

## **Reflections on *Push Me Pull You* at the time of committing the act**

**By Mark Harvey**

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I stand here waiting. Millions of questions go through my head. What will they say to me, will they understand my invitation, will they drop with me, will they take a risk with me, will they try to avoid interacting, how will they respond?

The first person arrives. I ask him to read the instructions. He chuckles. I ask him if he would like to drop with me. He looks at me perplexed. I realize my instructions sheet is not so clear. I explain to him what I want. He immediately says yes to it all and pushes me and I take him down with me. Crash. He's heavy, very heavy. Ouch. I spread our weight through the floor as much as I can. Luckily he's not hurt. Lucky I'm not. I roll him off me. We laugh. We laugh a lot. 'Thank you' he says.

It takes me 3 or 4 attempts at this until I abandon my written instructions. It makes so much more sense to give the instructions to people while I welcome them. 'Hi, welcome, I'm Mark, what's your name [all the while holding polite eye connection], when you'd like me to stop welcoming you please push me over. If you'd like me to take you with me when I fall, please tell me'.

The more I do it with people, the more they and I seem to laugh. And, the more they seem to want to drop with me with me pulling them. It feels like I and my participants have this large spoon and through our dropping we are stirring up the studio inside into something warmer, lighter. Of course, this might perhaps sound a wee bit new-age for my liking, but there's something about this collective experience we're sharing in doing this action and in the responses of people inside and outside the room.

Some who join in are very hesitant at first. They appear to be taken by surprise. But 90% of them take the plunge and drop with me. Splat, splat and splat. Perhaps this is some kind of ice-breaker for some? It could be interesting to do this now with lots of ice in our pockets... (Crushed ice preferably, so that we don't land on it.)

Something I am excited about is the moment of taking people's hands and letting go in my legs and pulling them with me and there's a kind of dead-in-the-air moment. A kind of 'oh my god, how's this going to all end?'. The sense of physical surrender feels for me each time like a place where my heart skips a beat. And their hearts skip a beat. It's all that playing bulrush (what some in other parts of the world call British Bull Dogs). The sense of absolute physical risk that this promises takes me there. The thrill of the promise of making it out alive without any bruises.

I confess I draw from all those years of contact improvisation here, thank you Steve Paxton. It's certainly that old somatic thing, one's conditioning comes out in auto-response mode, as I just can't help spreading our bodies through the floor, to make it comfortable, enjoyable, salubrious.

This is work. Is it work? is it a work? It feels like drops of worklessness. Perhaps Blanche would be interested in this. He took lots of risks, he was in the French resistance I hear. Art as not-work. Art as promises of heroic work... art as promises of resistance when dropping, promises of suspension, promises of falling with togetherness.

I'm ready to do this again.