



Murray, S. and Evans, M. (2020) PLAY, COMPLICITÉ, DISPONIBILITÉ: a dialogue between Mark Evans (ME) and Simon Murray (SM) at the National Theatre in London, November 2018. *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 11(4), pp. 515-518.
(doi: [10.1080/19443927.2020.1824857](https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2020.1824857))

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Deposited on 25 September 2020

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PLAY, COMPLICITÉ, DISPONIBILITÉ: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN MARK EVANS (ME) AND SIMON MURRAY (SM) AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE IN LONDON, NOVEMBER 2018.

Preamble and Context

As part of its programme of public talks the National Theatre in London hosted a panel event entitled 'The Influence of Jacques Lecoq on UK Theatre' in the Dorfman Theatre on 6th November 2018. The panel was chaired by Claire Brennan, theatre critic for The Observer and consisted of Leah Hausman (choreographer and movement director) Toby Jones (actor), Mark Evans and Simon Murray (both academics and writers). Apart from Murray, all had trained with Lecoq at one time and both Murray (*Jacques Lecoq*, Routledge 2018) and Evans (editor with Rick Kemp of *The Routledge Companion to Jacques Lecoq* 2016) had written extensively on Lecoq's Paris School and his pedagogy.

Thinking through and preparing for the event between all five of us was hugely pleasurable and included three hours in a National Theatre studio playfully reminiscing around Lecoq experiences and trying to agree a rough structure for the panel. All of us made short contributions to a full house in the Dorfman, leaving only a very short time for questions and conversation. After a show of hands it was clear that approximately 2/3 of the audience had trained with Lecoq in one capacity or another, and we were delighted to welcome Norman Taylor, a former teacher at the School (1982-2000) to the event.

Following a dialogic and performative presentation on Lecoq we (ME & SM) had given at the International Platform for Performer Training (IPPT) in Wroclaw in 2017, we decided to reprise a shorter version of this for the National Theatre event. Invoking three key conditions, attitudes, qualities or dispositions - PLAY, COMPLICITÉ, and DISPONIBILITÉ – which we believed to be absolutely central to Lecoq's pedagogy and approach to theatre making, we scripted and performed the dialogue below. These qualities were not 'invented' by Lecoq but were harnessed, deepened and practiced by him as the necessary bedrock for almost all live performance. Our dialogue hints at what these qualities might mean for performers/actors: between themselves on stage, in relation to their audience, to their text and to the material and non-human objects of the piece in question. These are qualities at once beautifully simple *and* perversely challenging to sustain for performers and in theatre making. Our dialogue was deliberately play-full and elliptical, offering our audience the opportunity to fill in the gaps and to make their own meanings from these words and the dispositions they embody.

ME **PLAY ... COMPLICITÉ ... DISPONIBILITÉ**

SM **PLAY ... COMPLICITÉ ... DISPONIBILITÉ**

ME Happy, libidinous, sensual and inseparable bed-fellows

SM Lecoq calls play *Le Jeu*.

ME Play, as in ***Royal Hunt of the Sun***, where we watched actors conjure a journey across mountains on a bare stage.

SM: Lecoq did not invent the circumstances of play for theatre training but it provides, as the philosophers say, a 'necessary condition' for the *life* of all theatre.

ME Play, as in *War Horse*, where puppet horses come alive as real, breathing beasts before our eyes.

SM Play refuses authority, not through aggressive contestation, but by joyfully shifting the terms of the debate, through slippage, laughter, deflection, the rough, the vulgar, the irreverent, the indirect angle of incidence and arriving from the oblique.

ME Play offers actors the possibility of claiming agency in the construction of work.

SM Play, as in Complicite's *Street of Crocodiles* when, at a dinner table, spoons, fork and plates begin to vibrate and jump, animated by the actors, as if they had suddenly acquired a life force of their own.

ME Play, as in *Street of Crocodiles* when books apparently being read by the characters, undulating from their spines, become flapping birds.

SM Play finds in error and failure a hope of redemption, the confidence that not knowing solutions is the first and last step of a democratic act.

ME Play, as in the manic cartoon mayhem of Moving Picture Mime Show's version of the *Seven Samurai*.

SM Tim Etchells wrote: 'Play is a state in which meaning is in flux, in which possibility thrives, in which versions multiply, in which the confines of what is real are blurred, buckled, broken'.

ME Play thrives on the unruly and invites the inmates to take over the asylum.

SM The playful actor mischievously challenges and undermines the 'expert' director, playwright, choreographer or composer.

ME Play - The pleasure of insouciance.

SM Play - The frisson of uncertain outcomes.

ME Play - The fearful delight in not knowing where you are heading.

SM Play - The risk of throwing away the route map.

ME Play - A cultural politics for over-prescribed times, for art in its own right and on its own terms.

SM The *disponible* actor is open and receptive to the human and material environment with which they engage on stage.

ME The *disponible* actor never says 'no' to challenges.

SM The *disponible* actor is always in the moment and aware of the theatrical possibilities of the moment.

ME *Disponibilité*: underpins all collaboration and group dynamics.

SM *Disponibilité*: deeply embodied, cognitive, psychological and emotional.

ME *Complicité*: generates a shared understanding between performers.

SM *Complicité* the condition we desire to create between performers and their audience.

ME *Complicité*: when present we all understand the rules of the game, the spirit of play, *Le Jeu*.

SM Complicite in rehearsal for ***Street of Crocodiles*** where all the cast sit back to back on the floor in pairs. As one slowly leans backwards the other curls forward, like Siamese twins their backs appear joined from pelvis to neck. They stretch and push, a gentle discovery of each other's spines, bodies opening and preparing. Complicite the company preparing the physical and psychical condition of *complicit é* amongst the ensemble.

ME *Complicité* attends to rhythm, gesture, speech and form.

SM *Complicité*: more the gleeful camaraderie of rogues, revolutionaries and sinners than the self-satisfied hand-holding of saints, the great and the good.

Simon Murray teaches contemporary theatre and performance at the University of Glasgow. He trained with Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux in Paris between 1986/7 and was a professional performer and theatre maker for ten years. He has written widely around physical theatres, lightness, WG Sebald, collaboration and is currently completing a book entitled 'Performing Ruins'. He was the co-founder with Jonathan Pitches of the *Theatre Dance and Performance Training (TDPT)* journal in 2010.

Mark Evans is Professor of Theatre Training and Education at Coventry University. He trained with Jacques Lecoq, Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux in Paris in the early 1980s. Mark has written widely about movement, actor training and physical theatre, including co-editing the *Routledge Companion to Jacques Lecoq* and writing *Performance, Movement and the Body* (Red Globe). He is currently co-authoring a book on Frantic Assembly.