Expansion/Contraction

Expansion/Contraction is the most basic pattern of movement. It is “What” the Energy is doing.

Expansion/Contraction (Ex/Con) is the grand archetype of all motion, the black and white of the artistic palette of movement. It could be called the pulse of all creation. What things in the universe expand and contract? From the big bang theory to the cell dividing itself we have examples anywhere we turn. Contemplate and seek out these energy patterns in yourself and the world around you.

All movements of a character and the essence of the character itself can be described by their degree of expansion or contraction. A basic 10 scale, using 0 as the most contracted and 10 and the most expanded creates a simple system by which to identify the extent of the opening or closing. I love to use Scrooge as an example of a character that might use contraction or expansion, demonstrating the application of a 10-scale for the evolution of the character. Most people know the basic story quite well so it is easily communicated. Each actor playing Scrooge could craft his/her own unique score of expansion and contraction.
Ways to play with this tool:

Begin with full bodied abstract movement explorations with guided imagery of expanding and contracting. In your flyback, ask yourself if you allowed your body to move as fully as possible? How was your concentration on the image?

Practice veiling and unveiling in increments. Practice transitioning from an Expanded 10, contract down the scale to 0, in a staccato rhythm, legato rhythm. Practice Contracting to Expanding the same way. Call out random numbers and add tempo so you are, for example, doing a staccato expansion slowly, and then quickly contracting. Remember to flyback often. Sometimes in our eagerness to do it again, we miss reflecting on what we have done and miss the potential growth opportunity. We encourage the flyback because practice makes permanent and we don’t want to go on repeating an undeveloped approach.

Explore physicalizing the different images for Ex/Con listed above and add your own. Make note of any interesting discoveries you have as you play. Try to enter the game free of preconceptions as to how the images may affect you.

Add sound to your expression to allow the voice to reflect the images. Start with random words, numbers or letters. Try a nursery rhyme or phrase of text. Allow the image to influence the sound, the phrasing, emphasis, pitch, tone, intention. Allow the complete vocal and physical impact to express itself. Add in a partner and play with contrasting tools that transform in the middle. Play with partner in a nonverbal dialogue of Expanding versus Contracting, using various degrees of veiling and styles. Add in generic dialogue, scenes or verbal improvisation. Repeat the same activity using a different tool in different places in the scenario. Note how the tool changes the way the scenario unfolds.

Use these basic ideas for all sessions playing with the tools:

- Do it as fully physically as possible with strong concentration on the tool. Flyback.
- Add random sound, eventually text, monologues, improvisation and scenes. Flyback.
- Each time you play with a tool, assume you know nothing about it.
- Gradually veil the tool as you apply it to text and blocking.
- Try using the same and contrasting tools with your partners.

One thing to be aware of is the tendency of some people to think they know what an image will produce and so they produce that. An example here is “I think my voice will get loud when I expand”. And therefore, when I play with expanding, I make my voice loud and I force the physical expression to follow the loudness of my voice. The limitation in doing what we think the image will produce is that we will rarely ever surprise ourselves. Our choices will always be within the frame work of our everyday thinking skills. Though using the tools this way will increase our repertoire of known behaviors, we will be unlikely to experience the freedom of creative expression that playing with a tool can spark. When you expand, you are actually imagining the energy expanding right now. The next expansion you do, this will still be true-you can only be expanding in the present moment. Anything else could be, in effect, a process of recalling your past Expansions and repeating the behavior you exhibited that other time. In your flyback self-evaluations, ask “Did anything surprise me? Did something happen unlike any other time?”