

COUNTERPOINT STATEMENT REHEARSAL

[1] Find any scene from any film...whether you read the scene or watched it.

[2] Figure out the TWO CONVERSATIONS, the A and B conversations, and then figure out the A/B = B/A. For example: In the "rehearsal scene" from *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, his objective is to learn how to love her (even though he'd really rather push her away), her objective is to deny him and shut him down because this is wrong (even though she'd love for him to love her).

[3] Work out the specific and exciting actions. His: "I will invite you into my soul". Hers: "I will shoo you like a fruit fly".

[4] Then work out the COUNTERPOINT ACTIONS...meaning the "STOP STATEMENTS". The counterpoint statement is a "STOP" statement. It is a demand. I want the other character to stop "verb-ing" me, the action that they are playing to me. Because their point is my counterpoint, and my point is their counterpoint. That means the verb they are doing to me is touching my counterpoint, something I am trying to repress or play against. I need them to stop doing that verb. I need to say "STOP doing that to me". So she would say: "Stop loving me" or more specifically "Stop romance inviting me". And he would say: "Stop shooing me away".

[5] Once the two actors have pinpointed the specific verbs they are playing, and their specific stop statements... they go back to their corners, emotionally prepare for those actions, then come back out to the centre, face off, point to each other, and say their VERBS. Then they say their STOP STATEMENTS. Then: the actors go back and forth, switching from verbs to stops. This smashes home the point versus counterpoint internal conflict, and drives the acting outward into vectored out connection. Then break into SOUND AND MOVEMENT.

CHARACTER #1: "I'm going to invite you into my heart"

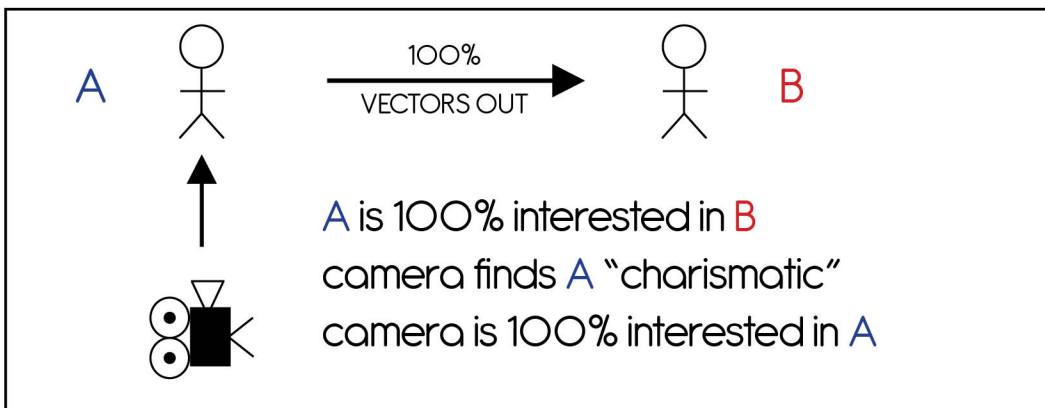
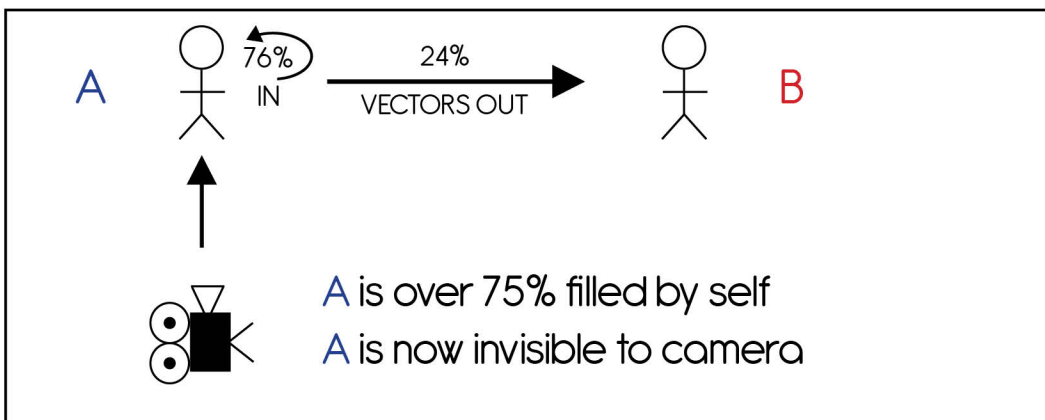
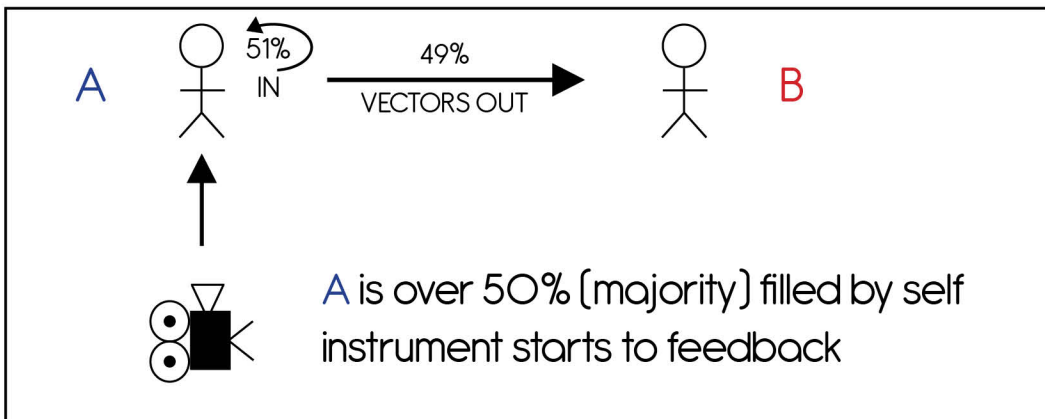
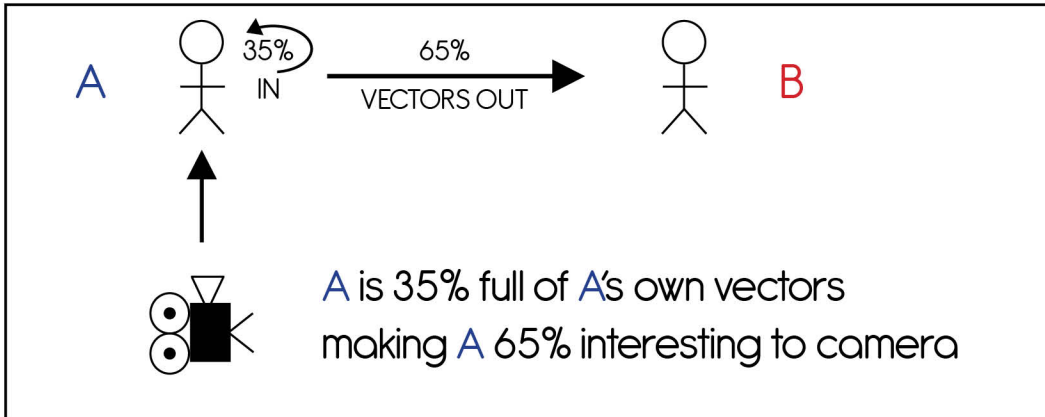
CHARACTER #2: "I'm going to shoo you like a fly"

CHARACTER #1: "STOP making me feel small!"

CHARACTER #2: "STOP smothering me with love"

SWITCH BACK AND FORTH...

THEN SOUND AND MOVEMENT.



"KID IN THE WELL" SCENE

92. EXT HILLSIDE - DAY

The FATHER stands by the well. His son is trapped inside. A PARAMEDIC runs up the hill. The Father sees him.

PARAMEDIC
Where's the kid?

FATHER
Over here!

PARAMEDIC
Okay!

The Paramedic saves the kid.

From the father's point of view:

What is the most important line of dialogue in the scene?

To the paramedic:

What is the most important dialogue in the scene?

THE SOUND AND MOVEMENT EXERCISE

Two actors face off at a comfortable distance apart. One actor makes any random sound and any random movement. For example, they yell out "BOOM" while throwing their hands up to the ceiling. Or "Fzzzzzzam" while waving their hand. Or "Kashwack" while tapping their forehead. Any sound. Any movement.

The second actor has to:

(1) Repeat that sound and movement exactly as they saw it. (ACCURACY)

Accuracy is of the utmost importance. The second actor has to focus very carefully to absorb every nuance and detail of the sound and movement of the first actor, in order to replay that sound and movement absolutely exactly as it was done. There is no "interpretation" of the sound and movement they just witnessed. No change. Including the volume and intensity. Including the shape and range. The sound and movement needs to be repeated completely...not at seventy five percent. Nor can it be exaggerated, and replayed at one hundred and fifteen percent. It must be repeated exactly.

In having to discipline herself to repeat the sound and movement accurately, the actor begins the process of throwing all her energy at the partner...absorbing the partner. Sharpening the listening.

Listening is with the whole body and the entire consciousness. It's behaviour absorption. It goes far beyond just the ears. By "listening", the actor should mean: a total and absolute outward-focussed absorption of the other.

(2) Repeat the sound and movement as soon as possible. (PRECISION)

Precision is equally important. The second actor must repeat the first actor's sound and movement as soon as they possibly can so that there is no time to for self-consciousness. If there is any lag time between the first actor's initial sounds and movement, and the second actor's repetition, there will be time for insecurity and thought...for inward-vectored self consciousness...to come crashing in. Repeat the sound and movement as soon as possible so that there is no time to think.

"As soon as possible" means instantaneously. If the second actor is being disciplined in their focus and is working towards a 100% vectored-out other-consciousness...the second actor should be able to repeat the first actor's sound and movement as the first actor is doing it.

In class, when watching two graduate actors work on the exercise, the actor's are able to repeat the other actor's sound and movement so precisely, that it almost feels as though they are doing the sound and movement simultaneously. It's extraordinarily captivating and compelling. It holds the audience's attention "captive" ...compelling them to watch.

[3] **Add a new sound and movement as soon as you can (ACCIDENT)**

After accurately and precisely repeating the first actor's sound and movement, the second actor adds a new sound and movement without hesitation.

If the second actor has had the discipline to absolutely repeat the first actor's sound and movement as accurately as they could and as soon as possible, the actor is almost entirely vectored-out on to the partner. If the new sound and movement pops out without thought and without any delay, the new sound and movement will be an accident. It will happen instantaneously and spontaneously. It will be an inspired accident.

Even if the second actor repeats the first actor's sound and movement accurately and precisely...if they delay their new sound and movement by a moment, if they balk in their instantaneous response,...the second actor will falter in their focus, turning on their "thinking".

The second actor's response need not be smart, nor funny, nor interesting. If the actor is anxious at all about their response being smart, funny, or interesting...they will have shifted their focus back to themselves and away from their partner.

The irony is that if the actor is worried about being smart, funny, or interesting...they won't be. By definition, that means they are self-focussed. And self focussed means their vectors are inward, filling up their instrument with their focus, and shutting the audience out.

THE EXERCISE CONTINUES: the First actor now repeats with accuracy and precision the new sound and movement that the Second actor accidentally created. Then the first actor accidentally adds a new sound and movement which the Second actor repeats with accuracy and precision, accidentally adding a new sound and movement...and on and on and on.

To the First actor, the Second actor's sound and movements are IMPERATIVE...absolutely important, consequential, vital, all engrossing. To repeat them as exactly and instantaneously as possible is the only goal in life in that moment. Whatever sound falls out of their mouth and movement from their physicality is an accident, unimportant, inconsequential.

To the Second actor, the First actor's sound and movements are IMPERATIVE...absolutely important, consequential, vital, all engrossing. To repeat them as exactly and instantaneously as possible is the only goal in life in that moment. Whatever sound falls out of their mouth and movement from their physicality is an accident, unimportant, inconsequential.

If the actor's pick up the repetition of sounds and movements as soon as they humanly can without sacrificing the accuracy...and add their next sound and movement as soon as they can, the exercise connects the two actors out of themselves, pushing each other to a 100% vectored out connectivity.

The SOUND AND MOVEMENT EXERCISE is to repeat the above, continuously.

To be accurate but not precise, is to leave lots of log time between repetition and addition of the new sound and movement. This creates a lack of connection. It throws both actors inside their heads.

To be precise in immediate responses, without being accurate in the exact duplication of the other's sounds and movement, is to create a harried sloppiness and lack of connection. It throws both actors inside their heads.

If the actors are not quite connected, not really absorbing the other's sounds and movements, slow on their repetitions, thinking of their responses, worried about their additions...they break focus. And they will lose the interest of the class. The actors will be going back and forth, but anyone watching will struggle to maintain focus on them. The audience will be inside their heads.

It is the actor's job to work to be totally absorbed by the other.

RULES OF SOUND AND MOVEMENT

I

Actor A makes a specific sound and movement. Actor B must repeat actor A's sound and movement **ACCURATELY**:
EXACTLY AS ACTOR A DID IT.

II

Actor B repeats actor A's sound and movement as as they possibly can, **PRECISELY**: **EXACTLY WHEN** THEY DO IT.

III

Actor B **ADDS** another sound and movement as immediately possible.

ACCURATE, PRECISE, IMMEDIATE.

The Speed Of Life is my way of describing “real time”. Real time is the speed of the subconscious, of the animalistic reaction time. The speed of life is far faster than a person can be consciously aware of. It's the time that your animal instincts and reacts to the world...without your even being conscious of it.

If a baseball player were in conscious time, self-aware time, they would never hit a baseball in their career. The time it takes a fast pitch to get from pitcher across home plate is faster than a person can consciously think. The reason why they have a batter's warm up box isn't to warm up the triceps, it's to turn off the conscious brain and turn on the animal reactive brain. It's why tennis players spend so much time hopping on their feet and twirling their rackets as they wait for a serve. They are getting into animal mode. Animal mode is the non-conscious reaction that a driver needs to instantly make a split decision to swerve an oncoming pedestrian, or a pilot to make a spontaneous manoeuvre to right a plane whose engine blew, or the animalistic mode a mother giving birth goes into to survive the delivery. It's why time seems to bend.

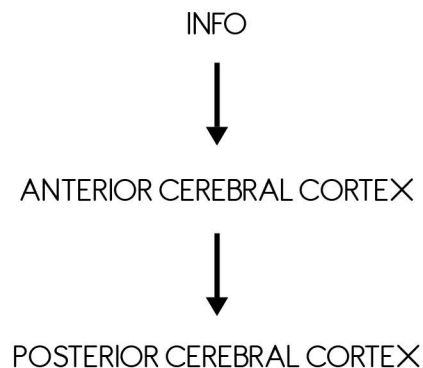
For example: You are on a date. Falling in love. You have met your soul mate and for the first time really connect over dinner at a nice restaurant. It's seven in the evening and you order drinks and then lose each other in your eyes and sexual/romantic connection. What feels like ten minutes later, you feel a tap on your shoulder from an irritated waiter. “You really need to leave now.” Looking up you realize: all the lights are on, chairs are on the table, music is off...it's past eleven and the staff are in their street clothes waiting for you to go. Time bends when you are in real time.

Which is why a good scene feels like it's over even before it started. That an actor knows it was a great audition if they can't remember it. A great night on stage as Hamlet is like a speeding roller coaster, and the actor goes from opening dialogue to final death in what feels like moments. Conversely, an “off night” feels like a lifetime in front of an audience, and a bad audition is when you can remember every moment...and the audition feels like it happened in molasses.

For the audience, a great performance, a great film, or a great audition feel like an event. An explosive time bending event that is over almost as soon as it starts, and transcends time and place, pulling us out of ourselves into another world, other people, other circumstances than our own. It's like when you return from vacation, and though you've just had a week in Hawaii, it feels like you just left...but also like you've been away forever. The “been away forever” is because you actually left your life, your circumstances, your self...and went somewhere new and foreign. But the “just left” feeling is because it was an event that pulled you into an “out-of-self-conscious” real time. An audience that is compelled by actors fully and become lost in the event of the performance, will feel like they've been refreshed, out of themselves, gone far away...but it feels over in an instant. Conversely, a non-focussed, self-involved performance, feels like a long long wait at an airport for a flight delayed by a storm. A few hours feels like days. It's those nights in the theatre where the audience spends the night conscious of themselves, now in their own heads, and tortured by being forced to be self-conscious because they are nowhere for their vectors to go...and so become acutely aware of candy crinkling candy wrappers and the sticky feeling of their shoes on the floor. In a movie theatre, it's when the audience is aware of their bums on the seat, and the frame of the screen. Which is the opposite of how it ought to be. When the actors are connected in the speed of life, is when you get the audience entirely connected to the event on the stage or screen...it is when you “could have heard a pin drop”.

The audience is always in the SPEED OF LIFE. If the actors aren't, the audience will get ahead of the actors putting the audience in their heads...

Getting yourself into The Speed of Life: Information comes in through your senses into the anterior cerebral cortex, the animal centre. And you react spontaneously, viscerally. Then that information gets sent to your consciousness centre, and you become aware of the information and your response. Then that information is sent to the memory/imagination centre and seared into the storage centre. There is a lag time between when you (your animal self) gets the outside information and when you (your conscious self) gets the information. YOU are behind you. YOU aren't in the real world:



MEMORY/IMAGINATION CENTER

That lag time has been assessed by David Eagleman of Baylor College of Medicine as 80 milliseconds. That our consciousness is actually 80 milliseconds behind actual events. That lag time between animal response (anterior cerebral cortex) and conscious response (posterior cerebral cortex) is not only the time for the information to travel, but also the time the brain needs to assess the sensory data and put it into some kind of order...to make sense of it. For example: if you watch someone clapping, the sensory input for sound is simpler and requires less time than the data for the visual. The brain literally has to take the two pieces of data and "wait" for both, so it can synch up the data and make sense of it in your brain.

Events that take place faster than 80 milliseconds fly under the radar of consciousness.

David Eagleman of the Baylor College of Medicine demonstrates that we are all living in the past: Our consciousness lags 80 milliseconds behind actual events. "When you think an event occurs it has already happened," Eagleman said. In one of these illusions, the flash-lag effect, a light flashes when an object moves past it, but we don't see the two as coincident; there appears to be a slight offset between them. By varying the parameters of the experiment, Eagleman showed that this occurs because the brain tries to reconstruct events retroactively and occasionally gets it wrong. The reason, he suggested, is that our brains seek to create a cohesive picture of the world from stimuli that arrive at a range of times. If you touch your toe and nose at the same time, you feel them at the same time, even though the signal from your nose reaches your brain first. You hear and see a hand clap at the same time, even though auditory processing is faster than visual processing. Our brains also paper over gaps in information, such as eye-blinks. "Your consciousness goes through all the trouble to synchronize things," Eagleman said. But that means the slowest signal sets the pace.

When you are in a heightened mode, the data comes so fast that your brain has no time to make the synch ups... you simply react animalistically, non-consciously, which is why the event seems to take place so hyper fast that time collapses. Like a one week vacation is over in minutes. Looking back on the event, the brain has to reconstruct all the synch ups and send them to the memory centre. Which is why looking back at the vacation once home, it feels like you've been away for months. Why after the captivating movie is over, you feel like you've been away from reality for years.

Eagleman: "When we're sitting through a boring event, it seems to take forever. But when we look back on it, it went by in a flash. Conversely, when you're doing something exciting, time seems to race by, but when you look back on it, it stretched out. In the first case, there was little to remember, so your brain collapsed the feeling of duration. In the second, there was so much to remember, so the event seemed to expand. Time flies when you're having fun, but crawls when you recollect in tranquility."

The audience sits in the dark room and are ready to be captivated at the speed of life if the actors are acting and counteracting and connecting at that speed. If, as in the SOUND AND MOVEMENT EXERCISE, the actors are checking out through pauses, hesitations, and other vectored-in methods, shutting down the other, the flow, and the imagination...the actors will not be at the Speed of Life, but in a slowed down self-conscious speed. Then the audience, who are always at the speed of life, will get ahead of the actors...and be bored.

Two actors face off in neutral position. Without movement, using only words, throw the sound back and forward like in the SOUND AND MOVEMENT exercise.

Now, replace the sounds with nouns. Specific tangible or incorporeal nouns. Tangible nouns are nouns you can touch: dog, house, car, window, perspiration, coffee, balloons. An incorporeal noun is a non-physical noun. Like a concept. Freedom, power, authority, love, fear, childhood.

Exactly as the Sound and Movement exercise, the actors need to be:

- ACCURATE (repeating exactly the noun the other said)
- PRECISE (as soon as they've heard it)
- ACCIDENTAL (let the next noun drop spontaneously from their mouths)

The key to the exercise, again just like sound and movement, is to be specific. Many people hide behind generalisms...words like "You", "Me", "Yeah", "Uh uh", "Whatever", "This"...etcetera

The exercise should look (sound) something like this:

ACTOR A

"Building"

ACTOR B

"Building"

"Blocks"

ACTOR A

"Blocks"

"City"

ACTOR B

"City"

"Skyline"

ACTOR A

"Skyline"

"Nashville"

ACTOR B

"Nashville"

"Dylan"

ACTOR A

"Dylan"

"Thomas"

ACTOR B

"Thomas"

"Train engine"

Only the exercise is approaching the speed of life...because the actors are repeating the others words AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. So it actually sounds more like a simultaneous over lap.

As ACTOR A says "building", ACTOR B is saying "building blocks" on top of ACTOR A's "building". And ACTOR A now says "blockscity" simultaneous to the last moments of ACTOR B's "blocks".

From moving the sounds to nouns...the exercise moves from the abstract to the concrete. Nouns represent images which represent ideas. These ideas can cause in the actor a desire to "succeed"...the anxious feeling of having to come up with interesting and perhaps smart or funny words. The ego, that "fist in front of the face" which was so masterfully pulled down and disengaged during the SOUND AND MOVEMENT exercise, pops right back up again to block the actor from seeing and hearing and absorbing the other. And the actor once again becomes result-oriented, worried about their own responses, and so shutting down both the listening and the accidental flow.

Again, smart and funny words can only happen as spontaneous accidents because the person is in GOOD DINNER PARTY mode. The next word literally has to "pop out of your mouth".

The exercise has been likened to a word association exercise, like a free-flow writing exercise on its feet. It is that, but more: if the actors have attained a disciplined tightness in the timing, and reached a "speed of life", the actors' responses are spontaneous...they are word association on a deeply subconscious level. Often, the responses come from deep associations known only to the subconscious of the speaker, images from childhood, odd, sometimes hilariously inappropriate responses. The associated responses would become surprising to the speaker themselves, except that because the exercise is speeding along so connectedly, the actor has really no time to even realize what they have responded because the next word from their partner is already coming.

Time bends, egos are removed, and the actors become electrically, charismatically connected.

If the actors are committed this deeply to focussing on the others word and then allowing for a instantaneous accidental response, the exercise takes on a lightning speed, compelling, and exciting timbre for this watching. Brilliant responses, spontaneous and completely un-pre-thought, fall out of each of the actors and the audience is taken on a speed-of-life roller coaster ride of images.

When the actor's actually attain the speed of life, something glorious happens. The distance between the cerebral cortex anterior and posterior collapses, the 80 milliseconds, and the actors begin to repeat the other person's words SIMULTANEOUSLY AS THE OTHER PERSON SAYS THEM.

The exercise becomes:

Building

BuildingBlocks

BlocksCity

CitySkyline

SkylineNashville

NashvilleDylan

DylanThomas

ThomasTrainEngine

To get to this point takes a massive amount of egoless, other-conscious discipline. Here are THE STEPS:

STEP (1): Actor A says one specific noun.
Actor B repeats that one noun AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Example:

ACTOR A: Lemon

ACTOR B: (almost simultaneously) Lemon

One way to engage that immediate response ability is to add a physical aspect: Actor B can pluck the word as Actor A says it. Actor B literally reaches her hand out by the side of Actor A's face and pulls the word into her as it is being said, repeating the word as she does so.

Stop. Breathe. Take a moment...then repeat ten or twenty times until Actor B's repetitions are almost simultaneous to Actor A's nouns.

STEP (2): Switch. Actor B says one specific noun.
Actor A repeats that one noun AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Stop. Breathe. Repeat ten or twenty times until Actor B's repetitions are almost simultaneous to Actor A's nouns.

STEP (3): Actor A says one specific noun.
Actor B instantantly repeats that noun AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
And then Actor B INSTANTANEOUSLY adds a new noun.

EXAMPLE:

ACTOR A: Lemon

ACTOR B: (almost simultaneously) LemonPeel

Stop. Breathe. Start again.

What inevitably happens, is that Actor B slows down her repetition of Actor A's noun. Even though in Step (1) she got her repetitions almost simultaneous to Actor A's stating the noun...now, when asked to add a word, the space between the initial noun and the repetition gets bigger. Intuitively, you'd think that the check-out would occur between the repetition and the new word...but the actor's expectation that a new word has to be created, and the ego's fear of failure and desire to get things right, slows the response down...shutting down the connection before it can even happen.

The actor must be disciplined to maintain the immediate repetition of the coming word...the immediately, spontaneously, and accidentally allow a new word to "pop" out. It's a visceral (viscera = latin for "guts") reaction...which happens to be in the English language and attached to an image.

Specificity is key. Intuitively you'd think that words would be harder than sounds...but once the actor has learnt to override the ego that gets triggered by the fact that the exercise is language and check in to the partner, nouns in fact become easier than sounds and movement. The specificity of the words make it easier.

Repeat this step until the repetitions and responses fly by at the speed of life.

STEP (4): Switch. Actor B says a noun.
Actor A instantly repeats the noun and adds a new one.

Stop. Breathe. Repeat.

STEP (5): Full exercise. In other words, steps 3 and 4 continuously.