

18th of September 2002, Berlin,
Interview with Keith Johnstone (K)
Interviewer: Rodolfo Garcia Vazquez (R)

R: Keith, I would like to start from the beginning; we go back to England the sixties, there is a young director, he works - he teaches at the Royal Shakespeare Company, he was, he took part in a legendary workshop with Arden, Bond, Vazquez

K: it starts a bit earlier, it starts about 1956; I was paid to write a play for the theatre which took me a very long time, so I read plays for the theatre, it was the Royal Court Theatre I know many actors were coming from the Royal Shakespeare Com but mostly I was actually working for the Royal Court- no connection with Buckingham palace - but that's what it is called - the English stage company at the Royal court theatre There was a writers group with interesting people in it, Wole Soyinka was in it - Nobel Prize winner - so you should mention him - that must have gone from about 57 or 58 to 61 and I directed plays at the theatre, I did many jobs but not acting but directing - it was a nice place to be. Because You could say what you felt like in it and it didn't offend anybody - most places I go to if I really say what I think people get upset - but not there

R: Let's say this was the first step - the first connection to theatre - to traditional theatre - acting with rehearsals and this kind of stuff - what comes next - I mean how did you start working with the theatre machine impro group - what made you go into this direction - did you have any feeling that it was not enough or

K: The writers group met - this group you mentioned - they had I think two or three meetings - indeed none of this writers had come from university - one John Arden had been to some kind of university but had studied architecture - none of them wanted to sit around discussing - they are not that kind of creature - in fact the new play writers who arrived at the Royal Court were not from the universities - later on they were - Pinter had been to university, Edward Bond - but none of those people.

Bill Gaskill who directed my play at the Royal Court, discussed the problem with me and I said that we should have an agreement that anything that could be acted out we should act out instead of discussing it - so once this rule was accepted enthusiastically - we had a special kind of group then it was already a kind of improvisation group because you made some claim -If Edward Bond said a piece of furniture can function like an actor you would give that a chance they go and show us - so that's the kind of beginners that was how it first started and then every night again sth wonderful we were very bad you there is sth there occasionally you get a flash of sth much more interesting than normal theatre.

R: and then you decided to go into - you decided create the theatre machine group or it was sth around also

K: George Devine really wanted to have a studio – the theatre didn't have very much money. Princess Margaret got ill and she was to open a new theatre called the Cochrane Theatre so it couldn't be opened officially until Princess Margaret got better. And then she didn't have a date available for about two years, so there was a theatre standing empty and the RC suggested that they should use it for classes – And the RC really had very little money but it did have directors who are on salary, so I was one of the people who was been paid and therefore was teacher of the studio - so I didn't want discussion so I decided we would teach comedy and we would agree that if we laughed then it was funny none of this discussion about well if other would have been there they would have laughed or so. But then you have the problem that maybe if you are laughing so much about yourself you are just kidding yourself and it is all bullshit. The only way to find out is to go out in front of people and play in front of strangers, it is the only way to know. So I thought I could give my comedy classes in public. – So it all happened in a way by accident but also driven by the need not to discuss things.

R: and from this – what I would like to know is, were you unhappy with the state of theatre- were unhappy with what was going on in theatre or it was sth natural for you going into this open comedy classes or did you feel sth was missing

K: We could take the underground line down to We could see all that live actors on the stage and we could come back to our theatre and it all looked like xxx like very much of so while that existed we knew we were not doing the right thing, certainly we were discontented, also my own ideas were different then, I was really interested in xx I was not interested in naturalistic theatre at all so I never saw it like other people saw it but it was nice if you could go what xxxx it was really fine – so I knew our work was not so good but it was interesting it was a place where you could do new things if you wanted to it was always xx

Oh in the first improvisation scene we got very annoyed about the English government they were trying to hush up sth

In a Kenian concentration camp eleven people got beaten to death and I think a hundred got injured and the British government was keeping a kind of censorship

So we decided to do an improvisation I did it with Gaskill using 11 black actors – unfortunately – I understand it now - the audience so wanted to encourage them

That our improvisation show became a comedy which wasn't our intention but that was the first real public improvisation thing that was about 1959. So certainly I was interested then in improvisation.

R: And what was your experience then when you decided to leave the RC and start this jumping to darkness because you didn't know what could happen to the theatre machine impro group or

K: It wasn't like that. I left RC in 1966 I directed it for a year with Gaskill and Ian Caspersen before then I had been directing the RCT Studio among other things and it was around about then that I started taking actors out to improvise first of all we took it out to see if the work any value to people. But then we started taking it out once we knew it had value then people would start to invite us to other countries. If you were a foreigner coming to England to study theatre to look at theatre nobody would let you in. But George Devine decided there should always be people looking at your work so the RCT was never closed. So if you came to England and wanted to see what new acting things were being done you wouldn't go into the acting schools which were taught by the British Council and they would send you off to RCT Studio where there were always three or four foreigners sitting to watch the work. And those people began inviting us go to other countries to play. So for a while we did that.

R: You were working inside the RC and at the same time you were sometimes going abroad with this improvisation group

K: Yes, mostly around England at first.

R: Why did you leave in 66 the RC?

K: I don't think – well we had a rather unsuccessful year and there were three directors and our position was not clarified so I think properly both me and Ian both left at the same time because Gaskill wanted to do it in another way I'm sure he was right. I was teaching at the Royal Academy then. And then I did more work with the theatre machine. But you can see this kind of things happens almost by accident. I always had a great interest in everything – I knew about the Italian comedy I'm not a person who is going to think that what we are doing is right. So I'm always likely to do sth new.

R: When you started improvisation you started the Italian ...

K: No I bought a lot of books on Victorian party games

R: Party games

K: It wasn't any use. But it did make me understand what they were for. The Victorians were so oppressive but they would have parties where they played games human sensitivity games. Well they take xxxx laughing gaspers they liked. No that didn't help. I had - the studio was opened to all members of the theatre professionals I think you had to have a union card you had to be xxx the RC was very famous all kind of people wanted to come to this studio – they all know more than I do cause I haven't

been trained of anything so I think I read a couple of Stanislavski books and at that time I wasn't very sympathetic to those ideas. In any case they knew much more about that than I do. I started – I decided I if you gonna be an improviser which interested me then it should be based on storytelling. And as I was a playwright I thought I might know a bit more about it than the actors. But none of us knew anything. So I started doing that and as I believed you shouldn't discuss if you could help it I would try to invent games that would avoid discussion. And then little by little I turned onto comedy. I was teaching masks. George Devine was teaching comedy. He got - he began to get annoyed because we were teaching masks a quite different way from him so I swapped my mask classes for his comedy classes so then I had to teach comedy. And I was very good in inventing games I used to invent so many games like ten a day it was easy. Later on I wondered what /had (?) happen because I didn't invent so many games but maybe it is because I had enough games to fill the need. I don't know. But it was a very creative and inventing time and we all knew sth interesting was happening.

R: You had this group inside the RC but then the contact with the audience also made this you learned a lot from the audience about improvisation or do you think only the class only the group who is inside the process is enough for a good improviser to learn

K: I don't understand the question

R: I wanted to understand how you developed your skills in improvisation how you developed your knowledge about improvisation. If it was enough the work with the actors or the contact with the audience was also important for this process. – You understand?

K: Well, - I mean the audience does influence you but it does in any kind of theatre if you are a good director you know that the audience has the knowledge – tell that at the university and they get very angry but you direct a play and then you watch the audience because the audience know when to open toffee papers it know when to look at the lights it knows when to open their programs it knows when to go quiet it knows to laugh and when you are rehearsing the play you are guessing what the audience will do and then you watch them to see if you are right. To me it sounds as if you are thinking that there should be sth special about the attention to the audience in improvisation

R: Yes

K: But actually if you direct some directors think if you educated the audience they would like what they do. I'm saying that the first problem in the theatre is to fill the theatre- when the theatre is full you can start asking questions like it is worth doing – and what are we doing. for me no point in having an artistic theatre with ten people coming to. You say –

oh, when we had different people, they would like it. So I think your problem is to fill the theatre first.

R.: In the beginning of this workshop you told us You don't look for light entertainment

K: I hate light entertainment

R: But- this balance – how can you get this balance – especially if you are an improviser you don't know exactly where you are going to when you go on stage with the scene so how do you as an improviser can find this balance between making people laugh or making people enjoy it and at the same time the people take it as art as sth to

K: I would not use the word art or culture. The improviser unfortunately does know what he is gonna do when he gets on the stage. He knows he will reveal nothing of himself. He will do nothing at any real interest. If anything interesting is about to happen he will kill it – or she will kill it, because on the stage they try to be funny but they don't want anything to happen. I'm not saying – when I say I hate light entertainment I'm not saying I like serious theatre. A lot of serious theatre is light entertainment, it's about nothing, it is a waste of time. I don't want to waste peoples time. The government loves sport. Fascist governments, communist governments all governments love sport – it is meaningless. I would put sport under light entertainment, it takes all those emotions and feelings that might be used better and you waste them on wondering if your team is gonna win – it is sick – very good for nazi governments or what ever especially and light entertainment to me is the same, lots of nothing – how can you – I had a phantasy about a job – maybe I write this – a giant – a very powerful child and you can't get rid of him – and all the giant killers turn up and the giant kills them all – and then one guy turns up who makes friend of the giant and gets him interested in TV and they do special TV programmes for the giant quiz games and little comedy shows which are meaningless he likes sport – and then you have destroyed the giant because he is so busy watching light entertainment and his mind turns into jelly – but I haven't written that but that's my feeling I mean I like if a scene is hysterically funny I'm very happy with it but I wouldn't call that light entertainment there must be a reason why it is so funny you know – I mean and I like psychotic scenes I like scenes that you remember like I think my attitude to artists is the same as my attitude to drugs, well if people are going to take drugs they want to have some effect on them you know morphine or whatever you want to have an effect but people use the theatre just to pass the time, so I don't really care what if somebody sees theatre and is thrilled and thinks it is wonderful and amazing even if I don't like it I think it is a good use of theatre. The kabuki used to have little rooms to go and sit in until you felt you could go into life again because you would be so upset by the performance you could sit in the little room like in a phone box until you

stop weeping and can go home, well I think that is good but we don't need that, so

R: and what do you think of comparing theatre today to the theatre of the 60s or the fifties

K: I don't know I don't go to the theatre

R: You don't go?

K: Not often

R: And when you go, what is the feeling you have?

K: Well I'm hoping it will be wonderful but I think it probably won't be wonderful. Xxxx

Japanese puppets I saw them back in 76 and I saw them again last year or the year before. I think they are absolutely wonderful. If theatre was like that I would go quite often. But even in Japan I don't think they like those puppets anymore they like Hollywood. I mean a lot of artists met them - I have about a hundred stations on my TV in Canada I think I could have more I think - you turn around and you can find six movies about robbing banks, you might as well watch football it has nothing to do with anything you are making movies about robbing banks because you don't want to make movies about anything that might change people, you are wasting peoples time you think that's in Hollywood that's the whole point, waste their time, leads entirely towards death, stop them thinking and I think that's what is going on, I'm not saying I am right, I'm telling you what my impression is

I think basically I a little bit provocative I want

R: In your work - especially in your training actors it is very clear that you want them to get free of any kind of fear of angst of or

K: just to be make it very easy

R: easy and also to make not the mind controlling the body but body and mind together making sth

K: Isn't that how things should be?

R: Yes, but do think that is possible in a in such a world where competition between artists for space and for survival which is so hard I mean it is sth that goes on the opposite, you have to forget that you are in a very competitive world that one person is going to be casted for a show with 500 or 5000 how can you manage this, I mean do you think this is something easy?

K: I designed the Loose moose theatre company in Calgary not to express my point of view my judgement theatre xxx started there, if you have a theatre based on normal thinking like every other company they take the values of the culture and they know how to organize things but we would do a short game I think it is still the same but we are not playing theatre sports xxxx at the moment but sometimes we do - but if you came to Loose moose you might say this is very interesting how do we get

involved - somebody would say well there is always a free class before the show, why don't you come to the class - so maybe you come along, you come to the class and then there will be a very short 10 or 15 minutes game of theatre sports and every week different people will choose the people who play - not me - so somebody might see you in the class and might say why don't you come and play theatre sports tonight for the first game - So you arrive and then an hour later you are on the stage - probably suffering - but you have different people every week to choose the teams and that is the theatre set up if nobody will ever choose you then I guess you have to say you have to learn more or if you take a game like "Meister" where you start with 15 people or 12 you do scenes and every night and again the audience decide what would you get given 1-5 points and your name is on a little board and every night and again you say, oh I'm sorry, we gonna have to get rid of some people and you saw off say 4 people who have the lowest points and after let's say two hours has only one person left who is the Meister and you can congratulate him. If you play games like that everybody in your theatre knows who is good, they know whom the audience like, you are not good because I say so, you are good because you keep winning "Meister". That helps. We know who is good. In the normal theatre everybody is lying nobody tells the truth, but if can change the work you also have to invent the forms you put it in. If you went to "2nd City" in Chicago they would audition you, they would pick the best improviser, they would cast you and they might say we gonna take to of you and we gonna fire one of you at the end of the week, tha's what they said to XXX Rivers. We are taking two girls you can start on monday on friday we will fire one of you. Well, if that's your attitude you are not gonna get a lot - this will affect the work you do, - so I'm saying you that have to question the social structures as well as the work. The structure os this class is not a normal class - the rules are different here, a lot of time is spent in explaining that the rules are not the same and then people get happy and less competitive here.

R: I have the feeling that there is sth also that happens with improvisers when they get older and more experienced which is more or less the same problem that older actors have also - to have the same tricks you know, and always to get in safer places

K: We haven't found this

R: No?

K: There are two worlds of improvisation. There is this world we are doing here which has quite different rules from the other world as you probably realize, I mean the rules here are not the same. If you keep working on the stage to make the audience laugh you learn tricks how to make the audience laugh you get old habits you are good because you make the audience laugh that's- sometimes the audience laugh and they don't want to laugh. Sometimes you shouldn't get laughs I mean there were bad laughs. Many improvisation groups print books full of lists of games -

personally I don't think that improvisation should be based on games. Games are nice because they give unity. Those books would never say this is a very boring game don't play it, they just collect it like old roman coins. They don't - you know - if it is funny they think it is ok.

R: So what you mean is that an improviser as he always needs to be in touch with the audience he must be always alive a very famous actor maybe he has a good position and he doesn't care very much or he has enough fame not to worry about a recycling.

K: If the thing gets stale you invent new problems but you can learn storytelling for ever you never become - you know it doesn't reach an end one problem one has in classes like this - I'm trying not to have it - they come trying to find the answer - the director at Los Angeles says they want the magic dust to sprinkle upon them but the truth is you don't come and learn how to improvise - you get a little closer to a goal you never reach and this stuff you never get there, there is no way to get there but you will learn more and more and more but it is open ended. This morning I talked about two ways to train actors. The actor is afraid but he learns to hide the fear. He goes on the stage. He has all kind of stuff he can do but probably he hits a wall and he won't get any better. The other way is to get rid of the fear and then the actor has more and more freedom he doesn't have to be good just that's what is necessary. Sometimes old actors get like that - I mean old actors if they get old often they become quite wonderful because they just do it. The old Olivier is fine - the old Gielgud is wonderful - the young guys were horrible

R: Because they wanted to be perfect or what?

K: No, they do it for themselves they want to be admired. You could see Olivier pleased with himself. Actors often like other actors when they can see the acting I'm often surprised of the actors like. If you can see the guy acting they think the guy is good. -I think the guy is good if you can't see his acting and just he does it

R: You said something - if you don't do anything we project on you, - this is my theory of acting

K: I would say. Well I have lots of theories but I don't think anybody else has this one

R: What do you mean? I should forget everything I learned about theatre technics or Stanislavski?

K: Well it depends if you are in a big theatre with 3000 people you gonna have to reach the back but if you try to reach the back all the time you are on the stage you don't have any power. They can still see you if there is someone sitting on a bed on the stage weeping or just the face covered

and they do nothing – the audience will watch that perfect happily for at least 25 / 30 seconds. If they do nothing and if they are relaxed because as soon as you see that you think of people sitting on beds weeping or women weeping or – you can't help but project onto people every time you meet somebody you put an image onto them and then you get to know them a little better and you change the image but we deal with the world like projecting images onto people. An American, an Israeli a Palestinian you are not weeping like you have bloody words and you think you know what you are talking about so it is natural to put projections. I gave the example at the beginning of "Blue Velvet" I think it is Kyle or somebody I may have missed the very beginning but he is walking across the field and pass the wood and he stops and looks at something – you don't see what it is and finally he looks at the grass and the camera comes in and it is a human ear lying in the grass. If he did anything to show me while he was walking if he did any acting I wouldn't be content to just watch him go I would want more but the effect is some movie and the less he does the more interested I am because he is not doing anything therefore it must be worth watching him because the director must have something for him - but if so – so for me you just - well Shakespeare is really the thing I mean many people and many Americans have such a trouble with Shakespeare so do Stanislavski I think. Often you just have to say the lines and the lines make it ok. But if you have a theory - I mean that is really annoying because if you are a playwright all playwrights I think that Memmuth book – Alexander just now – the publisher - Alexander Verlag - when he was here he was saying that – he has published the Memmuth book he was sorry he hadn't brought it – but playwrights have the experience that the actor is trying to show that he created the line and won't have the line have its power. If the story does it you don't do anything if the line does it you say the line. And then when you want power you do something.

R: And for example with emotional sounds – so the actors

K: That is just tie body into the mind but they shouldn't do anything to show us stuff. And those were short scenes this morning and I'm doing it – I'm trying to give them the experience that the intellect does not have to be in control and that is fine in acting but if it is a whole play you could not do that stuff about emotions you couldn't do it for very long but when you wanted it you could do it. If you are a bad pianist you play everything very loud – for a rockn roller it is probably all right but classical music you can't be loud and that should be inquired. You can't do something unless you do nothing – I don't have to argue that you know that it is true – but if you are afraid you can't be on the stage and do nothing, because you don't fear the acting.

R: And what do you think for example – you know this – who's line is it – you know this programme

K: I don't watch it

R: You don't watch it?

K: No, it was two theatre sports players that put it on this like what we did in the sixties but very bad

R: But why do you think it is so successful?

K: Because people love spontaneity it is a waste of time in TV it is only there for how long? Sixteen minutes I think they shoot four hours with wonderful improvisers and reduce them to the level of performing animals you watch the improviser jump through his hoop. The guy who tells them – the guy tells him stupid things to do – the last time I saw it I was appalled – I was in Toronto and I was getting dressed and by accident I am looking at a bit of it. And this guy who was in charge was saying he wants to get him to sing a song about bad breath – because he thinks it is funny – I don't want to go to the theatre to see somebody sing a song about bad breath. The audience laugh when he says it because it is stupid and nasty so he thinks they are pleased - anyway you shoot four hours with wonderful improvisers you show sixteen minutes everything is cut short nothing ever happens nothing ever goes anywhere. I mean no better than I do. I saw it when it first started and every single thing they did came from me – no it is not true I saw it when it first started xxx trouble and then I saw it and and everything I saw was the stuff we did in the sixties

R: You have rights on it or

K: We tried to investigate that back in the sixties – we could have actually unknown we had very bad legal advice – we could have got the form out and described it but no it is in the public domain.

R: So let us speak a little bit about this area the international theatre sports institute- ok? I would like to know how it works – how can groups be affiliated

K: If you look it up in the internet you will find it but I'm afraid of the internet because I think I will waste my time I think once I start just sounds like spending your life in a nights library but I have work to do so I let other people do that. When theatre sports was invented we were worried that the Americans might do something to stop us from doing it. So I said well ok we will go and see a lawyer and we will get some rights on this but I would not taking any money for it but then we found that we were losing money so I said ok we take 1 % but not for me but to deal with the administration and legal costs. And then we found that was not enough and so I think we did it 3%. A couple of times I have said this is ridiculous stupid lost of money is going on lawyers and I think Dennis has

phoned people out and suggest that we could put it in a public domain but the groups don't want to do that so I said ok. When I am 70 which is soon it is in my will so if I die they will get it anyway and I have said as long as you have managed to get representation from all of the license groups I will give all the rights to the ITI and I can do that because it would be a serious problem if I would have taken money but as I have never taken any money it has no value legally because they can't say you have earned money from this. You see if I had taken whatever money it has made 100s or 1000s of dollars spent on legal fees, if I had taken that money then I couldn't give it to them without paying a lot of tax. But as I haven't taken any money of it I can give it to the ITI and it is not a problem. - By good luck. That would be going on for two years we start an advisory group - mostly Americans from the West Coast - they really think it is theirs - because that is natural everybody always thinks they invented everything and they always think it is theirs. But they suddenly start to panic so they have a meeting in San Diego - this people from the West Coast - there were seven people on the committee and the job of the committee is to see that all groups are in a organization with representation from everywhere any group with license has got to have a saying how it goes so suddenly a panic has happened and I think they realized that it is not going to ready until my seventieth birthday - so actually they are doing something and they got some from New Zealand but they haven't got to many people outside America so they still have to solve the problem - but when they solve the problem then it will have nothing to do with me which is good because the office is in my house and I have a small house and there is no room in there it would be nice inviting guests but the place is all offices but that will stop and I always had so many worries and problems - but that won't be anything to do with and then of course they can put it in an public domain if they want, but they never will because they like to have a - my feeling it should be like Darwin like Icehockey - if you can't survive you are out - I not really thinking it should be

R: When did you exactly invent it?

K: Well the first theatre sport should be in the fifties - in the sixties when just to make things more interesting you do a competitive game or something you have two teams a team wins but -then I went to Canada and I didn't do that and then in the middle of the seventies I had 24 improvisers who all wanted to do it and I don't want to go onstage with more than four people - maybe six at the most but four is good. The reason is if you are on the stage with four people even if it is a bad night they see each persons character and despair. They get to know the people. The more people you have the less knowledge people have of the players so for me it is better to have four people.

R: And then - this was in Canada already.

K: But with theatre sport you can have you can play a twenty minute game you can a half hour game you can play so you can use 24 people in a night very easily also I hate being on the stage so it allowed me to get off the stage.

R: So the job of a director in an improvisation theatre performance is just teaching them how to improvise or how some

K: It depends. If I came round Europe back in the sixties I will be a director on stage with the people. But what happens is you see if you take who's line is it anyway what people think I do and it is absolutely not the worst thing about it is who is responsible for the quality – nobody – we just cut off the bad stuff but in my mind if you tell the actors to do something you are responsible for making your work like have to save them but what happens is that the guy says it and sits back and it is up to the actors but that is not good for the actors it is too much stress. Or why have the guy there if the actors decide what they want to do so – or if you have "Meister" which is a directed form so then you tell the actors what to do but also you tell the audience that the people who are responsible for the quality of the work are the two directors here, you say that as soon as it moves to somewhere else they don't say that because the directors are afraid to take responsibility but of course the director should be blamed. But then do a form where the actors go on for themselves it is Gorilla theatre where alternate in directing each other and the audience punishes them if they don't direct well.

R: Gorilla Theatre

K: Gorilla Theatre is another form- well there is many forms – there is "live game" it is getting popular but very difficult.

R: Is it difficult because of the improviser or

K: No I think

R: Because he must be very connected to the audience

K: Well it is difficult to find good directors in this world anyway. But they learn it by directing badly if they find good conditions we are always trying to train directors at the Moose. Biggest problem for directors is that thing we talked about this morning you look at the stage and you know what you would want to do and you tell them to do what you would want to do but that's no good. You have to tell them what they want to do. And then you have to play the games we were playing this morning and all that game was saying no to ideas. And this week I am hoping they can learn better what the other people want because when you start the improvisers I see hardly ever look at each other because they don't want the bad news, they don't want to know the other person doesn't like their idea.

So they are very separated. The other day – I think she is an actor, she was saying things and never looked to the other person to see if the other person wanted it. But you can train that. You can train people to be positive, you can train them to see if the other person wants the idea. And you can train them to know what the other person wants. So you are describing a very competitive world and you are saying but it has to be competitive and the rest of it but the whole thing about this week which maybe is very shocking is that it is not based on that but on the opposite. You go on the stage to inspire your partner. If your partner starts being wonderful you don't do anything. Because why should you bother. You can see that people are better working by the stuffed animal. And they are working with another improviser usually. But that's terrible. You shouldn't be better working with that teddy bear over there than with another player. But the forces in our culture are against this.

R: Yes, there is something else also in culture like this culture industry – alright? - Everything now is like a product something that you can sell. When you talk about improvisation you don't know exactly what product you are going to offer each night. You know it is a bit cowardice isn't it?

K: No, you can make it. Especially with TV you can cast off hour

R: That is what they do with "Whose line is it"

K: But most improvisation shows they keep using old stuff anyway. And they play games. You don't need to study improvisation if you play games. You just play the games. The game will keep you going. If you get people on the stage and you do their voices for them people will be entertained – it is just a game. I mean they watch people playing Icehockey they like to see games. So most improvisation groups get up on the stage and play games. And if they can begin to feel safe in it and enjoy it a bit instead of having the terror they are kind of to watch but I would (?) watch on TV why should I go to the theatre to see it. No.

R: You and Viola Spollin – you are like the new generation of improvisers that come after a tradition of Italian Commedia Dell`Arte – or do you think it has nothing to do with it, it is completely different?

K: No, it has nothing to do with it.

R: What is the basic difference you see?

K: Well some of the thing we did this week are like the Commedia in my view. But I didn't come to master servants scenes from the commedia I did it by. I tried to write an essay long ago. I was trying to find the differences in comedy in different cultures. But I kept finding master servant scenes

R: everywhere?

K: everywhere – So I started teaching master servant scenes. If you start teaching master servant scenes it starts look like a commedia. Especially if you give them brooms making hit each other. I mean there is the human being, there is the audience and there is the stage - you will find the same things. But it wasn't because I am xxx to the commedia, although I knew about it, I know about a lot of stuff I read all the time. The status stuff came from Konrad Lorenz and his jack doors and hacking orders among birds and that stuff but after months of not getting anywhere I thought I should apply it and was amazed that it looked like normal human behaviour. I couldn't believe that. But that was very successful. And then these things about social personality and how you learn how to look ugly in the street how you learn how to stop anything bad happening to you – that is obviously true and so then you try to teach the opposite here. For me it is just like watching human being.

R: But you say that in the English speaking countries now you have like two lines – this English line and the American line

K: They are all mixed together now. The American line has intended to be light entertainment, just for people drinking have cabaret just to pass time. And if you talk to an American improviser and you say work without suggestions. They say but how can we improvise? They don't know how they get improviser if they didn't get a suggestion. Well I think that is stupid because it guarantees light entertainment.

R: And what about your work in the US. Do you think the American improvisers they look for something from the English tradition or?

K: I think the whole thing is screwed up. But our people come to Calgary from all over the world and yes I am interested in the other thing. The normal thing is if you are a sensitive and intelligent human being you go into improvisation for a couple of years. You find that it is the same shit all the time. You give up. You loose your best people. They go away and then new people come in and it is all stupid but you have a good time. But after a while you begin to see what is the point and you go off because you know it is just like being the class clown. I think that is no good. I think your best people should hang around a long time. Because they like working under conditions where they are pushed a bit.

R: Why do you think people from different skills like psychologists or business men – they like to join your workshops?

K: Well this stuff is about human behaviour. The stage is a little model for life. I'm sure they find it – if I can get them to work here without fear I'm sure they can probably transfer it to their own lives in some way because I am working on human behaviour. And I am actually teaching

how to be a student and how to think. I keep telling them how they should be a student.

R: There is also something that you said that is interesting that a real good actor should always be a bit dangerous for the audience.

K: Yes, I do think that the good actors have a slightly dangerous quality. They don't have to be dangerous but it is nice if you can feel it.

R: The audience should feel it

K: I think so. They might do anything they are in the presence of some force. But you know that

R: Yes

K: Great Rockstars are the same

R: Yes, but do you think that this is a kind of feeling that we need in the audience, that we wanted?

K: Sure.

R: And what do you think the audience will wish to see in the future?

K: I don't know. I don't think human nature changes. I think the audience wants to see things connected, I think that they want to be taken forwards into the next step I think that whatever they see they want to be brought together and they want to be developed. But then you have to train people to that because the improviser doesn't want to take anything forwards and doesn't want to make connections. He wants to be funny and to get laughs but he doesn't want to change. More than anything else the audience wants to see the actor change or change someone else. They want stories. Stories always have some sort of content in them which often you don't understand. Traditionally if you have comedians they make fun of the - not the king and the queen or any big shit but they make fun of the officials, of the inspector general. And I think that is quite good if a peasant theatre makes fun of landlords and minor politicians all over the world. But now we have clowns that don't make fun of anybody except mother in laws or something it has no teeth it doesn't attack anybody. It is the one uncensored form you can't put anything on TV that is not censored even in the newspaper they don't censor you you know you won't keep your job if you keep making trouble. Sometimes you see what is going on in the papers.

R: Yes, but we live in time that seems very democratic but everything is very censored.

K: There was a letter printed in Harper's Bazar two months ago from a newspaper in Florida saying that he would fire anybody showing pictures of Afghan injured. He said if there is an orphan or something you can write about it but you are not to talk about or show any of the Afghan dead the civilians they must have killed thousands of people over there. So if you do you know you gonna get fired but you know that anyway. It is very unusual for the others that you have to do that for the owner. You know what the owner likes. You not gonna rock the boat too much. If you are on public TV and you are getting paid by Shell you not gonna do much about the oil shit. People censor themselves. In this medium there is no one who says you can't say that. The only thing is that the audience would stop coming if they didn't like it. But the audience likes it. But the improvisation has no teeth.

R: You mean the American

K: I don't go to see improvisation either but when I see it it is all a waste of time.

R: Because you said the Americans they don't believe anymore in master or slave scenes or things like that

K: They don't do that because everybody wants to be in control. They won't play master servant scenes because they think the master is in control. But he isn't. That is a mistake. They won't do family scenes because there might be some emotion involved. Theatre is about families and masters and servant and it is political and it is about causing trouble. But the improvisers on the stage trying to conceal him or herself. You may have very passionate feelings but they don't appear on the stage because you are up there being safe basically. I am not saying the answer to this. I'm not running an improvisation theatre at the moment but if I had an improvisation group I would want it to be a little provocative. I am thinking of starting a writers group at Calgary, a little writers' group. But it is really so we should start to study a bit to know what is going on to see if we can make this people a bit more – If the improviser - there is a mass of ignorance in America and Canada people don't know anything it is amazing – they don't know where Brazil is – four out of five Americans have no idea where Brazil is, I'm sure, I think that is true actually. Four out of five conquestmen don't have a valid warrant (?) passport. The schools are terrible. Bush can say all those things and every line is ridiculous but no one knows. They don't know they secretly mined Havana harbour, they don't know Castro was in Guatemala when they CIA sent bombers to bomb the palace –they don't know all that stuff. They don't know anything. They don't know Russia was attacked in 1999 or whatever by the western forces trying to put the business back in charge. There is a mass of incredible ignorance which you may have met. So it would be good to have the improvisers first be a little educated about the world and then to give them a passion for doing something

about it. I'm a bit old for that. It is an uncensored form. The human being is on the stage. There is the audience. No one can tell you not to say stop or not to do stop.

R: this is very difficult. But of course in this case the problem is not only the improviser but the background of the improvisers I mean. None of them come with any critic background that they. – you think that there is a difference between this actor of nowadays and the actors from the sixties or

K: No

R: It was like that at this time also?

K: It is a continual fight to get anything that is not light entertainment. It is very difficult.

R: You think this globalisation it is just a continuation of all this

K: I don't see the effect – I don't see it. People are human beings they should have human concerns. We avoid it, most people avoid it.

- I am worried because. If that goes in here it will get into my eye ... It is nice if there is a lot of problems that are not solved. Back in the sixties we video smashed in Germany they so liked us. The young people would come up and be so enthusiastic but then they you are not political – they loved us because we were not and I was saying there is something anarchic about walking on the stage with nothing prepared. And it is true. In the context of German theatre of the sixties you have four people walk on the stage with nothing and keep the audience interested for two or three hours – that was a political move. They were doing all kinds of political theatre but what is the point because if it is boring to hell with it. But that was – in a way there is the very fact that you are trying to learn freedom and trying to get access to what is inside the person is going to improve things a little. My fantasy which nobody ever understands would be to have a political theatre with no point of view.

R: What comes next.

K: People start a political theatre because they think they know what the answer is and they want to sell it to the audience. Then people who agree come to see them. It is the same as a bourgeois theatre. You get your values on the stage, the people who share the values come and they get patted on the back and

R: Everybody is happy

K: Yes.

R: and they go home.

K: I think a theatre should – I want people to think politically a bit. But I don't want them to come and be told what to think I would like to have – I am serious it would be interesting to do a political theatre where if you did one thing about one point of view you would instantly do another scene that told the opposite point of view. You have a scene about how torture is you have a scene about how you must do it or you have a scene about from the point of view of people in South of America and oppression and you do the klukluxklan and you do it from there point of view – I think that would be interesting. Or you could have theatre sports with a team of nuns and team of a motor cycle gang I almost had a team of zen monks once but it didn't work but now as ever dressed people as nuns and done a religious theatre sports team of nuns - they wouldn't have to be real nuns and then a team with a Marquis de Sade and Jean Paul Sartre I mean know has ever done that but it would be fun clashing philosophical points of view.

R: You speak a lot of pleasure and danger also danger as part of the pleasure of theatre

K: Yea, I mean if it is not dangerous what is the point of doing it?

R: But there is a contradiction or no if when you say: actors have fear of the danger of the stage

K: They have fear of everything hey are afraid of the director they are afraid of the future of what they might say oh god they are scared, yea, it is natural I can't blame them but

R: And this danger can give them back to

K: Well my example was from chasing playing tag. Idiots run into the distance because they think the point is to win if you gonna play tag with pleasure you run as close as you can to the hunter because it is fun to almost get caught. That is how you play tag. If you are improvising you don't – see what normally happens is people change everything I do to make it safer. Safer and more complex

R: More complex

K: yes a disaster. Did we play the game here where could not say the letter "a" – we did on Monday – yea well – you take it to a big post university they will do it with the letter "e" because they think the audience want to see them doing difficult things. And one group I taught it to and I saw them playing it. In that game the audience is sitting there waiting to say an word with an "r" in so they can laugh at you and feel

good. This guy had six people on the stage. He said you can't say the letter "s", you can't say the letter "t", you can't ... you understand

R: lots of rules

K: well, its is very difficult the audience can't watch – even for one person. Once you say that, your theory is if it is more complicated it will get better. Yesterday we played a game which you liked because it goes on for long time. The master spoke in the servant's voice and in his own voice. If these people go and were teachers, some of them would say, I know let's have the servant speak for the master and let's have the master speak for the servant. Which will not be as good, but you could do it. And then I have seen six people on the stage each talking for the other. I told them not to do it but they are still doing it. Because it is so difficult. But nobody in the audience can follow anything. Because everybody minds the other. You should leave it alone. They will make it safer and they will make it more complex.

R: And what are your next projects?

K: I could initiate art sports I did some two months ago.

R: Art sport?

K: Yes, you could do music sport, you can do art sport. We had art sports in San Francisco. W

R: And what is it, Art sports.

K: Well art sport for most people would be you do a painting and have it judged – no, no – art sports is when you work together on things. The big success was we decided to paint a new person three minutes each to do the painting, but nice music being played. We get someone from the audience take off his clothes so that we could paint them. I said somebody will come. The guy said no, no you never get anybody. I said don't worry, just ask and then wait and somebody will come. Somebody came up. We laid her on the bed and she is naked and then painting her. I had another fifteen minutes of stuff I planned to try but it was so spectacular and there is this lady looking really pleased like the cat that ate the cream. But I stopped after that because I didn't know where to go after that. Anyway there is things like that. I am desperately trying to finish a game which I can't finish. I don't know – somebody was making a film but the money ran out so they gonna start again I think in October. They are getting in a hurry now because they are not sure I last so everybody is speeding up he we got to be quick – and all the other guys are dead now because they all smoked.

R: Yu didn't?

K: No, I did but I stopped. Dell Close (?) has gone last year. I think he left his head to the local theatre company. I think they used it in Hamlet. XXX went away a few years back. Well, they are all flaking out. But I am surprised I'm still getting ideas. I didn't know that would happen.

R: That you would keep on

K: I thought when you are past sixties you were dead and I thought you would turn into a potato but. All this work about saying "no", yes?

R: it is new.

K: it is really important and it is just a couple of years.

R: Yea because in this impro

K: If you find a purpose and it doesn't inspire the actor – you are a good director – you are Stanilawski – you gonna find another purpose because your job is to inspire the actor, - yes? – All over the world people are looking at the text and trying to find the right purpose because they don't think it is to inspire the actor. Stanislawski wouldn't say that because it is like his blood. And I'm teaching beginners to accept all ideas because they kill all ideas. But with advanced improvisers I have always known that of course you can kill ideas for fun. Anyway recently I decided that people have no idea what the other people wanted. Not a clue and they won't look at each other, that has been very clear.

R: Yes, that is clear also in this workshop, that you always ask people to

K: to find out what the other person wants because people think the other people want what they want. And this is absolutely wrong. Other people are often different. So that is what all this stuff is about. I kind of knew before. I have always known about this circle. That circle is so important, try to stay in the circle. But a couple of years ago I started teaching this. Let's draw circles and let's have the circle of the science fiction story of the space ship landing on another planet. And let's draw a circle and say what is in the circle and what is out of it. But that is not exactly a new knowledge but I realized you have to teach it. So that is fun and a lot that this week.

R: And also another thing that you also emphasize is this connection that sometime people go on stage and they have no connection.

K: They are terrified yeah. As soon as they try to get a plan. As soon as you think you are something better you have no connection with the other actor because you are trying to think of something better.

R: You are trying to be all new or how to be the best and then you forget about the other one.

K: Well I teach people to coach improvisers. First of all, they start having all these ideas and you say no, no, no – look what is there. Go from there. Just see what is there and go from there and take it forwards. Actually a tape recorder which says “do it!” might be quite good. You know because as soon as someone suggests something – then they talk about it and they won’t do it. So you look at the stage, you see what it is about yes – do it! They are talking about being at a picnic, arrive at the picnic and then you all get happy because then everything gets easy but when you start people are always trying to find something that is not on the stage. When they are directing improvisation they always sit like this. You have to say relax, don’t be good, calm down, stop it, sit back, relax, get a cushion. Because if they are like this they can’t function. But if you watch them that is what they do. Lot’s of teachers stare at the students all the time like - look I am a good teacher, I am looking at you. I know everything. I am the teacher I am the expert here I am looking at you – that is terrible. Most of the time in this class you may notice I am not looking at them. That was why this morning I was busy looking in this corner over there. I think you noticed me doing it. Because they should know how they are doing by how they feel. I told Peter to say “fuck off Keith” on Monday. He hasn’t looked at me since.

R: he was afraid

K: Oh yeah of course, he is looking at me because he is worried because he wants to know. So if he is gonna to see more why to say “fuck off Keith” then – receive anything worse and now he doesn’t look at me and which is good. Well he has to go for himself in his relationship. He knows when it is working. He doesn’t have to look at me to see if it is ok.

R: Let me just see if there is something, that is – yeah I think it is very nice – thank you.

K: You are welcome.

R: Ask you about the rights to translate it to Brazil if in case

K: I don’t think that has anything to do with me – I think it is Faber & Faber – I think so. It is a big conflict. Faber & Faber printed Impro. They were worried about losing money so they sold the paper back rights to Mathewan. They didn’t think Impro would sell. They thought it was a pro bono complication – good for the public but – so then they will be really sorry about that- and I think they want the paper rights back. So you probably contact Faber & Faber and if that is wrong they will tell you to contact Mathewan.

R: All right – ok- wonderful

K: It did not seem terribly interesting to me but perhaps you can cut off the boring bits and get sixteen good minutes.

R: O h no it is lots of material. No I was really as I told you some things really impressed me a lot because they are very simple. At the same time, I know the more simple the difficult to get. Because usually to get to the simple in clear idea it takes a long time of training and observing. Especially when we start as beginners or improvisers or actors or directors we want always anything very complex like

K: it is normal for old people to get simple. It is a normal procedure that you make everything a little – well you tie things together a bit more – it is normal – part of aging

R: Yea some kind of wisdom I think there is in it

K: Yes, to make it simpler

R: It is like the theory o f reativity, you know it is just a small formula but I is

K: I bought a physics book – it was just two dollars a second hand book – in the chapter about relativity and the first words were – relativity is only common sense. So I thought oh I lived so long

R: to learn this

K: Well Nils Bohr said you have to wait til all the old guys die. I´m not going to do anything about it. But when they are dead it will be all right

R: Everybody will accept

K: Yea but then they won´t accept a new thing. It is always the same. You like what you learn when you are young. Einstein couldn´t stand all that xxx stuff – he had to wait til he died
I like Richard Feinman, he was in Brazil

R: Who

K: Richard Feinman, a physicist. One of the great physicists of the century died about twelve years ago. He did teach in Brazil. There is funny things to say about Brazil in a book called "You must be joking Mr. Feinman". Well he went to Brazil and found very strange things with Brazilian students. You might like the book. There is a chapter on how to make the show girls in Las Vegas sleep with you – there is a whole chapter on that. It is true.

R: And what does he say

K: You have to ask them before you buy them anything. If you bought them anything you are dead. He made friends with the Maitre D who told him this. He said you won't do it but if you really want to know the secret if you must know that is what you do. He tried it. He said: Buy yourself. – She got really pissed off but she didn't go away. And one he appeared at the arm of Maitre D and said I'm sorry I'm sorry you are right, I couldn't do it. I bought her a ham sandwich. He said: go back and ask her for the money. He went back and said: What about the money for the ham sandwich I bought you. She is furious. But she doesn't go away. Anyway I mention them because it might interest you in the book. The chapter is called "you just have to ask them"

R: - the money back

K: you just have to ask them if they will sleep with you. But you are buying them something first and then you are in another category. You move into the category of the people they get money of and they don't sleep with. But as long as you don't spend money on them. – Well he was Los Alamos during the war. Working on the atomic bomb. He was the youngest professor of America in history I think 24 years old and he worked on the bomb on the lenses. Nevada is very close to Las Vegas. You drive into Las Vegas for entertainment. And you are twenty years old. And there are all this beautiful showgirls and you can't get near them. You can buy them drinks that is as far as you can get. But being a great scientist he decided to work on the problem. Which meant making friends with the maitre D who is the person who knew everything. He said won't believe it you won't do it. But I am interested in human behaviour as you know so once I read something like that I remember it for ever because it is so interesting. As one know how to open the general's security safe at los Alamos the general opens the huge safe and there is Feinmans coke and his sandwich - it really pisses people off. – You might know him you are old enough. You remember when the space shuttle crashed it blew up with the teacher on board. That was when I first saw him. They had a report. The report was put together with fourteen people – no scientist. Because they don't want the answer. And then they get the report and there were fifteen people. Feinman got into the committee – he is a scientist. There is fifteen people there is microphones like everywhere. The reporters of the world are facing it. And the guy at the end wants a glass of iced water. He asks for it during the press conference. And then there is a fifteen minutes break because then everyone wants to have ice water. So finally it arrived and everybody had his ice water. Then there is a three minutes pause and then this guy who turns out to be Feinman says: "Excuse me, but I just had a bit of rubber from the o-rings in my iced drink for three minutes and as you notice if I pick it up and drop it is solid as a rock – boing. He did this in front of all the TV cameras. So now we know why the space shuttle blew up. But they didn't want to know. But he did it in front of the TV. Could not be hushed up. Anyway he is an interesting person.

R: Complex person also

K: Yeah, he is great he is really good. I don't think he is a nice person – well nice sometimes. Oh he learned to draw.

R: Also?

K: He used to take models to his hotel room and draw them. He finally had a little exhibition with his drawings in LA I think. His drawing teacher said you never draw anything again you know and he never did once he had the exhibition he couldn't do it anymore. I guess because it had to be good afterwards. No more fun. – Anyway nice talking to you guys.