

See also: Questions, Unattributed

Empirical This text, this A-Z of The Theatre of Mistakes, seeks to reflect the nature of the conversations in which I participated for the purpose of complementing the **research** strategies of **curator** Jason E **Bowman**. Conversations held in a variety of venues and situations – some formal, some social, which began via email, over the telephone, in an airy tango studio in North London, in a café on Manhattan's Lower East Side, in the calm of university rooms, at the top of the escalators in Liverpool Street Station. Conversations which continued in a studio in Peterborough, in the fronts of cars, in the bar at the Battersea Arts Centre after a performance of Station House Opera's *Mind Out*, over dinner in a converted warehouse on Brick Lane and coffee in a quiet Herne Hill restaurant, in a small, temporary art space in Shoreditch, on the steps of London's National Gallery, in a yellow house in Oslo, after too many glasses of Prosecco in Soho's French House...

Conversations which ranged from precise recollections complete with corroborated dates to vaguer memories which failed to allocate names or sites to moments half-revived, semi-forgotten. Treating each interviewee's impressions of their involvement with The Theatre of Mistakes – whether as spectator or participant, regardless of the longevity of that experience – with equal importance, *The Theatre of Mistakes: an A-Z* explores the possible as opposed to the definitive as a valid tool in the creation of a multi-perspectival narrative. As such, it is not exhaustive, is far from complete. Nor does it see completion as a desirable aim. Rather, it hopes to instigate more questions, provoke more memories, more contradictions, rather in the manner of **gossip**.

Endings

The rules governing The Theatre of Mistakes' performances meant endings were unpredictable unless operating within previously specified time constraints. In theory, some performances could finish within a few moments of starting (depending on triggers) and Peter **Stickland** recalls Fiona **Templeton**'s integrity in this matter; she had no qualms in seeing the rule to its conclusion even if it meant the performance was only 3 minutes long. Conversely, there were structures that were deliberately open-ended, infinite. In the preface to the script of *Going* – the first fully rehearsed 'play' – for instance, various options for endings are suggested.



Going, the endless performance

Then there is the bigger ending. Why did The Theatre of Mistakes disband?

Exercises

Essora Tessorio

Ephemeral

Englishness

Endings

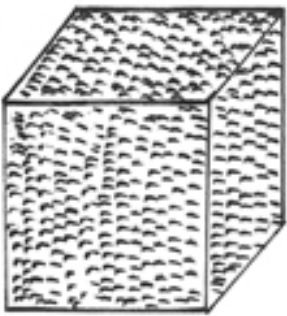
Empirical

Elements of Performance Art

Eden, Susan

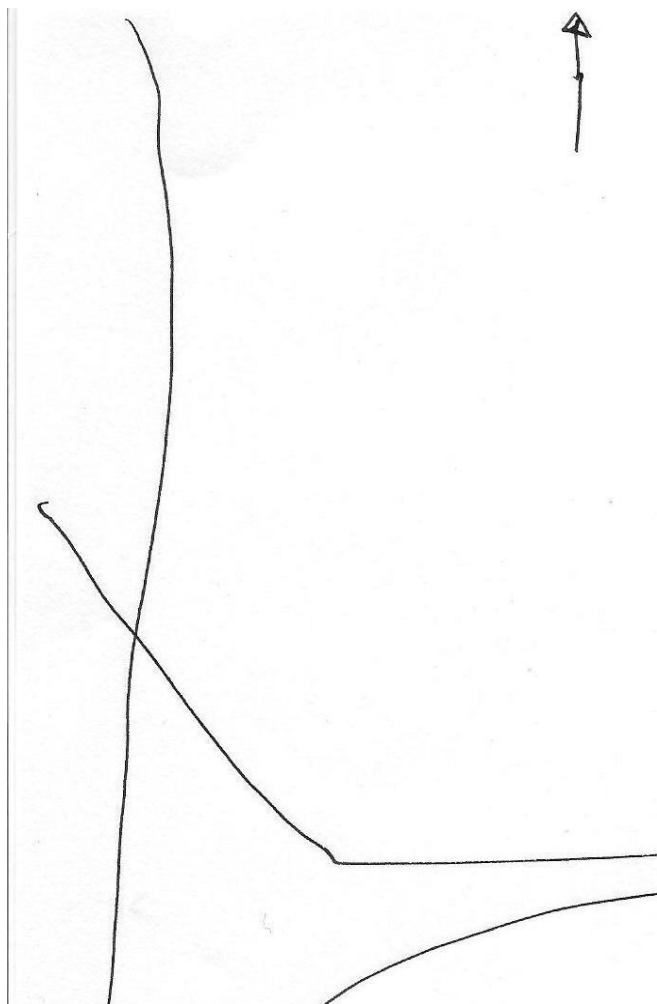
Eden, Andrew

Economics



An A-Z of The Ting: Theatre of Mistakes – E

Marie-Anne Mancio



2009-09-03

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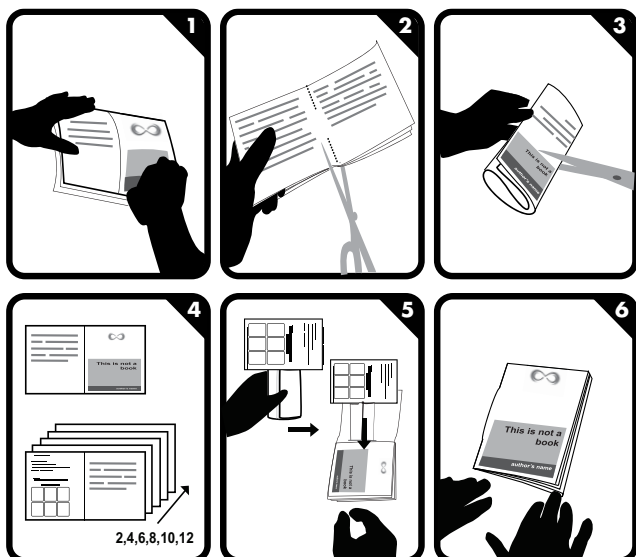
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The Ting, early workshop, nd, c.1974
Photo © The Theatre of Mistakes, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

Economics
See also: Victoria Chick, Funding, Samovar
The Ting's adherence to **Minimalism** was due in part to lack of funds so it is not surprising its aesthetic developed out of the quotidian. Kilims Signe Lie **Howell** and Anthony **Howell** brought back from their travels were deployed as props; the vehicles people drove to **Purdies** farm were the substance of Amikam **Toren's Ballet for Cars**; Lie's pregnancy inspired **Birth Ballet Chorale** (1974) performed by pregnant "ladies;" performers were told to wear whatever black clothes they owned; and later **The Street** (1975) was, literally, on the doorstep. Costumes were retrieved from donations and army surplus stores. Howard **Tong** recalls everyone having to change into his aviator suit to be photographed for the publicity information about Ting: The Theatre of Mistakes.

The Ting: Theatre of Mistakes

an **A-Z**

E

Marie-Anne Mancio

Use any means of getting off the ground
for a moment at a time e.g. by jumping
by using delicately balanced equipment
such as a stick

for a short time e.g. by being supported by another performer
by using equipment that is difficult to
balance on such as a ball
by using equipment that requires an effort
such as holding on to it
by using equipment that is gradually dis-
mantled

for a long time e.g. by using a permanently raised part of the
performance area
by using equipment that is solid and stable
by using equipment that is gradually built.

This exercise may be applied by a performer who is moving freely
as a sculptor to performers that he or she is using as objects.

OFF THE GROUND



While the Arts Council of Great Britain considers which cate-
gories are appropriate for our application for one year's rev-
enue grant of £6000, THE TING: THEATRE OF MISTAKES teeters on
the verge of bankruptcy. This is despite a healthy schedule
of future bookings at home and abroad (including nine perform-
ances at the Serpentine Gallery in September and October, three
performances at the Stedelijk in Amsterdam in November and neg-
otiations for a tour of the Far East and the U.S.A. in 1976).
Publication of our first book *ELEMENTS OF PERFORMANCE ART* can-
not go ahead without adequate funds. We have no money to cover
our living expenses while we carry on vital rehearsals and work-
shops. The previous year's activities have left us with a def-
icit of over £900. Fees (if any) for performance art are not
geared towards a large-scale company such as ours. At present
we have no money to cover the deficit, no money to continue, no
money to get home tonight, no money to pay for rents, rates,
services, let alone for any ongoing administration of our aff-
airs. There is no guarantee that our application for the reven-
ue grant will meet with success, or that it will be forthcoming
soon enough to keep the most threatening wolves from forcing
their way through the door.

In order to deal with this emergency, artworks for The Ting, from
artists determined to see the company survive are welcomed at THE
ART ROOM, 11 ASCHAM STREET, LONDON N.W.5., where such artworks may
be bought by those of the public wishing to support us—enquiries
01 267 1597.

Cash donations are also welcomed, here, now, and at any time at the
above address.

At the same time, members of the audience are invited to sign the
petition being circulated or to write to Roy Shaw, Secretary General
of the Arts Council of Great Britain, 105 Piccadilly, W1V 0AW, stat-
ing the relevance of our work in more personal terms.

Please do all you can. Please fill in the samovar.

MONEY AND THE TING

Finances were a continual struggle for The Theatre of Mistakes:

Cf Andrew Eden on *Box Installation* at Purdies farm, August 1974:
"Anthony said: would you like to have a field?
But there was no possibility of *any* materials of
any kind *at all*. So it was literally Anthony and
me going along to the supermarket and seeing what
we could get."

(Interview: Andrew Eden & Susan Bonvin, Peterborough, 24th Nov 2008).

Poster left at performance spaces c.1975/6, Theatre of Mistakes Archive

3) Mr Robertson goes on to say..."And they're doing this on your money..." (the general public, the tax payer) "....They have a direct grant from the Arts Council to stage this thing." In fact, we are paid a fee, by The Hayward, for a certain quota of performances, 48 of them, running for the duration of the exhibition. Each performer gets no more than £3 per day spent performing, while a small sum has been paid towards production costs—the four members of the nucleus receiving an extra £1 per day for coping with all preparations, maintenance, rehearsals, daily work-shops and administration. The piece could never have been mounted without subsidy coming directly from the pockets of the nucleus.

Letter dated 16th Aug 1977 from Anthony Howell to BBC re treatment of The Theatre of Mistakes in Fyffe Robertson's 'Robbie' which aired the previous night on BBC1 at 8.30pm. See also: [Audiences](#)

- 3 Use it (them) for their properties e.g. making a sculpture out of tables.
- 2 Use it (them) for space delineation e.g. standing on a rug constitutes immunity from performance laws.
- 1 Use it (them) functionally: e.g. sit on the chair.

Use one (or multiples of one) basic article of furniture within the performance area.

FURNITURE EXERCISE

Exercises @ The Theatre of Mistakes

- 1) Sit, lie or stand in one position for one hour.
- 2) Repeat one word not more than once every 10 minutes.

Any number of people

SPEAKING STONES EXERCISE

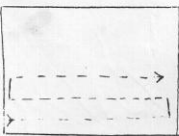
Nine Units Exercise
Triples
Metronome, Stick, Chairs
Total Drag
Far and Near Soliloquy

SLEEPWALKERS

One couple or more.

Each performer stands at the edge of the performance space. Raise arms from sides and walk directly across/along the performance space. When the opposite side is reached, lower your arms, turn round, move one pace along the edge.

Again raise arms from sides and walk across/along performance space. Continue sleepwalking thus. When a corner of the performance space is reached start sleepwalking along the other two edges.



Whenever opposite another performer walk towards each other at the same speed. When you meet (still with hands outstretched in front of you) place hands on each others shoulders. Stand like this for five minutes. Then slowly revolve anti-clockwise once. As you both start to revolve, start making a scarcely audible noise which gradually grows louder. The noise stops abruptly as soon as the anti-clockwise revolution is completed (i.e. when both performers cease moving). Each step a pace to the left, without dropping arms. Now continue on your way, sleepwalking towards the opposite edge.

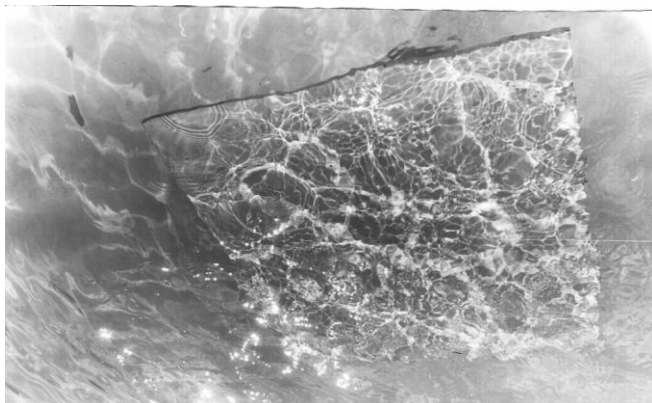
Always perform a complete revolution with your partner, ending the revolution in the same position as you began.

Should you come across an obstacle in your sleepwalking, turn at 90 degrees and then continue in the new direction.

5 years ago which created the company and its quality. It should be born in mind that the final decision of the company does not just make one gap in the final performance art scene since it was the decision of 6 performance artists to work together. It should be born in mind that the final decision of the company does not just make one gap in the final performance art scene since it was the decision of 6 performance artists to work together. It should be born in mind that the final decision of the company does not just make one gap in the final performance art scene since it was the decision of 6 performance artists to work together.

Anthony Howell: Application for a Major Bursary
The Theatre of Mistakes

PRICE LIST.			
ARTIST	TITLE	PRICE (A)	
1. Edward Meneeley	Star	£150.00	} £600.00 for the set
2. " "	Time	150.00	
3. " "	Ball	150.00	
4. " "	Line	150.00	
5. " "	Drip	150.00	
6/7. Susan Bonvin	Aids to spread focus (Edition of seven sets maximum)	104.00 per set	
8-12. Marc Chafmowicz	5 untitled works	45.00 (£210.00 for the set)	
13. Susan Hiller	Untitled adhesive table work	45.00	
14. " "	" " " "	45.00	
15. " "	" " " "	45.00	
16. " "	" " " "	50.00	
17. " "	" " " "	45.00	
18. Lindsay Moran	Canvas	300.00	
19. " "	Glove drawing	35.00	
20. " "	Table drawing	25.00	
21. " "	Carnations	20.00	



The ever-contentious relationship between performance and documentation asks whether a death occurs between the ephemeral moment and the permanent record...



Essora Tessorio (17th June, 1973 at the Whitechapel)

See also: **Venues**

Though this event prefigured Ting, the act of Signe Lie **Howell** reading out Anthony **Howell's** poetry is indicative of their future collaboration. Victoria **Chick** recalls it was very well received; the phrase that she still remembers:

Cold ocean cold ocean cold ocean cold ocean

(Interview: Victoria Chick, London, 4th Nov 2008)

Exercises

Fiona **Templeton** played a major role in editing exercises from the **Gymnasium** into the book **Elements of Performance Art**. Though exercises are mostly undated, at least a couple – *Sleepwalkers* and *Lightning Spinners* – were performed in October 1974. Others include *Body Aural Couplets* (February-December 1975); *Digital Masks* (February 1975), *Dynamic Camouflage* (June 1975) *Slow Traffic* (June 1975), *Amplification* (July 1975)

Sleepwalkers

Progress to Reverse or Tidal Drag

Walking Circle Forwards

Joints Exercise/Anatomical Exercise

Three Movements Exercise

Ultimate Rope Trick

Brisk Intervals

Universal/Dinka Jumps in the Circle

Lightning Spinners

Finger Heat Exercise

Sticks

First Conversation Piece

Marionettes Verbal

CUBE, PYRAMID AND SPHERE

Three dimensional shapes drawn by means of map references and addresses in London. Corners, centres apices ranging from the top of the post office tower to the deepest point on London's underground, from the Serpentine to the ponds on Hampstead Heath. Where possible, these corners, centres and apices will be indicated in their actual situation. Planes and curves will also be indicated where possible.

A poster to be produced with addresses and map references, tracing a journey along the edges of these solids and of chosen latitudes of the sphere. Also a folded sheet to be distributed by post.

Extract from notes for *Summer Pieces*, 20th June-20th July 1975, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

Long-time friend of Anthony **Howell**, artist Andrew Eden was involved in *From Where to Where* "a verbal and visual event" with him in May 1974 (Hampstead Heath) and was always aware of the activities of The Ting. He was also one of the founder/editors of *Wallpaper* and took part in *Summer Pieces*.

Extract from Amanda **Welch's** review of *Cardboard Boxes* The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

It reminded me of those displaced cubes of sky in Magritte's pictures. as though sections of the sky had landed in the field. both artificial and natural – dusty August sky, colours step makes all the difference. The chilly colours seemed white and yellow – yellow and blue – blue and white. One to see an exact sequence of all white rectangles changing to

Eden, Andrew

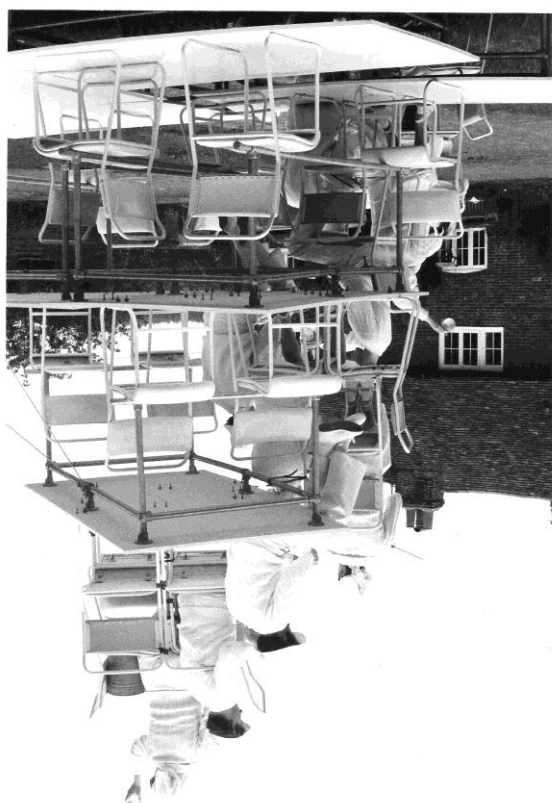


Andrew Eden Cardboard Boxes at **Purdies** farm, 1974



Photos ©The Theatre of Mistakes, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

Rehearsal/performance of *Waterfall* Hartley Wintney, Summer 1977
Photo © The Theatre of Mistakes, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive



The Theatre of Mistakes is divided as to their 'Englishness'. For Peter **Stickland**, their aesthetic can only have grown out of its context – its language, that particular brand of eccentricity, its (comical) approach to physicality that passes for Englishness. For Fiona **Templeton**, the work transcended that but then perhaps her perspective is informed by her history of practising on both sides of the Atlantic. Either way, it appears The Theatre of Mistakes was best received elsewhere in Europe (cf the artist Alan Charlton, the film maker/artist Peter Greenaway). As Anthony **Howell** notes, the literary tradition in English theatre made performance art unpopular with critics.

Ephemeral

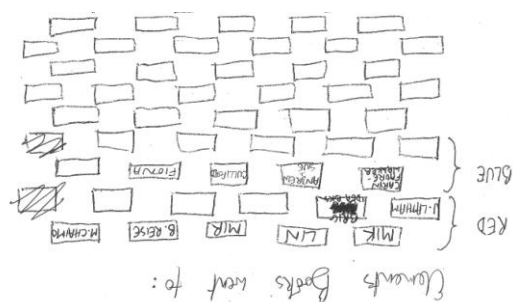
Performances, shadows, sunlight, scratches of chalk; Robert **Janz** walks through New York City streets and along London pavements; Jane **Clark** films water; Susan **Hiller** maps dreams...

"It's appropriate now to work on the authentic form of those phenomena that erase themselves, that go through a complete cycle of changes from birth to death [...] I would like my work to exist within the life cycles of the natural things that come into being around us."

Robert Janz in the draft of a Press release by Anthony **Howell** for *Summer Pieces*, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

See also: **Documentation**, **Purdies**, and for filmmakers Anthony **McCall** and Annabel **Nicholson**'s connection to expanded cinema read Lucas Ihlein "Pre-digital New Media Art" *RealTime Arts* no. 66, April/May, 2005, 26 for a discussion of work from the **Seventies**.

Extract of Diagram found in The Theatre of Mistakes Archive regarding distribution of the *Elements* book



Though currently out of print, there are plans, instigated by Jason E Bowman, to re-issue *Elements of Performance Art*.

"Anthony Howell and Fiona Templeton's *Elements of Performance* was self-published and distributed by Ting in 1976 in an initial edition of 60. Offering a unique insight into how Ting advocated performance art be created via instruction and chance with cross-disciplinary activities, it remains an out-of-print seminal publication as a hybrid manifesto/manual. The Ting: The Theatre of Mistakes' methods of production are outlined in the publication against six elements: conditions, body, aural, time/space, equipment and manifestation with a total of 42 **exercises**, to be structured via chance allowing for multiple formations and convergent structures." (Jason E **Bowman** "Accidentally on Purpose, The Ting: The Theatre of Mistakes, Towards A Retrospective" PS15, Zagreb, June 2009)

Eden, Susan: See **Bonvin**, Susan



In 1977, he and his wife Susan Bonvin were part of OnSite, a group show at Arnolfini, Bristol, 3rd – 29th October 1977. The others included several artists who had been present for the August 1974 weekend at Purdies farm: Jane **Clark**, Susan **Hiller**, Robert **Janz**, and Amikam **Toren**.

Eden and **Bonvin** are currently working collaboratively on a series of paintings.

For a biography of Eden, see his profile at <http://www.axisweb.org/seCVFU.aspx?ARTISTID=9438>

Further reading: www.susanbonvin-andreweden.co.uk

See also: **Bibliography**, **Economics**, **Letters**, **Manifesto**, **One Rule Game**, **Ting**, **View**, **Union**

"Theatre of Mistakes had a very American, New York aesthetic, in one sense. But it had a curious English public school touch to it as well. I was always wearing cricket clothes or something daff - grey suits"

(Julian Maynard Smith in www.viziang.co.uk/readings/Smith)

The dole
August bank holidays

Englishness
Active Circles
Cricket whites
Eccentricity (see Deborah Howell)
Hartley Whitney

of 2009, have not re-performed altogether. publication; all have lectured on The Theatre of Mistakes) but, as Stickland prepared scripts of *Going* and *Homage to Morandi* for versions of *Waterfall*; see Templeton for *Coming* (with *Going*); members have resurrected works (Howell did several smaller group fragments, eventually disbanding in 1981. Individual *Orpheus* and *Hermes*, the most being *Homage to Morandi*), the 3 years (the least 'successful' work of that period probably being Theatre of Mistakes. Despite continuing in some form for a further *Payne* was still drifting; Stickland was still interested in The *Greenall* was "exploring the S&M scene" (unattributed); Miranda was at the point of wishing to further her painting; Mickey Templeton stayed on to pursue her own projects; Glenys *Johnson* toured there in 1978. Anthony *Howell* wanted to go home; "everything fell apart in *New York*" (unattributed) after *Going* There were no mutual, considered decisions as such. It appears



Mickey Greenall, Anthony Howell, and Fiona Templeton in *Going*
Photos ©The Theatre of Mistakes



Fiona Templeton, Glenys Johnson, Peter Stickland, Mickey Greenall in *Going*

© A. Howell & F. Templeton *Elements of Performance Art* (1976)

method of executing turns whenever you find it necessary to turn.

Consider constructing a travelling pattern by employing any consistent

Employ triggers to begin, alter or cease your progression.

method of progression throughout the performance.

Choose one of the methods of travelling thus discovered as your

and/or

walking carrying a weight with eyes shut etc)

the original method of travelling plus a combination of any two

and/or

(such as walking backwards, walking carrying a weight etc)

the original method plus each of the alteration possibilities

and/or

Perform the original method of travelling

Negotiating Obstacles

Carrying a Weight

In a Series of Jerks

Smoothly

As fast as possible

Backwards

As slowly as possible

Suggestions:

Choose five possibilities of altering the method of travelling chosen.

the centre of the length of the performance space).

(e.g. walking the length of the performance space along a line down

Perform that method of travelling over that distance along that line

centre of the length of the performance space).

Choose a particular distance (such as the length of the performance

space) and a specific line to travel along (such as a line down the

Decide upon one consistent method of travelling (such as walking).

PROGRESSIONS

+

CONDITIONS:

1. Exercise Performance
2. How Long, How to Start, How to End, How to Be
3. On and Off Areas
4. Referee/Audience
5. Trigger Possibilities

BODY:

1. Angles/Curves
2. Falling Down and Getting Up
3. Freeze
4. Head Turns
5. Horizontal and Vertical Exercise
6. Interruption Rule
7. Jumped Progress
8. Moving Statues
9. Progressions
10. Sound Faces

AURAL:

1. Extending Sentence Duet
2. Mutual Sentences
3. Pitch/Volume/Speed Slides
4. Slowed Songs
5. Text Exercise

TIME/SPACE:

1. Body Box
2. Body Speed and Travelling Speed
3. Gaps Exercise
4. Lines of Direction
5. Speed Scale

EQUIPMENT:

1. Chosen Object Exercise
2. Furniture Exercise
3. Object/Subject Exercise
4. Off the Ground
5. Properties of a Prop

MANIFESTATION:

1. Exercise Alteration Exercise
2. Reflection
3. Repetition
4. Reversal
5. Solo Performances

©Fiona Templeton and Anthony Howell *Elements of Performance Art* (1976), Contents