Dick McCaw

Taking Clive Seriously for a Moment . . .

Dick McCaw was a friend and colleague of Clive Barker's for many years, notably during Clive's chairmanship of the International Workshop Festival, which McCaw created and directed to answer the continuing training and development needs of professionals working in the performing arts. In this article, he assesses the roots from which Barker's *Theatre Games* derives its continuing influence, and offers a critique of its vulnerabilities, interwoven with personal reflections on his association with its author. He discusses our greater understanding of the workings of the brain since the advent of fMRI imaging, and how this affects Clive's metaphor of the roles of the 'back' and 'front' brain in controlling and integrating the actor's motivation and movement, relating this to other ways in which Clive's proudly autodidactic methods often reached towards the right solutions through unscientific methodology. He looks also at Clive's use of the teachings of Moshe Feldenkrais, and of his intuitive and successful use of Feldenkrais techniques in regaining momentum following his first stroke. Dick McCaw, whose DVD celebrating Clive's theatre games workshops and their background, *Theatre Jazz*, was issued by Arts Archives, Exeter, in 2005, is currently teaching at Royal Holloway, University of London.

CLIVE BARKER'S *Theatre Games* reminds me of Spike Milligan's *A Book of Bits or Bits of a Book.* The book contains elements of three different books: it is a practical handbook which one can plunder for the games and exercises it contains; it is an autobiographical account of his time with Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop and how, as a result of this, he developed his approach to actor training; it is also an attempt to offer a more scientific basis for his practical approach to actor training. The fact that his book is still being used in drama teaching (I for one find it a valuable resource) means that it must have a continuing value for both teachers and students. Why? I think the way that Clive mixed these three elements – practical exercises, biography, methodological enquiry – might account for its enduring popularity. It is still a good read.

The quotation on the back of *Theatre Games* states that it is 'quite unlike a textbook' and rather like a 'long, fascinating chat into the small hours'. Although I was a friend for some twenty years and worked with Clive closely for many of them, I don't remember Clive ever talking about theatre into the wee small hours. His references to people with whom he worked and to ideas or principles were elliptical to say the least; because he never used surnames it took me years to figure whom he was talking about (and he knew a lot of people). He shone in conferences because he had a fantastic memory for facts about theatre – he was an unindexed encyclopedia of world theatre. In short, the form of a book was quite uncharacteristic of his mode of thinking and, a few pages into it, he explains why:

> Slowly I have been pushed towards learning about the interaction of mind and body through the nervous system. But the work was almost fully developed pragmatically to its present stage before I came round to this. I have ended up with an understanding of the nervous system as an explanation for what I was doing. It seems the clearest way of explaining it *in a book*.[1]

His book is a reflection upon his practical work, and in no way reflects how he would conduct a class or a workshop.

By a strange coincidence, the last time I read *Theatre Games* was while I was commuting between London and Lewes in 2003,

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the beginning of my training to be a Feldenkrais practitioner. This time I am reading it having just qualified. Although Clive would talk grandly about the research *we* did into the nervous system and movement, in fact it came from his reading of Feldenkrais's 1949 classic, *Body and Mature Behaviour.* I don't think Clive ever had any direct experience of the Feldenkrais Method – either the classes in Awareness Through Movement, or the individual lessons in Functional Integration. His ability to understand Feldenkrais's quite dense and technical book came through his self-confessedly pragmatic approach to movement. One thing that I want to examine in this article is the tension between Clive's feeling for practice (how he conducted and reflected upon his workshops) and his theoretical pronouncements and justifications. In particular I want to examine how he makes use of Feldenkrais's ideas.

Although I am not uncritical of his approach, I hope to demonstrate that there are very good reasons to continue to take Clive's work seriously. I shall begin by examining his philosophy of education, and then explore three linked subjects: his use of theatre games in actor training; his belief in the superiority of a kinaesthetic as opposed to an intellectual approach to acting; which then explains his insistence that theatre is a physical and not a literary experience, *both for the actor and the audience.* In my conclusion I shall examine his approach in a broader context.

A Philosophy of Education

Clive's approach to teaching was heuristic. One of the quotations in the *OED* illustrates such a heuristic approach: 'Heuristic methods of teaching are methods which involve placing students as far as possible in the attitude of the discoverer – methods which involve their *finding out*, instead of merely being told about things.' Clive echoes these words: 'The keynote to all the work is that it is a process of exploration and discovery, not the direct acquisition of practical skills which the actor does not possess. The acquisition of skills is a by-product of the work.'[2] Elsewhere, he notes that 'One cannot teach "acting". One can only create situations in which the actor can learn and develop.'[3] In short it is about '*letting* something happen rather than *making* it happen'.[4] As a teacher, then, Clive would only ever set up the learning situation, without hinting at its possible outcomes, function, or meaning.

> If an actor is told in advance what the purpose of an exercise is, this knowledge might push him towards doing the exercise 'properly' or 'well' or 'efficiently' as an end in itself, and this would interfere with the experience and sensations that are encountered in simply 'trying' it. His concentration would be on the end result, instead of on the process or means, which would defeat everything I am trying to do.[5]

Later in the book (he always referred to it as 'the book') Clive adds that, 'One can never predict what value any individual will get or take from any exercise. One should never try to make an exercise or game "work"; one should set it up and let it take place.'[6] The heart of the Feldenkrais Method is also about a student learning through (in Clive's words) 'the experience and sensations that are encountered in simply trying' out particular movements. Feldenkrais defined learning 'in the most general sense' as 'acquiring new responses to stimuli',[7] and defined a 'successful act of learning' as an 'adjustment' to our environment.[8]

Throughout this article we will see the value that Clive places on there being a constant flow of interactions between the actors themselves and the actors and the audience. If there isn't a constant flow of movement, then, he would argue, that performance is dead. Clive's training was geared to sensitize the actor to this feeling for interaction.

Dickens's *Hard Times* begin as Gradgrind elaborates his philosophy of education:

> Now what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts, nothing else will ever be of any service to them.

Gradgrind is only one from a rogues' gallery of grotesque teachers who espouse cramming students with information rather than

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whetting their appetite or arousing their curiosity. One of my favourite scenes from the Medieval Players'[9] 1983 adaptation of François Rabelais' *Gargantua* was when the hapless young giant was literally being stuffed with the pages of totally useless literature – most of which he could regurgitate both forward and backward. The result was that 'at the last his father perceived, that indeed he studied hard, and that, although he spent all his time in it, he did nevertheless profit nothing, but which is worse, grew thereby foolish, simple, doted, and blockish'.[10]

Clive deplored an education system in which the 'stress is laid on the result, and not on the way of achieving it'[11] (a sentiment to which Feldenkrais would have gladly subscribed). The most eloquent distinction between the two approaches to education that I can think of comes from Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* – published in 1961 and made into a film in 1969:

> The word 'education' comes from the root *e* from *ex*, out, and *duco*, I lead. It means a leading out. To me education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil's soul. To Miss Mackay it is a putting in of something not there, and that is not what I call education, I call it intrusion, from the Latin root prefix *in* meaning in and the stem *trudo*, I thrust. Miss Mackay's method is to thrust a lot of information into the pupil's head; mine is a leading out of knowledge, and this is true education as is proved by the root meaning.[12]

Clive and Feldenkrais shared a wider notion of education that extended beyond school and university into adult life. His understanding of the necessity of what is now called 'Continuing Professional Development'[13] is reflected in several passages in *Theatre Games.* Clive realized that an actor's training doesn't end when they leave drama school:

> The present situation, which allows the actor so little opportunity for training and development once he has finished the formal training of drama school, demands that we find some way by which the actor can find his own way forward. The process of learning and development in the actor is, in any case, directly related to the process of growing up and moving towards maturity.[14]

The choice of the word 'maturity' is, I think, more than a glancing reference to Feldenkrais's *Body and Mature Behaviour.* Both men believed that a person who was balanced and capable of spontaneous action would live a more fulfilled and contented life. In short, Clive's approach to education extended beyond theatre – it was about the art of living well. And when Clive refers to 'a philosophy' which he hopes would emerge 'in the reading' of his book – I think this is what he meant.[15]

The final comparison between the two men lies in their personal attitude as teachers. In *Theatre Games* Clive refers to 'the concept of the scholar-clown', which 'involves a person who not only understands the scholarly aspects of drama and the theatre arts, but can put them into practice'.[16] I have memories of Clive clowning in his workshops and have seen many examples of Feldenkrais joking as he taught: humour opens the space for possibilities; it creates a more propitious atmosphere in which students can make their own discoveries; it allays the fear of failure so often associated with learning. The word that best sums up these two teachers was 'genial'.

Theatre Games

> I have never found a technical exercise for which I couldn't find a direct parallel in the world of children's games. This by no means guarantees that the problem will be solved, but it can be tackled in a manner that is totally within the actor's experience and movement memory.[17]

Of course Clive was a scholar clown: his approach (I hesitate to use the word 'method') to actor training was based on children's games. His use of these games is subtly nuanced, as anyone who was taught by him can testify – he would watch your playing of them with an eagle eye, and his commentary afterwards was always illuminating.[18]

> The elements of play, as defined by Caillois, are also the seeds of drama because they are expressive forms of human personal and social behaviour, and because drama is itself a game or a play activity. The use of games is therefore not only a means of technical training and of exploring human behaviour and acting, but a springboard for exploring the nature of drama and theatre.[19]

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The linking of games to human behaviour picks up on Clive's insistence on there being a connection between theatre and everyday life:

> None of the activities of the actor is unique to him. All occur in everyday life. The processes by which he carries out his work are common to all human beings. The significant difference for the actor is that he chooses consciously to present these activities and regularly to repeat their patterns of action in the presence of an audience.[20]

Later in the book he is even more categorical: 'There is no such activity as "acting".'[21] (Just as above he had argued that you can't teach 'acting'.) This returns us to the broader philosophy of personal development, which I mentioned earlier, and to his insistence that acting should be something personal and spontaneous – which I'll discuss when we get to his ideas about how to achieve the spontaneity through 'body thinking'.

Later in the book Clive refers to how games can be used in actor training:

> In the first instance, the game is enjoyable purely for the subjective experience of taking part. In the second instance, the game is played for its own sake. A still higher level of skill comes when it becomes enjoyable for what can be expressed through it, that is, the use of it as a structured theatrical situation, but I will come to this gradually. It is important in games work to realize that the training potential cannot be extracted until the initial release of energy begins to dry up.[22]

This was a really important principle for Clive: first you play the game 'for its own sake' – for the pure fun of playing it – then you explore 'what can be expressed through it'. At first the game is a way of releasing surplus energy (or, though he never says this, raising it to an operatory level), and only *then* do you move on to the heuristic or investigative stage.

Take, for example, the signature game, Tail Tag,[23] which involves all participants having a toilet-paper 'tail' which they have to protect while trying to take their opponents' tail. His side coaching would include him shouting out in cod-French '*Pas courant!*' He was trying to take the participants beyond the competitive high-jinks to become aware that they are creating very specific types of relationship with each other in space, and turning on their central axis.

In other games such as Grandmother's Footsteps or Pirate's Treasure, he would ask us to reflect on the quality of the movement we had just been using – in the first 'quick, light movements', in the second, 'light, sustained movements'.[24] This explains his claim that 'the game can sustain an apparently infinite number of playings, since the strategies and responses are so variable in any single situation'.[25] As long as you can suggest possibilities to the students, thus sustaining their interest, the game remains alive and working.

Clive once pointed out the limitations of simply making a video record of him teaching: 'You can see me at work, but you don't know what I'm thinking.' But that is just what the DVD-ROM format can offer: written or spoken commentary on the thinking behind his conduct of *this* particular game with *that* particular group in *that* particular space.

'The Flow of Demand and Response'

In 2003 (i.e., after his serious stroke), while watching footage of his 2001 workshop in Warwick, he turned to me and said, 'One thing I know I can do and that is watch movement.' His self-education in movement observation goes back to Theatre Workshop days in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when 'the actor Brian Murphy and I spent many hours standing on railway stations and street corners, in libraries and art galleries, watching people, and then putting ourselves imaginatively in their situations.'[26] This translated into how they worked in the studio, where they operated 'an alternating process of doing, and watching other actors do'.[27] The trick lies in seeing what is happening, and then seeing how it could develop further – for example, by searching for a more apt movement quality. Michele George, one of Peter Brook's stalwarts in the 1970s, sat throughout that weekend workshop in 2001 and declared at the end that she had been in the presence of a genius.

In his article in this edition of *NTQ* Eugenio Barba (a great friend and admirer of Clive) has also noted Clive's patient playing of theatre games, engaged 'in the small, continuous, and intimate game of the renewed

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search for the new'. But I think Eugenio is not entirely accurate when he writes about how Clive 'loves improvisation'. Throughout the book Clive is quite clear that theatre games are a halfway house between unstructured improvisation and the detailed study of a play text. He notes in a section entitled 'Improvisation' that young directors often use it 'as though it were a panacea for all ills', adding that they have an 'almost magic faith that improvisation will solve the problems without having to work at them'.[28]

> It is difficult to get the actors to re-create the flow of demand and response in the scene in other than intellectual and verbal terms, unless they can get away from the tightly structured text and give themselves time and room to examine the natural working out of the strategies and response, which are highly compressed in the text. Other directors might tackle this problem by asking the actors to improvise in their own words. I prefer to approach it through this game structure.[29]

The above passage contains most of the thematic material that I shall be exploring in this article: the 'flow of demand and response' between the actors, and the opposition between the intellectual/verbal and the physical approach to the text. At this stage it is sufficient that we focus on how games are better than improvisations at working on the text, because they avoid verbal intellectualization and operate at a physical level.

Later in the book Clive returns to why he chooses games over improvisation. His first reason is that he isn't keen on introducing improvisations early in rehearsals because at that point the actors don't have a great deal of information about their characters.

> My second reason for not using this method is that the improvisations often turn out to be no more than verbalizations. The actors talk like parrots, reiterating haphazardly everything they can recall about the situation, without listening to, or more than marginally responding to, the other actors.[30]

A Structure for Improvisation

I shall return to his Clive's critique of the 'intellectual and verbal' way of working when I deal with his ideas about 'body/think', but now I want turn to what he might mean by 'structure'. He defends games as opposed to free improvisation precisely because they offer a '*structure* within which actors can improvise' (my italics).[31] Later he defines how this structure works:

> The strength of a games structure, for me, is that the specific encounter, exchange, or conflict can be isolated, worked on, and taken directly into the situation of the play.[32]

He describes how although he must have learned the game The Raft of Medusa' in the Boys Scouts in Middlesbrough, he saw it used 'with devastating effect by Littlewood in a projected production of *Danton's Death*'. He goes on to describe how the company 'played the game for over a week in rehearsals, moving from it to an improvisation of the real situation of the Raft of the Medusa'. Eventually, the 'stylized movement arrived at was carried over into rehearsals of scenes in the play'.[33] The first thing to note about this is the fact that it was Littlewood who first used theatre games as an integral part of her rehearsal strategy; the second is how the *quality of the movement* is carried over from playing the game into the rehearsal of the play. It is this movement aspect of games which provides the bridge from this section to the next one on our kinaesthetic sense.

When Clive starts to list some of the reasons that he teaches Theatre Games, the first is that they 'reveal something of the actor's movement problems and possibilities'.[34] Just as Feldenkrais's method is based on returning to the autonomous learning of the infant (we sometimes forget that we learn how to roll from back to stomach, to come to sitting, to crawl, stand and walk *through our own self-directed purposeful and playful activity*) so Clive takes us back to an earlier and body-based form of learning:

> One goes back to the root processes of learning, by which he acquired movement skills in the first place, and this helps him rediscover lost skills, or those which have atrophied. . . . It substitutes for the pain of learning the joy of rediscovery. It also reinstates the non-reflective body/think mechanisms, since the child does not consciously reflect upon, or direct his play.[35]

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Throughout the book Clive repeats the principle that 'the object of the games and exercises is to reveal to the actor what happens when he works, and to help him be aware of the mind/body processes involved in his work'.[36]

There is another echo of Feldenkrais in the way Clive stresses the actor's awareness of the process because it involves movement (as opposed to a verbal or intellectual process). Although such an approach 'by no means guarantees that the problem will be solved', it can at least 'be tackled in a manner that is totally within the actor's experience and movement memory'.[37] Indeed, in Clive's conduct of games the echoes of Feldenkrais (intentional or otherwise) are unmistakable:

> During later sessions the leader can correct posture in the interest of playing the games more effectively. The actor, therefore, tackles movement obstacles through functional activities, and is prevented from becoming self-conscious about problems.[38]

If Littlewood used theatre games as a rehearsal technique, Clive developed them into a valuable pedagogical tool that covers the full range of training needs – from a basic aerobic warm-up to the most subtle explorations of theatrical interpretation.

Kinaesthetics and Body/Think

I'll begin with a definition of kinaesthetics, since it is a term that I shall be using a great deal in this section. In ancient Greek, *kinein* means 'to move', and *aesthesis* means 'sensation'; thus kinaesthetics is

> the sense which enables us to appreciate the positions and movements of limbs, and depends on receptors in muscles, tendons, and joints, as well as on the sense of muscular effort involved in moving a limb or holding it in a given position.[39]

The *OED* enlarges on this by adding that it is 'the sense of muscular effort that accompanies a voluntary motion of the body'. In one of the quotations used to illustrate the sense of 'kinaesthetics', it is said to be 'the mediator of general well-being or general discomfort and malaise'. Together with our vestibular system (the complex of channels and tiny bones in our ears which gives us our sense of balance and position) the kinaesthetic sense provides us with an automatic sense of our position in space: this overall awareness is our proprioceptive sense – for which the *OED* offers the following example:

> Kinesthesis and the vestibular sense have been called proprioception, since they have something to do with end results originated by the activity of the body itself. . . . Proprioceptive organs may affect the consciousness. Thus we can tell how much our knee is bent even with our eyes shut, owing to the joint-organs, or how great a weight we are holding, owing to the muscle-organs.

Pride and a Daily Marathon (co-authored with Oliver Sacks) is a graphic account by Jonathan Cole of how he lost his proprioceptive sense and then relearned how to walk, sit, stand, and maintain balance entirely through using his visual sense. If the lights were turned off, however, he would fall to the ground.

We have already seen Clive explain that one of the underlying principles of *Theatre Games* is that 'an understanding of the nervous system' could provide 'an explanation for what I was doing. It seems the clearest way of explaining it *in a book.*'[40] As I've noted, *he* doesn't really offer an explanation of how the nervous system works: this is left to long quotations from Feldenkrais's *Body and Mature Behaviour*. He frankly admits that his book 'is not scientific, for two reasons': firstly that in 1977 brain processes were 'not definitively understood', and secondly that 'terms like . . . proprioceptive nerve endings would inhibit me from acting, rather than help me'.[41]

With this deft piece of footwork, Clive sidesteps the task of explaining how the nervous system works '*in a book*'. So, instead of using such actor-averse terminology he opts for the term 'body/think' rather than 'kinaesthetic' or 'proprioceptive':

> The kinaesthetic sense, or body/think, is the process by which we subconsciously direct and adjust the movements of our bodies in space, either in response to external stimuli, or to intentions arising in the mind. It is the process by which physical

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purposes are carried out effectively for the greater part of our lives; it is the process by which we practise habitual physical skills naturally and unself-consciously; it is the process by which we constantly take in information from the external environment and react to it without reflection, and by which we comprehend and respond to information being sent to the brain by our own bodies.[42]

Clive's definition of this user-friendly term broadly coincides with the definitions that we've read above. (Given his use of this term, it is odd that he makes no reference to Mabel Todd's 1937 classic, *The Thinking Body*, especially as it offers a 'User's Manual' of the human organism.) As a student of Feldenkrais, my only problem here would be the distinction between the brain and the body – and it is one upon which the edifice of his theory is built. We shall see how the products of the subconscious body – 'body/think' – are always chosen in preference to those of the conscious self and intellect. Clive's desire for simplification has led him to offer a simplistic, and at times misleading, account of the nervous system.

This over-simplification is nowhere clearer than in his decision to refer to the 'front' and 'back' brain:

I am physically aware of two modes of thinking. I feel there are two distinct parts to my brain, each with its own function and mode of operating. The front part of my brain I use for visualizing, for reflective meditation, for precisely defining my thoughts and ideas, for thinking in abstract, and for the deliberate conscious control and direction of my actions. The back part seems largely to live a life of its own and I am only conscious of what it is doing when I 'stop to think', or when I hear the words I am spontaneously speaking. The back brain also appears to control my physical actions and reactions instinctively without my being directly conscious of what is happening.[43]

Just as in the earlier quotation, Clive refers to his own experience as an actor rather than the discoveries of the scientist to offer his account of how the nervous system works. And this would be fine if only Clive had been clear that he was using the terms 'front' and 'back' brain metaphorically – the 'front' being a shorthand for the conscious part of the brain (say, much of the complex cognitive and linguistic functions undertaken by the left hemisphere), with the 'back' brain referring to the brain stem and cerebellum which guide our movement without our being aware of it. In truth Clive isn't offering science, but is appealing to what 'everyone knows':

People say, 'There's something in the back of my mind,' and, 'I always had that at the back of my mind.'[44]

Again, this is well and good, but it doesn't offer an accurate account of the nervous system – 'visualizing', for example, occurs at the very back and not the front of the brain.

Unlike Clive, Feldenkrais *was* a scientist, and he could read and understand complex research journals and then marry this understanding of the nervous system with his lifelong practical research into ju-jitsu and judo and develop, over thirty-five years, a method whereby his knowledge could be experienced by students through carefully structured movement lessons. Ironically, *Body and Mature Behaviour* is his most theoretical and therefore least user-friendly book. As Carl Ginsburg noted in his Foreword to the recently republished text, it was in his practical explorations between 1950 and 1981 that Feldenkrais 'became much less didactic and therefore more exploratory',[45] adding later that:

The simple message of Feldenkrais is that we do not have to know all the scientific details to learn to live well. In his later work, he developed the notion of awareness as the key to opening a learning space to transcend conditioned behaviour and action.[46]

Using Reflexive Nervous Activity

The irony is that Clive, a pragmatist and practitioner down to his fingertips, should only have known Feldenkrais through his most theoretical work, and never have experienced any of the practical lessons in movement. Had he been able to take a few lessons in Awareness Through Movement I feel he would have seen a connection between the playful use of restrictions and inversions (for example of central and peripheral movement) and his theatre games.

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Clive was an autodidact and took what he needed from Feldenkrais's book: this was an understanding of the conscious and subconscious control of our movement. Feldenkrais notes how it would be disastrous, indeed pathological, if we only relied on conscious control in our everyday movements. When we perform a movement with ease, it is because *we can do it without thinking about it*:

> Conscious control, when properly directed, often improves details here and there, but intellect is no substitute for vitality. A sense of futility of life, tiredness, and a wish to give it all up is the result of over-taxing the conscious control with the tasks the reflective nervous activity is better suited to perform.[47]

We shall see later how Clive's whole theory of vitality, spontaneity, and truth in performance comes from his understanding of this principle, which involves letting go of conscious control so that 'reflective nervous activity' can take over.

> Somehow if you let the back part of the brain work, without conscious interference, the body works more efficiently. If you concentrate on making the body work, you interfere with its working. . . . Army instructors, taking recruits round obstacle courses, will always tell the recruit not to think about what he has to do, but just do it. Those who think, fail most often to gain the objective.[48]

Where Feldenkrais sees conscious control as simply being unhelpful, Clive sees it as 'interference' with the source of spontaneous action: for him, 'the activity of the back brain constantly and continuously reveals itself in our physical actions and purposes'.[49] Indeed, he emphasizes that all his work is designed to override the conscious mind:

> All the work outlined previously is designed to bypass the intellectual, reflective, or pre-conceiving mind mechanisms and to overcome mental inhibitions through the release of physical energy. The training tackles specific problems in the actor's work.[50]

> The difference between thinking about what one is doing, and thinking what one is doing, is the difference between the conscious and the subconscious. The former can take place before or after the activity, but not during it. [51]

As I say, this categorical distinction between the conscious and the subconscious is at the heart of Clive's theory of acting and of actor training. When he lists the different purposes of his games, the point is made repeatedly: games with simple aims and objectives take the actor's 'mind off the movements he is making'; four other categories of game all take 'the pressure off the actor'.[52]

I was working on Clive's DVD-ROM at the same time as one on Phelim McDermott (one of the directors of Improbable, a former student of Keith Johnstone, and someone passionate about improvisation). Both men noted correspondences between each other's work – this was nowhere more clear than in McDermott's instruction to 'get out of your own way'.[53] By this he meant that the actor should open him or herself up to what is happening around them; they should draw ideas from what is actually out there, rather than 'having ideas' about themselves (and which result from them having withdrawn themselves from their surroundings into their own thoughts and imaginings).

McDermott understood Clive's observation that you could always detect an actor's move that was the result of them having had a 'good idea'. In this context, it is not too far a stretch to see a connection between Keith Johnstone's and Jerzy Grotowski's[54] notions of a 'block' – it is a parasitic consciousness that prevents you from making a spontaneous physical reaction to an environmental stimulus.[55]

The second important principle that Clive took from Feldenkrais concerned the sense of balance:

> If all movement is the constant shifting in space of the balance of the body's weight, then the first factor we must consider is how balance is maintained, and how shifted. It is not an accident that the physical metaphor of balance is taken to describe someone of a mature mind – a balanced person.[56]

While Clive doesn't follow all the intricate detail of Feldenkrais's chapter on 'Erect Posture and Action', he does grasp the fact that the alignment of head, shoulders, and pelvis is essential to economic movement.[57] Effec-

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tive posture means that any movement can be started 'without a preliminary adjustment'.[58]

Clive uses the term 'centre' to grasp the state of equilibrium within the actor. His instinct was that actors needed to work from a low centre, and when he was watching a video of students at work he would point out someone's 'centre rising' just at the point at which they would be hatching a 'good idea' – you could actually see them lifting themselves out of a dynamic relation with the space. Although he never referred to Mabel Todd, her analysis of this phenomenon of the 'rising centre' is very apt:

> Man has become absorbed with the upper portions of the body in intellectual pursuits and in the development of skill of hand and speech. Thus, in addition to false notions regarding appearance or health, he has transferred his sense of power from the base to the top of his structure. In thus using the upper part of the body for power reaction he has reversed the animal usage and has to a great extent lost both the fine sensory capacity of the animal and its control of power centred in the lower spinal and pelvic muscles. These are the crouch muscles, which should still be employed for spring or take-off and for shock absorption.[59]

Later on in Todd's book she puts the matter even more tersely:

> Man, ignorant of the principles underlying bodily economy, has raised his sense of power from the base, and has raised with it his centre of gravity.[60]

The actor's vitality and spontaneity all stem from this ability to work from their low working centre, or (which amounts to the same thing) from the back rather than the front brain. Even though Clive's neurophysiology may have been patchy, it doesn't alter the fact that he had an intuitive grasp of this fundamental principle. I shall now explore how Clive used this principle to work in his account of how the actor functions on stage.

Physical not Literary Theatre

Clive is quite categorical that unless the actor is working from the back brain – that is, kinaesthetically – the result is purely literary. We've already seen practitioners as diverse as Grotowski and McDermott agree that acting should be 'passive', allowing oneself to be acted upon by what happens on stage – another word might be 'responsive'. In the following account, Clive describes a performance where none of the cast is responding to the others: the effect being a series of unconnected 'acting-events':

> When everyone on stage is giving, and no one is taking (the physical and mental practices cannot be divorced in practice), the normal to-and-fro of interaction between characters cannot take place, and the movement of the action of the play is broken up into disjointed statements and single actions. These appear to have no effect on anyone else on stage, since no one responds or reacts to them, except in terms which are themselves actions and not reactions. Comprehension becomes possible only in literary terms. The audience does not respond physically, but sees, reflects, and interprets intellectually. [61]

In making this distinction between the literary/intellectual and the kinaesthetic, he associated himself with a tradition reaching back to Meyerhold and well articulated by Grotowski:

> To the academic, the theatre is a place where an actor recites a written text, illustrating it with a series of movements in order to make it more easily understood. Thus interpreted the theatre is a useful accessory to dramatic literature. The intellectual theatre is merely a variation of this conception. . . . Here too, the text is the most important element, and the theatre is there only to plug certain intellectual arguments, thus bringing about their reciprocal confrontation. It is a revival of the medieval art of the oratorical duel.[62]

As Grotowski repeated throughout *Towards a Poor Theatre,* theatre is an event that happens here and now, and not a repetition of a series of remembered gestures and postures. This distinction between a repeated and a relived event is central to Clive's notion of acting. He explains how an actor can produce a theatre of repetition:

> Between rehearsals, instead of absorbing what he has learnt into the reflex activities of the back brain, and trusting that he has absorbed it, he goes home and thinks about it, concretizes it into a fixed image, which he then tries to repeat at the next rehearsal.[63]

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A later comment on this process makes it clear that his analysis is conceived entirely in terms of this distinction between body/think reflexes and acts of conscious activity:

> One could say that the problems I dealt with earlier, of conscious control interfering with the activities of the body, arise because the narrative is being held in the conscious front mind, and therefore there is no direct connection with the muscles of the body, so the automatic triggering of physical activities does not take place.[64]

If an actor fails to trust the subconscious body/think processes, and instead tries to solve the problem 'in his mind': 'the conscious mind *concretizes* and *totalizes* the *end* to be achieved, or the *result* that should be the conclusion of his action, and he tries to make it happen without going through the natural body/mind process that will help him arrive at it'.[65] Very much echoing Feldenkrais, Clive argues that such actors 'try to recreate the *effect*, not the *process* by which the effect was achieved'.[66]

The Subconscious Narrative

But what is it that triggers off these 'physical activities'? Where Grotowski would talk of a score, Clive refers to a 'subconscious narrative':

> I suggest that there is running through every actor's mind a subconscious narrative that has been built up during study and rehearsal and that, as this narrative runs in the mind, it triggers off physical activities in the body.[67]

Quite *how* this 'subconscious narrative' is laid down in the brain and how it 'triggers off physical activities in the body' isn't explained. Maybe this is what Eugenio means about Clive's approach to improvisation having too little structure. Grotowski captured the dialectic between improvisation and structure (what he called a combination of opposites or *conjunctio oppositorum)* in the passage which follows:

> During a performance no real spontaneity is possible without a score. It would only be an imitation of spontaneity since you destroy your spontaneity by chaos. During the exercises the score consists of fixed details and I would advise you . . . to improvise only within this framework of details.[68]

In a different context Clive does offer a rather good analogy for a score: the image of stepping stones. He is describing how you play a text by Marlowe as opposed to Shakespeare:

> What is required of the actor is an acrobatic balance which swings him from image to image, thought to thought, and to do this the speech has to be analyzed by the actor to find the precise moments at which to make the leaps, bridges, and transitions from one to another. Compared to Shakespeare, it is like using stepping-stones as against climbing a ladder.[69]

When Clive does deal with narrative analysis in Chapter 12, 'Theatre Narrative and the Tense of Acting', he seems to switch from a very improvisational approach to one that is Brechtian. He describes how in 1964 he had to take over a role in Littlewood's celebrated *Oh! What a Lovely War.* He was starting with a fixed result (the previous performance) and had to break it down 'into processes of action'. He tried various reconstructions of the narrative and after rejecting performing it in the first- and third-person present tense ('I am a soldier', 'He is a soldier') he finally arrived at the third-person past tense as the mode in which he could 'act again'. The soldier he was portraying had a limp, and this limp appeared naturally when he played in this mode:

> I began again in the *third person, past tense*. 'The soldier was on a route march in the First World War.' It worked, and a sensational thing happened: *the limp appeared in my body before the words formed in my mind.* The body/think reflex activity happened before the 'print-out' formed. I was immeasurably relieved; I could act again.[70]

This account seems miles from the approach he has been describing before, but the proof/test lies in his physical response – *because* the 'body/think reflex' had kicked in, it must therefore be true. Since there is no indication *how* this works, and since I have never understood how this quite conscious Brechtian approach activates the subconscious, I shall return to his more general account to con-

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clude this discussion of physical theatre. (At this point *Theatre Games* seems more like bits of a book that haven't connected up.)

If I sound over-critical of Clive at this point it is because much of what he has written about the kinaesthetic sense and its relation with theatre games is fascinating and there are many connections with contemporary practitioners of theatre, with body work, and with the martial arts.[71] While I may not be convinced that there is a *direct* link between his approaches to actor training and narrative analysis, I have absolutely no doubt that in terms of creating a sensitive and responsive actor, he has a great deal to offer. An example is the following piece of advice:

> The basis of this work is to remove the mental processes by which an actor 'builds a character', and to work from the concept of the actor as a resonant instrument through which the speech is articulated, in the same sense that movements applied to a musical instrument produce music. The more sensitive the movements, the more expressive the sound produced. In this respect the actor is both the instrumentalist and instrument.[72]

This advice links up everything that he has previously said about the importance of opening yourself to the work, of letting go of your ego, and being available[73] to what is happening on stage. His ideal was expressed by a fellow member of Theatre Workshop:

> Harry H. Corbett said to me that his ambition was just to give one performance in which he has only one conscious objective or intention, and that was the one that took him out of the wings on to the stage. The rest should come from reflex reaction to what happened out there.[74]

This, I think, is the heart of Clive's approach to performance, and it is one that still has many exponents today.

The Audience's Experience

Finally I want to examine Clive's claim that 'the perception of the actor's movements in space is experienced kinaesthetically by the audience'.[75] The most poignant example of this kinaesthetic sympathy for movement can be found in Tim Etchells's book *Certain Fragments*, in the section called 'Writing Wendy'. Here, he describes how he is sitting down to write about a dance performed by Wendy Houston, who has often worked with his ensemble, Forced Entertainment:

> In going back to the event I'm drawing on two things I can name (as well as others that I cannot). I'm replaying what I saw and heard of her that afternoon and the twitches and movements that I made in response ('without thinking') as I watched. There are two bodies remembered then – mine and another – one written over (or through) the other. I'm at the keyboard still and the distant ripples of another person's movement and my own past movement are playing through the medium of my skin.[76]

Below I quote Clive's account of how an audience experiences a performance. All the elements of the foregoing are there: the necessity for the actors to be sensitive to the flow of the interaction with each other on stage and to be moved by 'the dramatic event they are portraying'; the warning against mechanical repetition; the distinction between a physical and a literary theatre:

> I have argued earlier that the audience primarily experiences a performance kinaesthetically, through sympathetic physical reactions in the body, and only later does it consciously reflect upon this experience. If this is so, then the strongest audience response comes when the actors are meeting and interacting on the stage, and imaginatively invoking in their bodies the kinaesthetic sensations of the dramatic event they are portraying. If the actors are merely mechanically repeating the patterns of some past situation (as will happen if the production is 'fixed' definitely in rehearsal), or if they are consciously preoccupied with reflective thoughts or intentions, then the audience cannot respond to the flow of interaction. All they can do is follow the stage pictures and the literal meaning of the spoken text.[77]

Clive very aptly quotes from B. Beckerman's *Dynamics of Drama* to demonstrate that this kinaesthetic connection between actor and audience is two-way:

> From actual experience performers can sense whether or not a 'house' is with them, principally because the degree of muscular tension in the audience telegraphs, before any overt sign, its level of attention. We might well say that an audience does not see with its eyes but with its lungs, does

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not hear with its ears but with its skin. . . . Perception includes subception, bodily response to stimuli before we are focally aware of the stimuli.[78]

Beckerman's words could so easily be taken as a commentary on those of Tim Etchells.

Conclusion

As I noted at the beginning of this article Clive often used 'we' when talking about discoveries or hunches, never in the royal, always in the collective sense – even when he was clearly speaking for himself. In fact, most of his findings either came from his thousands upon thousands of hours in the studio where he would watch patiently and then share his observations, or from his reading – in the case of his knowledge of the nervous system, Feldenkrais's *Body and Mature Behaviour*.

I hope I have demonstrated that Clive's thinking does have many resonances with quite a wide range of practice and thought. However, he could have taken more from Feldenkrais than he did, particularly the concept and practice of awareness. Clive's militant anti-intellectualism meant that he rejected anything resembling conscious reflection. (He would tease me that I couldn't possibly move since I was a diehard intellectual. I think he softened his position when I started the Feldenkrais training.)

Actually he needed to distinguish between the bullshit that some intellectuals produce (he had a good nose for detecting it) and the intelligent use of our consciousness. Clive's rather crude account of how the subconscious links with physical movement (he relies on the operation of 'reflexes' which are never fully explained) means that he offered no means by which an individual could get out of bad habits or patterns of movement. Indeed, he offered no means by which we might become aware of such patterns (though it could be achieved through other people observing us move).

Feldenkrais's subtle lessons of Awareness Through Movement offer a means by which a person can come to understand their movement pattern through their awareness of how they make movements: that is, through the mindful attention they pay to what parts do and do not take part in this movement, and how this changes through the repeated performance of this carefully constructed sequence of movements. Although Clive does occasionally use the word 'feedback', he never gives an account of the incredibly subtle interplay between the sensory and the motor nervous system. Our every move is guided and refined by the kinaesthetic (i.e. sensory) feedback we get from the making of that movement. Had Clive dwelt a little more on how the nervous system functions, this would have added further weight to his insights into the dynamics of human movement on stage.

Thomas Hanna notes the functional interdependence between movement and sensory impressions:

> A fundamental finding of physiological psychology is that humans perceive a sensory impression only of that for which they already have an established motor response. If we cannot react to it, the sensory impression doesn't clearly register.[79]

This lends weight to Clive's ideal of acting – a state of being moved on to your next movement by the ripples that were created by your last movement. Hanna offers us a technical explanation of how this works in terms of the nervous system:

> The indissoluble functional and somatic unity of the sensory-motor system is testified to by the obvious structural and bodily unity that is built into the human spinal column. The column is composed of descending motor nerves and ascending sensory nerves which exist, respectively, to the fore and aft of the vertebrae. This fore and aft schema continues all the way up the spine to the top of the brain where, just to the fore of the central sulcus of the cerebral cortex, lie the motor tracts and just to the aft the sensory tracts are aligned. It is a schema that is at the centre of our being.[80]

In other words, our sense of movement comes from the simple fact of our hard-wiring – from the spinal column to the structure of the brain itself. With the advent of fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scanning in the 1990s allowing researchers to study the brain as it functions, our under-

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standing of the nervous system is making huge advances. One example is Antonio Damasio's recent book *Looking for Spinoza*, in which he points out how movement and emotion are functionally linked in the brain.

But before we all rush out to pester Departments of Neurology for a go on their scanners, let us consider what we are looking for and how Clive might be able to help us. Although a lot was still unknown about the structure of the brain and the function of the nervous systems, Moshe Feldenkrais was at least certain of one thing: that there is no special place in the brain for the 'mind' (or 'self', or 'consciousness').

> The body and mind are never independent; subdivision is entirely arbitrary and unfounded. . . . In some cases, the localization is so diffuse that we can understand how the idea of soul or psyche grew. But the diffusion of localization, when adequately understood, shows that the existence of a psyche, per se, in any way separable from the soma, is to say the least, extremely unlikely.[81]

Not only is there no executive part of the brain which issues orders to move, or where all perceptions are 'screened' or 'played', Feldenkrais stresses that most voluntary actions involve several aspects and therefore engage different parts, or layers, of the brain: for example social or moral (anterior cortex), cognitive (parts of the left hemisphere), and emotional (the brain stem and the vegetative part of the brain).

Much of the literature about movement and acting is still held back by hanging on to the terms 'body' and 'mind', whereas the writings of Hanna, Feldenkrais, Damasio, and many others[82] indicate that we are one complex psycho-physical organism and that the phenomenon (one could even say epiphenomenon) of consciousness is a result of incredibly sophisticated networking. Thus Clive's division of the front and back brain is not useful for future research into how we can achieve more spontaneous movement.

I suggest that future developments in actor training need to make use of information generated by fMRI scanners in the way that Feldenkrais used his knowledge of the nervous system in creating his lessons in Awareness Through Movement. So, while there might be a great deal of complex neurological knowledge that lies behind the lessons, the lesson itself has to be something that the actor can learn from through their experience of it – the learning happens through making movements with an awareness of *how* they are being made.

This highlights the main difference between Feldenkrais's lessons and Clive's games: in the first, awareness plays a crucial functional role in the lesson; in the second, the reflection happens afterwards. I would argue that this is because Clive had a far narrower definition of consciousness than Feldenkrais.

> In [Feldenkrais's] later work, he developed the notion of awareness as the key to opening a learning space to transcend conditioned behaviour and action. . . . Awareness, better stated by Feldenkrais as 'consciousness plus knowledge' and as 'that part of the thinking apparatus that listens to the self while acting', is a human process available to us all.[83]

However, both men might have been interested in the fact that the words experiment and experience share the same etymology (*en* – in + *peira* – trial, experiment): the *OED* offers the following meanings for experiment: '1. To have experience of; to experience; to feel, suffer; 2. To ascertain or establish by trial (a fact, the existence of anything, etc.)'. Definitions of 'experience' are 'To make trial or experiment of; to put to the test; to test, try.' 'To ascertain or prove by experiment or observation . . . ' 'To learn (a fact) by experience; to find.'

Whatever research into the nervous system throws up in the future, our training is still going to have to be conducted by wise teachers who create situations in which the actors can learn from their own experiences. We still need the wit and generosity of such teachers as Clive who understand that learning has to come out of the students' activity and not be forced into them.

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Notes

1. *Theatre Games*, p. 8.
2. Ibid., p. 51.
3. Ibid., p. 6.
4. Ibid., p. 3.
5. Ibid., p. 8–9.
6. Ibid., p. 51.
7. *Body and Mature Behaviour*, p. 53.
8. Ibid., p. 47.
9. Along with Carl Heap, I started the Medieval Players in 1981. Clive joined us on the Board of Directors in 1986.
10. See the start of Chapter XV of Book One of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in Sir Thomas Urquhart's translation. Clive was a director of the company from 1985 to 2001.
11. *Theatre Games*, p. 51.
12. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, p. 36.
13. Clive was Chairman of the International Workshop Festival, created to answer the continuing training and development needs of professionals working in the performing arts, from 1995 to 2001.
14. *Theatre Games*, p. 52.
15. Ibid., p. 10.
16. Ibid., p. 215 (see also his article, 'The Dilemma of the Professional in University Drama').
17. Ibid., p. 63.
18. For an example of him at work see *Theatre Jazz*, a DVD-ROM that I created with him for Peter Hulton's Arts Archives in 2005, and *Theatre Games*, a double video produced with Hulton in 1996 (which we'll soon be reissuing as a DVD).
19. *Theatre Games*, p. 88.
20. Ibid., p. 11–12.
21. Ibid., p. 211.
22. Ibid., p. 126.
23. You can see him conduct this on the *Theatre Jazz* DVD-ROM. It is also described in *Theatre Games on* page 71 (where he suggests handkerchiefs rather than toilet rolls as tails). On page 129 he adds that the game develops '360-degree awareness of space, and the carriage this produces'.
24. Ibid., p. 81. There is another very useful reference to Laban's movement qualities (or Efforts): 'Since the majority of games involve movement, they therefore contain at least one element of interest and use for the actor, the facility to train the specific movement quality the game includes' (*Theatre Games,* p. 81).
25. Ibid., p. 132.
26. Ibid., p. 55–6.
27. Ibid., p. 57.
28. Ibid., p. 89.
29. Ibid., p. 133.
30. Ibid., p. 167–8.
31. Ibid., p. 167.
32. Ibid., p. 168.
33. Ibid., p. 104.
34. Ibid., p. 65.
35. Ibid., p. 64.
36. Ibid., p. 51.
37. Ibid., p. 63.
38. Ibid., p. 79.
39. *Oxford Companion to the Mind*, p. 727.
40. *Theatre Games*, p. 8.
41. Ibid., p. 24.
42. Ibid., p. 29.
43. Ibid., p. 17.
44. Ibid., p. 19.
45. *Body and Mature Behaviour*, p. xvi.
46. Ibid., p. xxiv.
47. Feldenkrais, quoted in *Theatre Games,* p. 31.
48. *Theatre Games,* p. 18.
49. Ibid., p. 19.
50. Ibid., p. 110.
51. Ibid., p. 27.
52. Ibid., p. 69–78, passim.
53. In his article 'Exercises', Grotowski explains that 'to surpass yourself is passive', and thus the best advice he can give to a student is '"don't prevent yourself" from surpassing yourself. That's all.' On page 205 of *Towards a Poor Theatre,* he advises: 'The process must take us. At these moments one must be internally passive but externally active. The formula of resigning oneself "not to do" is a stimulus.'
54. The only writer I know of who has made the connection is David Zinder in *Body, Voice, Imagination.*
55. Grotowski offers this definition: 'One must ask the actor: "What are the obstacles blocking you on your way towards the total act which must engage all your psycho-physical resources, from the most instinctive to the most rational?" We must find out what it is that hinders him in the way of respiration, movement and – most important of all – human contact' (*Towards a Poor Theatre,* p. 177).
56. Feldenkrais, quoted in *Theatre Games,* p. 31.
57. Mabel Todd puts this very elegantly: if we keep the 'three principal units of weight', the head, the chest and pelvis, 'balanced at centre in relation to the axis of gravity there will be no unequal strain upon ligaments or muscles about the joints' (*The Thinking Body,* p. 59).
58. *Theatre Games*, p. 32.
59. *The Thinking Body*, p. 160.
60. Ibid., p. 163.

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61. *Theatre Games*, p. 42.
62. *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 28.
63. *Theatre Games,* p. 45.
64. Ibid., p. 158.
65. Ibid., p. 44.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., p. 158.
68. *Towards a Poor Theatre,* p. 192.
69. Ibid., p. 193.
70. Ibid., p. 160.
71. He makes one fascinating reference to boxing, again focusing on the flow of energy between the two players: 'Players rarely take account of their opponents: they look at the hands and not the eyes; they lack the balance between offensive and defensive possibilities that is there in the boxer or fencer; they tend to attack or defend for long periods, with no easy flow of alternating activities' (*Theatre Games,* p. 125).
72. *Theatre Games,* p. 193.
73. David Zinder borrows the French word *disponible* to describe this quality of availability: 'in a state of performance and "availability", any stimulus – any stimulus at all – provokes the actor's imagination and brings associative images to mind' (*Body, Voice, Imagination,* p. 185).
74. *Theatre Games,* p. 45.
75. Ibid., p. 152.
76. *Certain Fragments,* p. 74.
77. *Theatre Games,* p. 124.
78. *Theatre Games,* p. 42–3.
79. 'What is Somatics?', p. 344.
80. Ibid., p. 344–5.
81. *Body and Mature Behaviour,* p. 187–8.
82. In particular 'Action Observation and Acquired Motor Skills: an fMRI Study' undertaken by B. Calvo-Merino, D. E. Glaser. J. Grèzes, R. E. Passingham, and D. Haggard, in *Cerebral Cortex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
83. Carl Ginsburg's 'Foreword' to *Body and Mature Behaviour*, p. xxiii–xxiv.

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