- *I'm not as nice as you think.*
- *If you ask an improviser for a Christmas scene, they've got to put burning nuns inside it.*
- *The theatre should study human behavior, this way it does not get outdated.*
- *You give them stupid names, like James.*
- *You should not dismiss Trump, he is a kind of genius.*
- *Just by being altered, you can create the material.*
- *If you can get toddlers to fight, you can place safe bets on them.*
- *Men with brooms, very strange.*
- *I never had a teacher who said to me "I don't know".*
- *Don't walk on the stage to make people laugh, walk on stage to make something happen.*
- *Did your partner have fun?*
- *Break the rules!*
- *More tongue! I like saying that. . .*
- *I'm gonna die before women get equal pay. Am I pissed off? Yes!*
- *It does not take talent to choose dynamite instead of bread.*
- *If you think you need a good idea, you're paralyzed. Just change the relationship.*
- *Is it a good idea? It is if he changes!*
- *I used to say "Drop dead Keith", but now it might happen and they'd feel bad. . .*
- *Go forward into the darkness. Bring back the past into the light.*

- *You look inward, see what's there, and use it.*
- *The visitors should always win.*
- *People who say yes are rewarded by their adventures, people who say no by their safety.*
- *Did you know that queen Victoria never looked back before sitting down?*
- *I'm not trying to be funny, I'm trying to stir up the relationship.*
- *Art is anything you want to steal.*
- *I want to unglue you.*
- *If possible, all ideas should be tried and not discussed.*
- *The Korean army once wanted the license for theatre sport.*
- *You must not be afraid to come into this space.*
- *This is your space.*
- *I'm old, but I can still see what's in front of my nose.*
- *I don't go to America any more, I'm afraid of their hospitals.*
- *You have to get ride of the fear.*
- *The voice is to control the audience.*
- *Can you keep it up? I like that in a woman.*
- *It's great changing yourself, but the best is to change the other.*
- *If you want to understand the Nazis, you've got to understand that it could have happened here.*
- *There's penis humour everywhere.*
- *Castrating statues seems to be fun.*
- *Theresa calls it the Johnstone method, to me its methods.*
- *Bloody Rody walks.*
- *In improv I describe all this shit, but I don't say you should be close.*
- *You can remember Keith said that and try something else.*
- *It's amazing to hear the prisoners laughing.*
- *I've lived long enough to see the sky colour change. I've lived long enough to see cultures change. It's amazing.*
- *It's amazing to have someone alone on stage.*
- *We need something peaceful this afternoon, after all the balloons.*
- *If you want the sex, you must accept the cat.*
- *In improv, there is no fourth wall.*
- *Look at the audience like they are your friends and you just recognized them.*
- *I want them to want to take you home!*
- *She's wonderful in all the sex scenes, you should have a look.*
- *Now, you have to get back to real life.*
- *Don't try to change. If you understand the insights, your brain will change.*
- *I've never seen a magician who's afraid of what's coming out of the hat.*
- *If you can look at the basis of things, you can improve.*
- *There are a lot of defences inside you, I hope you've met some of them.*
- *Always pretend you don't know how to do it, you might find something new.*
- *Learning is for pleasure.*
- *I'm arguing for the importance of attitude over intelligence. If you stay with the problem, you don't need to be intelligent.*
- *It's not IQ guys, it's attitude.*
- *To get through the world, it takes so much ability. Look at mice, flies, spiders. Their brain is so tiny, and they get by. Why can't you press the right button and do it?*

- *You should look inwards, for the demon who's stopping you.*
- *Look how beautiful they look. I want to take them back to Canada!*
- *If you don't understand why the game exists, you go on stage and you don't do things that can create stories.*
- *It is a talented group, very few virgins.*
- *I would eat the little girl right away.*
- *It is not the actor job to show emotions, it is to do stuffs. If it happens it happens.*
- *To hell with emotions, it screws up so many people.*
- *Pessimists are more likely to be right. I do positive pessimism.*
- *If you can find better things to do to get people ride of fear, please do it!*
- *He should have died on the spot, struck by lightning.*
- *The game where you shoot wrong names is important, you should remember that.*
- *It's just common sense.*
- *If you do anything, do a lot of it.*
- *Hitler thought art was important. What if those guy in Vienna had accepted him in their art school. . .*
- *Because it was comedy, people thought it was unimportant.*
- *Thank you for entertaining an old man.*
- *And I wore my new shoes, and nobody noticed.*



## KEITH'S REFERENCES

## Books:

- *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!*  
Shows the nature of learning. Problem-solving skills. Humility. Fun!
- *The Body Has Its Reasons* - Therese Bertherat  
Our bodies are us, they are not just some house that we carry around. When did we forget that as a society?
- *Thinking fast and slow* - Daniel Kahneman  
Covers many cognitive biases. Facial expressions induce feelings.<sup>1</sup>
- *The natural way to draw*
- *Drawing on the right side of the brain* - Betty Edwards  
The fight between the rational and the artistic mind. Still some debate about neurological evidence of specialized brain sides, but, I argue that it does not matter. There are two ways of thinking, and whether it is linked to a side of the brain does not matter. If you do try some of the exercises in this book, you will feel those two ways of thinking.
- *The divided self* - R.D.Laing
- *Audition* - Michael Shurtleff
- *The bible* - God  
Have you heard about the guy burying its underpants ? Or the raping angel of death ?
- *Society of mind* - Minsky
- *The naked Ape* - Desmond Morris
- *Barn Burning* - William Faulkner
- *On writing* - Stephen King  
Perseverance. Down to earth approach.

## Movies:

- *Safety last* - Howard Loyd
- *City lights, The kid* - Chaplin  
Funny and sentimental.
- *Christmas Day !* - Mr. Beans  
Just taking the next following thing, without originality.
- *Ikiru* - Akira Kurosawa  
You only have three months to live...
- *Seven samurais, hidden fortress* - Akira Kurosawa
- *The passion of Joan of arc*
- *The shining* - Kubrick  
Just seeing somebody being the subject of attention is stressful.

<sup>1</sup> Note that some (a minority, as far as I know) of the psychological evidence mentioned in this book has now been deemed false by meta-reviews. Still provides a lot of insight.

## MY REFERENCES

I recommend the books recommended by Keith. But let me add some more! I constrained myself to be short. I did not include many references about theater or improv, other great lists already exist. This is more of a mix between multiple influences, to broaden a bit our horizons.

- *Impro* - Keith Jonhstone  
Did you expect me to start with something else?
- *La poésie sauvera le monde* - Jean-Pierre Siméon
- Any introduction to the theories of Bourdieu.
- *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance* - Robert Pirsig  
The sequel is crap, however. Don't spend too much time on metaphysics. This is about life.
- *Zen in the art of Archery* - Eugen Herrigel
- *True and False* - David Mammet
- *Clown Secrets* - Ira Seidenstein  
I don't find the book overly well written, but I do recommend its approach if you can go to some Workshop when he is around, or see Caspar Schjelbred in France. Rumor has it that a new book by Ira will soon be releaser, I am waiting for it!
- *The six viewpoints* - Mary Overlie  
Going back to the basics, always.
- *Les techniques du jeu dramatique* - Charles Antonetti  
Following the fascinating "Éducation populaire", i.e. popular education ideas. It talks about conscious movements.
- *Le maitre ignorant* - Jacque Rancière  
This book takes a somewhat extreme point of view but still provides many fascinating ideas.
- *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood* - Alexander S. Neill.
- *True and False* - David Mammet
- *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* - Haruki Murakami
- *La horde du contrevent*, and *Les furtifs* - Alain Damasio
- <https://www.languagetransfer.org/>  
Check it out for some free language lessons, that try to actually make you think, not just repeat like a parrot.
- Anything by Terry Pratchett. Or rather everything. Just to see that you can be entertaining and intelligent. Entertaining and emotional. Entertaining and poetical.
- <https://www.hpmor.com/> If I dare, I'll recommend a Harry Potter fan-fiction. . . You'll definitely learn a lot of things, and if you are already won to the cause of rationality, you should read between the lines, to see its limits.

I tried to refrain from citing fictional works, books, poetry, movies. . . But you can draw inspiration from so many things!