



University of HUDDERSFIELD

University of Huddersfield Repository

Brown, Emily

Task, Attention, Movement: An Exploration of Psychophysical Training Methods for Ensemble Performance

Original Citation

Brown, Emily (2015) Task, Attention, Movement: An Exploration of Psychophysical Training Methods for Ensemble Performance. Masters thesis, University of Huddersfield.

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/27142/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

**TASK, ATTENTION, MOVEMENT: AN
EXPLORATION OF PSYCHOPHYSICAL TRAINING
METHODS FOR ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE**

EMILY HANNAH BROWN

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters by Research

The University of Huddersfield

October 2015

Copyright statement

- i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns any copyright in it (the "Copyright") and s/he has given The University of Huddersfield the right to use such copyright for any administrative, promotional, educational and/or teaching purposes.
- ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts, may be made only in accordance with the regulations of the University Library. Details of these regulations may be obtained from the Librarian. This page must form part of any such copies made.
- iii. The ownership of any patents, designs, trademarks and any and all other intellectual property rights except for the Copyright (the "Intellectual Property Rights") and any reproductions of copyright works, for example graphs and tables ("Reproductions"), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property Rights and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property Rights and/or Reproductions

Abstract

This is the written thesis which accompanies the practical element of my research which was presented in June 2015. Taken together, the two modes are designed to share my processes and findings.

I have been conducting research into psychophysical training methodologies for ensemble performance, interrogating the methods of the practitioners Annie Loui, John Britton, Jerzy Grotowski, Lorna Marshall, Yoshi Oida, and Frantic Assembly. I wanted to discover which tasks were the most effective in cultivating a specific set of skills in an ensemble and why? These skills were: dissolving "blocks" and responding to impulses; awareness of our own bodies; focus; stage presence; playfulness and group awareness. The research also explores how one could create a transferrable training - one that the participants could take advantage of and reapply to other performance/theatre training contexts.

Using a group of 6 undergraduate students (who at the time were in their second year of their drama degree), I used a task-based approach to the work, conducting exercises with the group which came from both firsthand experience with John Britton, and from books by the practitioners mentioned above. The training was intended to practically critique these exercises by trying them out in the studio. The use of a video camera to record workshops meant that I could watch the work back after the sessions. The studio work and the camera combined, gave me an interesting perspective on the research, because as the leader of the group and also a part of the ensemble, I was both inside the research and an outside eye. When the process was over, the participants completed exit questionnaires, and were interviewed in order for me to gain a more comprehensive view of their experience of the process.

Each of the participants improved to different degrees in each of the areas in which they were trained and I was successful in creating a transferrable training, as each of the participants affirmed that they would use the practices in their future performances and theatrical careers. I also found that for some of them, the training had impacted on their everyday lives, some commenting that as a direct result of the process, they had become more mature around other people and/or less self conscious and anxious.

Table of Contents

Contents

Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Figures.....	6
Dedications and Acknowledgements	7
Chapter 1.....	8
Introduction.....	8
Beginnings.....	11
Methodology – a brief outline	17
Chapter 2.....	18
Tasks.....	18
Which tasks are the most effective in cultivating a specific set of transferrable skills and why?	20
Dissolving Blockages and Responding to Impulses	20
Awareness of our own bodies.....	23
Focus	26
Stage Presence.....	27
Playfulness.....	28
Group Awareness.....	30
Chapter 3: Task, Attention, Movement: Research Presentation.....	33
3/5 Minute sit.....	34
Tableaux Exercise/Image Sequence.....	36
Improvisations	38
Absent Ball Exercise	41
Marcia Takedown	43
Counterbalance and Weight Support Exercises	45

Conclusion.....	47
Appendices.....	50
Handout A	50
Handout B	52
Presentation Postcards	53
Exit Questionnaire	55
Bibliography	56

Word Count: 14,541

List of Figures

Figure 1 34
Figure 2 36
Figure 3 38
Figure 4 41
Figure 5 43
Figure 6 45

Dedications and Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor Hilary Elliott for her patience, advice and support, which has been invaluable to me during this process.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to Emily Bird, Kathryn Blackburn, Jak Bowler, David Field, Melissa Sert and Sean Sewell without whose dedication, this project would not have been possible. Thank you for giving up your time, and thank you for your friendship and hard work.

Thank you to Paula Brooke for travelling with us on this journey as far as you could.

Thanks also to Mark Larter for stepping in at the last minute, and to Pat Yates for helping me to turn over 100 gigabytes of video documentation into 7 gigabytes of watchable material.

Thank you to the staff of the Drama department at the University of Huddersfield, particularly Nik, Deb, and Eric for your advice and support during this project.

Thank you to John Britton, for sparking an idea which blossomed into this project, and for your advice along the way.

Thank you to my parents Carole and Robin, my brother Anthony, and my boyfriend Gregg for your endless support and encouragement.

This project is dedicated to all of these people who made it possible, as well as to my dear friend Joseph Holmes, whom his friends and I miss so much.

Chapter 1

Introduction

I have been conducting practical research into psychophysical training methods for ensemble-based performance. To undertake this investigation, I created my own ensemble, and placed myself inside of the research, as a director and also as a co-performer and ensemble member. Therefore I have used the first person to talk about the experience of the practice, as well as accounts from my six participants, which I have taken from reflections in studio sessions, and exit questionnaires and interviews which were conducted a couple of months after our performance in June.

My underlying motivation for this research was a desire to create a set of transferrable skills (i.e., skills that the trainees could take away and use in other aspects of their theatrical careers) based on my previous experience of psychophysical practice. I was given a formative experience and some definitions of *psychophysical* training when working with the founder and Artistic Director of the DUENDE ensemble, John Britton. I wanted to practically critique the training exercises I had already encountered with Britton, as well as other exercises I had yet to discover from practitioners such as Lorna Marshall, Annie Loui, Yoshi Oida, Frantic Assembly and more. This written thesis will analyse the exercises my group and I did together, both in the performance and in the preceding workshops themselves, and discuss how effective these exercises were in cultivating a specific set of skills.

Marshall, Loui, Frantic Assembly and Britton have all provided me with a wealth of exercises on which to base my research and I will now briefly summarise the literature that has been most relevant to my explorations.

Lorna Marshall's book *The Body Speaks* (Marshall, 2008) contains many useful small tasks for the psychophysical actor. Many of the tasks are of course variations or copies of exercises which were not invented by Marshall herself, but *The Body Speaks* contains a comprehensive variety of exercises, from warming up to attempting more complex group work and improvisations. Marshall takes a physical approach to acting, starting from the body and working with impulses in an attempt to help the actor become more physically expressive.

Annie Loui's *The Physical Actor* (Loui, 2009) is a very practical guide to preparing to work with partners, partnering exercises and contact improvisation, using pictures to accompany the text. Loui also offers a range of anecdotal information from her own training to help to put her exercises into a broader context.

The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre (Graham and Hoggett, 2009) is also a great actor's 'manual', as well as a biography of Frantic Assembly itself. Part One of the book takes the reader through an archive of the company's past work, detailing how they were created, while Part Two offers several practical exercises and games which are drawn from the company's experiences. The book explores devising and choreography through the lens of Frantic Assembly, giving examples of their own work and experiences. The writers Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett acknowledge that they are not from a theatrical background, and therefore this book, along with Loui's *The Physical Actor*, contains little of the theoretical side of psychophysical training to sit alongside the practical aspect, unlike *The Body Speaks*, which encompasses both.

Britton's book *Encountering Ensemble* (Britton, 2013) is incredibly informative, containing over twenty essays of varying lengths by various practitioners and theorists, exploring the topic of the theatrical ensemble. The myriad of different voices offer a wide range of perspectives which sit alongside Britton's own voice, sharing information on his own training processes, including some key exercises in his practice for ensemble training. I have also been fortunate to have trained personally with Britton, giving me firsthand, lived experience of his methods, which will be discussed later in my thesis.

Yoshi Oida and Lorna Marshall's book *The Invisible Actor* (Oida and Marshall, 1997) combines Oida's advice and exercises for the actor, and an aspect of theoretical knowledge concerning psychophysical theatre and Japanese *Noh* and *Kabuki* theatre practices, where Oida's early practice began. This is teamed with allegorical tales and Lorna Marshall's voice throughout, offering further explanation about Oida's practice when needed.

I have also used Dymphna Callery's *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*, (Callery, 2001) which is a fairly basic guide to physical theatre, in which Callery rejects theory in favour of practice, as opposed to teaming the two together. However, she does mention some key practitioners such as Grotowski and LeCoq, and offers some practical exercises. The book seems to be a good guide for beginners, but lacks the richer analysis which books such as Britton's and Marshall's contain, and therefore Callery will not be referred to as frequently in this thesis.

Other authors which have been useful during my research process are Alison Oddey and her book *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (Oddey, 1996), Al Wunder with *The Wonder of Improvisation* (Wunder, 2009), Jennifer Kumiega, James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta, and their writings on Grotowski (namely *The Theatre of Grotowski* (Kumiega, 1985) and *Jerzy Grotowski* (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2008)), Bella Merlin and her writings on Stanislavsky in *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (Merlin, 2004) and *Beyond Stanislavsky: the Psycho-Physical Approach to Actor Training* (Merlin, 2001), Louise Peacock, who offers insights into clowning in *Serious Play: Modern Clown Performance* (Peacock, 2009), Phillip

Zarrilli with his books *The Psychophysical Actor at Work* (Zarrilli, 2009) and *Psychophysical Acting: an Intercultural Approach after Stanislavsky* (Zarrilli, 2008), and David Zinder with *Body Voice Imagination: ImageWork Training and the Chekhov Technique* (Zinder, 2009).

My Practice Research work is located amongst these practitioners in the field of 20th/21st century European performance training. The Russian clown Slava Polunin¹, who created his character Assissiaï and then later *Slava's Snow Show*, was also a huge influence in the onset of this project.

In terms of literature concerning *practice-led research*, Simon Murray and John Keefe have written a book named *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction* (Keefe and Murray, 2007), which gives its reader some information on some contemporary Western theatre/dance practitioners and theorists. Hazel Smith and Roger Deans' *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Smith and Dean, 2009), Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt's *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (Barrett and Bolt, 2009) and Baz Kershaw and Helen Nickolson's *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Kershaw and Nickolson, 2011), have all widened my knowledge and broadened my understanding of *practice-led research*. This term and subject matter is the topic of a wide debate, and as Smith and Dean point out, "individual contributors [to the book] may use this and related terms rather differently" (Smith and Dean, 2009, p.7). I like to use their definition of this term:

"we as editors are referring *both* to the work of art as a form of research and to the creation of the work as generating research insights which might then be documented, theorised and generalised"

(*ibid.*)

That is to say, that the studio work in itself is a way of thinking about practical work. In Kim Vincs' essay *Rhizome/Myzone: A Case Study in Studio-Based Dance Research*, in which she gives an account of her process of research in her PhD, she aptly describes how there can exist a "work of art as a form of research" (*ibid.*). In her essay, she claims:

"The dances became an essential substrate or ground within which to think about dance. The outcomes are the dances themselves and also the thinking about dance that was done by making and writing about the dance"

(Vincs, 2010, p.111).

¹ Slava Polunin's character Assissiaï first appeared on television on 31st December 1980. Polunin was also the creator of the *Litsedei* theatre company, the *Mime Parade*, the festivals *Congress of Fools* and *Mir Caravan*, one of the founders of the *Academy of Fools*, and in 2013 was named the Artistic Director of the *Saint Petersburg Russian State Circus*. His now legendary *Slava's Snowshow* has been touring the globe since 1993, has visited over 30 countries and hundreds of cities, and been seen by millions of people. (Polunin, 2013)

Similarly, in my own work, the studio practice was a way of thinking about practice itself, my training a way of analysing and practically critiquing the exercises which were undertaken.

Beginnings

I first encountered psychophysical training as part of my first year at the University of Huddersfield, when John Britton along with three other members of the DUENDE ensemble came to work with the first year drama students in 2012. Elion Morris, one of the ensemble, met John Britton in 1998, and they have been working closely together since 2002, when Britton formed the Quiddity Ensemble. In 2008 Morris completed the MA in physical theatre run by Britton and was an associate director of DUENDE from 2010-2015. Morris puts Britton's work into a broader context:

"Influenced by the work of Australian/American improvisation teacher Al Wunder and drawing on the psychophysical laboratory traditions of Meyerhold and Grotowski, Britton's work exists in a unique position, offering actors a set of tools to access ensemble practice, without imposing stylistic and ideological constraints."^{2 3}

(Morris, 2009)

During the two weeks in which I worked with Britton, I had my first experiences of psychophysical ensemble training. I later went to a workshop run by him over one weekend in January 2013 named *Self-With-Others*⁴. This further developed my interest in the area of psychophysical ensemble. *Self-With-Others* "offers a performer ways to train her bodymind by developing how she pays attention [...] through exploring relationships with others. The 'others' are the rest of the ensemble and, by extension, audience, architecture, music and all other elements of performance" (Britton, 2013, p.316).

The term *psychophysical* was first coined by Konstantin Stanislavsky, and was in its most obvious sense used to describe "an approach to Western acting focused equally on the actor's psychology and physicality applied to textually based character acting" (Zarrilli, 2008, p.13). However, as Bella Merlin suggests in *Konstantin Stanislavsky*, "everything is

² For more information on Al Wunder see Wunder, A., 2006. *The wonder of improvisation*. Ascot, Vic: Wunder.

³ Famous for his actor training method of Biomechanics, more information can be found on Meyerhold here: Pitches, J. 2003;2004; , *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, 1st ed, Routledge, London.

⁴ Milton Building, University of Huddersfield. 26th and 27th January 2013

psychophysical, even analysis of character" (Merlin, 2004, p.79). Stanislavsky's rudimentary use of the word *psychophysical* has now gained a greater signification, with Grotowski using his system of the *via negativa* (discussed more below) to eliminate any limitations and blockages, "both physical and psychic (the two forming a whole)" (Grotowski, 1969, p.96) in his actors so that they might reach the state of the *trance*, "where the actor's powers of body and mind become integrated" (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2008, p.46) and then "emerge from the most intimate layers of his being and his instinct" (Grotowski, 2002, p.16). That is to say, that the word *psychophysical* itself has developed a more specific meaning relating to the connection between the actor's body and mind. In fact, I am in agreement with Lorna Marshall when she points out that "body and consciousness are indivisible in practice, and the function of the mind cannot be separated from the function of the body" (Marshall, 2008, p.20). Instead, "there is only a single interconnected entity" (*ibid.*).

Because my interest began with Britton's work, I like to use his definition of the word *psychophysical*:

"The word denotes a perception of the human organism that recognizes the holistic interrelationship of process of the mind and actions of the body. A psychophysical training is an integrative training, one that recognizes that what one does and how one pays attention to it are intimately connected – and that both require training simultaneously.

A psychophysical approach asks a performer to pay attention to her experience of her body's actions, and to the processes of thinking that underpin those physical actions. Through learning to manipulate this attention, she learns how to construct her performance"⁵

(Britton, 2013, p.283).

In the introduction to his book *Encountering Ensemble* (2013), Britton offers many different definitions and metaphors by different practitioners and theorists for the word *ensemble*. At the end of the introduction, he concludes that "ensemble [...] is a collective experience that emerges from the interaction of distinct individuals" (Britton, 2013, p.48). The word "collective" here is important, because it acknowledges Britton's belief in a shared training in the formation of ensemble, as he notes on page 273: "Practitioners concerned with developing ensemble have repeatedly found their attention drawn to the need for performers to share a common training" (Britton, 2013), and again on page 274:

⁵ Britton notes that as most of the people who train with him are women, in the absence of a gender-neutral pronoun, he uses 'she' when talking about an individual performer, and that he has "no evidence that the experience of male performers is substantially different" (Britton, 2013, p.275).

“ensemble’ training [...] promotes the development of shared sensibility, enhanced sensitivity, common vocabulary, collective understanding and even, as I explore below, shared ethics.” (*ibid.*)

In Chapter Fourteen: *'Self-With-Others': A psychophysical approach to training the individual in ensemble*, Britton poses again that ensemble cannot be forced into existence, but that it emanates “from the relationship of each individual to each other individual” (Britton, 2013, p.314).

Morris sanctions Britton’s definition here: “In the work of John Britton, [...] ‘ensemble’ is a collective process that is engaged through rigorous training and a commitment to a shared set of ‘psychophysical’ principles” (Morris, 2009). After the process of training which I undertook for this research, my understanding of ensemble is in agreement with these definitions and ideas. This thesis will explore how my group achieved an enhanced sensitivity, and a collective understanding and training. I did not, however, attempt to reach a point of “shared ethics” in my ensemble.

One of the underlying principles of *Self-With-Others*, of Britton’s work and also my own is Grotowski’s *via negativa*. This principle deals with the *blocks* a performer experiences which stop them from reacting to impulses efficiently. If the performer’s mind is disorganised and not completely clear, if they are not in a heightened state of awareness, if they are thinking about what they look like, what will happen that evening or what they have seen in the news that day, these are all blocks which prevent the performer from reacting to impulses with immediacy and complete attention. Grotowski theorised that an actor should be in the state of trance - a state of “passive readiness [...] a state in which one does not want to do that but rather resigns from not doing it” (Grotowski, 2002, p.17). In this way, the actor accesses a “different kind of consciousness” (Kumiega, 1987, p.46) in which they are more awake and alert than in their daily lives. The actor’s reactions come from this heightened state, this “other consciousness” (*ibid*, p.47), where there is a “freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse is already an outer reaction” (Grotowski, 2002, p.16). This thesis will explore how I interrogated this concept.

Despite my first practical experience of psychophysical training only taking place when I was 18, my first memorable experience of watching psychophysical performance was when I was a very young child, no older than 5, when my Mum took me to see *Slava’s Snow Show*. I remember the scale of the show, the vast imagery, loud music and huge interactive props. It was magical! Years later I returned to see the show in Sheffield in

November 2013.⁶ This time, I was struck by a different aspect of the show. As I watched each of the performers on stage, I was amazed by their range of (psycho)physical skill - the way each movement was choreographed, and executed so meticulously with such intention and precision. The control which the clowns had over their bodies appeared to be absolute, as they moved seamlessly through each carefully crafted moment. Their balance was steady, their mime skills unlike any ordinary street performer I had ever seen, and the comic timing in their physicality was second to none. The movement in the piece was breathtakingly impressive. This scale of capability sparked an idea which eventually became my research project: it occurred to me that I could take the clown away from the stage effects, the large-scale props and costumes, his complicité with the audience, and still have a performer who was interesting to watch, and had an excellent stage presence. Peacock distinguishes the clown from the actor by:

“his or her ability to play with the audience and to create a sense of *complicité* with them by using play to connect with them. [...] Clowns can also be distinguished by their physical skill. That is not to say that acting does not require physical skill, which of course it does. Rather, the fact is that clowns make use a wider [sic.] range of skills, which may include circus skills such as juggling or balance, mime and great physical control and comic timing”

(Peacock, 2009, p.14).

I looked at the elements of Polunin’s performance which I was really interested in replicating in my own work:

Physical skill

Excellent sense of balance
Moments of complete stillness
Physical precision

Mental Discipline

Attention to detail of movements
Awareness of own body
Excellent stage presence and focus

⁶ Lyceum Theatre, Sheffield. Friday 22nd November 2013

In October 2014 I started my project, taking on 6 volunteer participants⁷ who were all in their second year of their Drama degree at the University of Huddersfield. Working from a set of psychophysical principles (discussed more broadly in Chapter 2) which underpinned my work, I started to try to cultivate the skills listed above.

Then, in December 2014 I attended a performance of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*⁸, with movement directors Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett – co-founders of Frantic Assembly⁹. Due to the more psychologically realistic nature of the piece, the movement in naturalistic scenes was less physically precise. However, it was the movement sequences which really interested me. The cast were all very physically proficient, with excellent acrobatic skill and evident physical fitness, and the most interesting thing for me to watch was the way that the ensemble worked in the physical sequences. The cast were always open and aware of their fellow actors on stage, and there was a sense that they were *ready*, perhaps in Grotowski's 'trance' state. This meant that lifts and more demanding physical sequences were executed with apparent ease and efficiency.

Frantic Assembly work using a task-based methodology:

"All of our devising is broken down into tasks. These remain bite sized and self-contained. They never set out to encapsulate the whole production idea or solve the entire demands of the text. They are always as simple as we can make them as they are merely building blocks, created to support more blocks."

(Graham and Hoggett, 2009, p.7)

⁷ We started out with a group of 5 women: Emily Bird; Kathryn Blackburn; Paula Brook; Melissa Sert; and myself, and 2 men: Jak Bowler and Sean Sewell. However, one of the participants Paula Brook, had to leave the process in January due to unforeseen circumstances. However, we had brought in David Field in November, re-balancing the numbers and adding another male to the group.

⁸ Lyric Theatre, The Lowry, Salford Quays. Saturday 27th December 2014.

⁹ Formed in 1994 in Swansea and originally "Frantic Theatre Company Limited", Frantic Assembly have created over 20 different theatre works and toured extensively both nationally and internationally. You can find more information about them on their website: <http://www.franticassembly.co.uk>

This task-based approach is characteristic of psychophysical training, where larger undertakings such as devising a completed piece of theatre, are broken down into “self-contained” exercises. Amongst a wealth of other practitioners and companies whose methodologies involve task-based work are Jerzy Grotowski, John Britton, Lorna Marshall, Annie Loui, Yoshi Oida, and Dymphna Callery to name but a few. I used this approach in my own work, using smaller exercises to eventually develop a 30 minute piece. Although this way of working can be used to create larger pieces containing narrative (as seen in Frantic Assembly’s work), I was not looking to create a narrative in my piece, but merely a set of exercises which could be looked at through a performative lens. I also discouraged facial expression for the same reason, wanting to concentrate on the movements of the body, as opposed to imposing narrative onto the work with the face.

Methodology – a brief outline

In October last year, my group and I started our training process, taking to the studio twice weekly for nine months. We began with ice-breaking exercises, and taking the first steps in exploring our bodies. We were also working on our focus from the beginning, trying to maintain our attention over longer and longer periods of time. Simultaneously, we started to work on getting rid of the blockages which stopped us reacting to impulses, and then on following our impulses, looking for the “freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction” (Grotowski, 2002, p.16). We also worked on physical precision and control, honing our attention in on the micro-movements and tiny details of our bodies in motion and in stillness. Last but not least, we worked on group awareness, ensemble work and playfulness, trying to achieve a sense of complicité, which Dymphna Callery, author of *Through the Body*, elucidates is the “crux of ensemble practice, a shared belief which depends upon intense awareness and mutual understanding” (2001, p.88).

I introduced all of these principles and ideas with task-based exercises, working, re-working and developing exercises from the practitioners already discussed. The training and devising work we undertook culminated in two performances in June at the University of Huddersfield named *Task, Attention, Movement*¹⁰. I felt this was one of the best ways to test whether my training had worked, to see whether my ensemble could maintain their attention to their bodies, to other’s bodies and to their tasks, whilst also having an awareness of other’s tasks, all whilst in a ‘performance’ context.

¹⁰ Milton Building, University of Huddersfield. Tuesday 9th June 16:00, and Wednesday 10th June 19:30

Chapter 2

Tasks

The Following is a comprehensive list and critique of all of the exercises undertaken in our time in the studio. They are split into three groups: the exercises used in the research presentation; other exercises undertaken regularly but which were not in the presentation; exercises we did which were not a part of our regular training. This section will examine all of these exercises in detail, looking at where they came from and also the efficacy of the exercises in producing the desired skills in my particular group.

Throughout the thesis are hyperlinks which when clicked, will take one straight to a video on YouTube of my ensemble and myself performing the relevant exercises in our training process. Each hyperlink (which is underlined and in blue) will also have a footnote containing the web address for those reading a hard copy of this document. The video documentation was taken in most of the training sessions, and in the videos (which are edited in chronological order), one can see the progression of the group.

The tasks (or adaptations of) used in the presentation *Task, Attention, Movement* were, in this order:

- 3/5 Minute sit
- "Tableaux Exercise/Image Sequence"
- Several Improvisations including:
 - "Group Improvisation";
 - "Continual Lift Sequence";
 - "Milling 1/2";
 - "Negative Space";
 - "Responding to the body";
 - "Responding to the room";
 - "Responding to the music".
- "Absent Ball Exercise"
- "Marcia Takedown"
- Counterbalance and Weight Support Exercises
- 3/5 Minute sit

I chose to demonstrate these exercises in the research presentation because they best summed up the principles I was trying to teach. These exercises will be discussed in Chapter 3.

There were other exercises we used regularly (more than three times) in rehearsals. Some of them were omitted from the presentation because their main principles were already demonstrated in other exercises, some of them were used as warm up exercises and one ("The Ball Game") was not practical in the presence of an audience.

"The Ball Game"
"Trust/Nod"
"Fishes Exercise"
"Sculpting"
"Rolling 1/2"

Other exercises which I experimented with were:

"Waking up the Legs"
"Playtime for Hips"
"Playtime for Shoulders"
"Isolation Exercises"
"The Ball in Pairs"
"Amoeba Exercise: "instant art"
"Responding to Objects"

Some of the writing in the following section was also in the handout given at the time of the performance. To see this, please refer to 'Handout A' and 'Handout B' in the appendix.

Which tasks are the most effective in cultivating a specific set of transferrable skills and why?

Dissolving Blockages and Responding to Impulses

Marshall poses that “the first step in exploring your body should be awareness” (Marshall, 2008, p.10). I found that before awareness of the body, came a need to disband any self-consciousness or anxiousness in the group, because if a performer cannot get past the mental blocks that hold him/her back, they cannot fully commit to their task. For example, if one has a tendency to think about how they look during an exercise, whether they look ‘stupid’ to their other performers or are ‘doing it wrong’, they are not fully engaged in the task itself, meaning they cannot pay full attention to the other things that require their attention.

One participant in particular, Emily, noted that she was very self conscious at the start of the process. She was not the only person who felt this way, but she did show the biggest improvement in this area. In a questionnaire that I gave all of the participants after the performance (hereby referred to as the “exit questionnaire”), they were given check boxes to rate how skilled they were on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the worst, and 5 the best) in a particular skill area both before and then after the training. For the skill *less self-consciousness and anxiousness*, Emily rated herself at a 1 out of 5 before the training. In early rehearsals she was sometimes daunted by the exercises, anxious, and uncomfortable. In an interview with her after the performance, she noted that early on she was “very nervous about the idea of performing even though I wanted to do it” (Bird, Personal Communication, 21 August 2015).

In many ways, I observed that Emily was often ‘prisoner’ to this anxiousness, not allowing herself to fully partake in exercises in fear of what the rest of the group might think of her. One of the exercises we used from the beginning was the “Trust/Nod” exercise from Loui’s *The Physical Actor* (2009, p.41-43). This exercise is simple: we stand in a circle and one person (having gained permission by the way of a small nod) walks to another’s place. The person who has given permission now needs to find a new place in the circle before the first person gets there, they look for permission, and the exercise continues. The ensemble follows the trajectory of movement as it unfolds, and “the faster the pace [...] the more alert, complicit, and responsive the actors become” (Loui, 2009, p.43). A video of this exercise can be found [here](https://youtu.be/6tMN8WyIX74)¹¹.

¹¹ <https://youtu.be/6tMN8WyIX74>

We also played what John Britton calls "The Ball Game" (Britton, 2013, pp.330-332) to dissolve blockages, which will be discussed later in this chapter under the subheading "Focus".

These are both exercises in focus, attentiveness and readiness, and disbanding self-consciousness and in doing them, we attempt to reach Grotowski's "passive readiness [...] a state in which one does not *want to do that* but rather *resigns from not doing it*" (Kumiega, 1985, p. 123). This initially helped Emily to overcome her blocks by simply taking away the time she had to think about resisting. I found that once her anxiousness had diminished "she [developed] the ability to respond more appropriately to each impulse, not by blocking it, but by channelling her response" (Britton, 2013, p.349). I used both of these exercises as a warm up before the research presentation to remind the ensemble of this basic principle, and as a reminder of how much the group had improved in the previous nine months of training.

Once Emily and the rest of the group could do this, we moved on to impulse exercises which were a little slower in their tempo and rhythm. I wanted my group to be able to access Grotowski's trance state without needing a fast-paced exercise to distract them from their blockages. I wanted to dissolve the blockages completely so that they were able to reach this state and maintain it, even when performing an exercise at a much slower pace, such as those which were seen in the presentation. I also needed them to become accustomed to touching and being touched, as some people, such as Melissa, were displaying signs that they were not completely comfortable with this yet. I used Loui's sculpting exercises which she names the "Mannequin Exercise" and "Statuary Garden Exercise" (Loui, 2009, p.78-81).

In its most basic form of the exercise, the group works in pairs, and one person from each pair manipulates (or 'sculpts') their partner into a certain position, using their hands, arms, head, feet, or any other part of their bodies they can think of. Loui details this basic form of the exercise more fully in *The Physical Actor* on page 78, and calls it the *Mannequin Exercise*. She suggests experimenting with how your partner's body can move as it is manipulated, and how much force is necessary to get the partner to achieve different positions. For the partner who is being moved, she brings their attention to keeping the position they are put into, whilst being available to be moved. It was this availability that was important to me.

For us, the main things we took from the exercise were learning to sensitise ourselves, and reacting to a clear stimulus from a partner (being sculpted) and learning to touch and be touched. At the end of the session, Melissa noted how it felt more "natural" to allow people to touch her now, and Emily noted that she felt much less self-conscious about

being touched than she had been when we performed this exercise in the auditions for this process.

As well as the exit questionnaires, I also conducted interviews (hereby referred to as "exit interview(s)") with each participant in August 2015. In her exit interview, Emily told me that in the second performance, she "wasn't nervous at all even though I was still aware people were watching" (Bird, Personal Communication, 21 August 2015). The dissolving of blockages is unquestionably a difficult thing to quantify, and so I used the exit questionnaire to attempt this. In the skills *less self consciousness and anxiousness, working without forming opinions* and *openness to ideas*, on average, the group went from 2.66 to 4.33 in the former category, 1.83 to 4.16 in *working without forming opinions* and from 3.66 to 4.83 in the latter category. There are of course, other things which hinder the psychophysical actor, but these were, I think, the main three blockages in my group. Everyone in the group thought they had improved in each of these categories, the biggest improvements being seen in the *working without forming opinions* category, with David, Sean, Kathryn and Emily improving by 3 steps each. In her exit questionnaire, Emily rated herself at a 4 out of 5 after the training (as opposed to a 1 before) in the *less self-consciousness and anxiousness* category, meaning she felt much more capable, and much less anxious. When we had addressed the initial anxiousness of the group, we were able to move on to the next stages of the training.

Once my performers had begun to eradicate any blocks and respond to their impulses, it was important that they were able to not only notice and listen to their impulses, but also to respond to them authentically and appropriately. I used several different improvisation exercises to get the group to this stage. Marshall and Loui both speak about acting and reacting "honestly" whilst improvising, pointing out that one should not try and "shape your response to make it 'better' or more acceptable" (Marshall, 2008, p.36), and that we as performers are not here to impress the audience with skills, but to "communicate honestly" (Loui, 2009, p.42) with the other ensemble members. I like to use the word "authentic" to suggest the same thing - the participants are asked to be open, genuine, and eliminate "those elements of "natural" behaviour which obscure pure impulse" (Grotowski, 2002, p. 18). Marshall uses the word to mean a direct, simple [...] and honest manifestation of feeling in the moment (Marshall, 2008, p.237). As Zinder puts it, they are to surrender to the "creative moment", and in Grotowski's concept, "not [prevent] it from being there" (Zinder, 2009, p.12). For more about these improvisation exercises, see Chapter 3: "Improvisations".

Once the participants were able to produce what I am calling 'authentic' responses, they were then asked to produce 'appropriate' responses. Zarrilli recognises this as the fourth of his psycho-dynamic principles: "as concentration and awareness are heightened, one is able to attend to specific actions/tasks assiduously with one's primary focus" (Zarrilli, 2008, p.83). We experimented with Marshall's "Responding to Objects" (2008, p.46). This turned out to be a good 'way in' to group improvisations for my ensemble. I would place an object in the space (e.g. a chair), and the group would start off individually, paying attention to their own impulses. Then, we would start to improvise with the object, engaging with both it, and also one another. Now that there were other elements to the improvisation, the group had more to pay attention to, and we learned the skill of channelling an impulse into a physical response which could serve the exercise, the ensemble, the space, or the material. Alternatively we also learned that sometimes making the decision not to respond at all could serve the material better. A video of this exercise can be seen [here](#)¹².

Awareness of our own bodies

The next quality to work on was an awareness of our own bodies. Philosopher and phenomenologist Drew Leder (quoted in Zarrilli) poses that:

"While in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence. That is, one's own body is rarely the thematic object of experience. When reading a book or lost in thought, my own bodily state may be the farthest thing from my awareness. I experientially dwell in a world of ideas, paying little heed to my physical sensations or posture."

(Zarrilli, 2008 p.49)

My training encouraged the participants to make their bodies the "thematic object of experience", to bring their bodily state to their attention so that they were able to be more fully present. Obviously, the improvisation exercises which we first encountered had already started to bring our attention to our bodies. Some other exercises that we used to do this were: "Waking up the Legs" (Marshall, 2008, p13), "Playtime for Hips" (*ibid.* pp.24-25), "Playtime for Shoulders" (*ibid.* p25) and "Isolation Exercises" (Loui, 2009, pp.58-64) by Loui.

"Waking up the legs" is a basic warm up exercise which asks the participant to "explore all the possibilities of locomotion" (Marshall, 2008, p.13) with (and only with) the

¹² <https://youtu.be/L9pWaMKXreo>

legs. Marshall advises us to start as though we have no idea how to use our legs, so that we “start from zero” (*ibid.*), giving us the opportunity to fully explore what our legs can do, as opposed to following learned patterns of behaviour (walking, jumping, hopping, etc.). The exercise serves not only as a physical warm up, but it also helps the participant to attune him/herself to his/her body, switching off the conscious part of the brain, and instead ‘listening’ to what the body (specifically here, the legs) wants - whether it wants to stretch, curl up, be still, or whatever other feeling presents itself in the moment.

“Playtime for Hips” and “playtime for Shoulders” both follow the same pattern, but this time isolating the hips, and the upper back. We “Move and ‘listen’ to find what wants to happen, and then slither into whatever contortion creates a sensation of pleasurable release” (Marshall, 2008, p.25). Again, Marshall warns against using learned patterns in these exercises, instead encouraging participants to pay meticulous attention to what their body “wants” do to, and to do this “as far as it ‘wants’, for as long as it ‘wants’” (Marshall, 2008, p.13). Looking back on the video documentation after the process, it occurred to me that perhaps sometimes the body may *want* to do learned patterns, and that Marshall shows a slightly reductive and limited understanding of impulse work in this way. Kathryn, who has trained as a dancer in ballet, tap and modern dance since she was three, would often point her toes, and her movements seemed to be naturally graceful, despite my reminding the participants that they were not trying to look good, or impress with their skill. I do not believe however, that this way of moving was contrary to the instruction, that Kathryn was trying to look good. Instead, I must conclude that although Kathryn sometimes displayed formalised movements, these were so embodied, so much a part of the way that she moved that that was exactly what her body wanted her to do at that time.

Having said this, all of the above exercises encouraged the participants to pay close attention to a particular body part, and only that, just like Loui’s “Isolation Exercises”, in which we worked through the body starting from the head, concentrating on one small section of the body at a time. For example, we would move the head down, to the right shoulder, to the left shoulder, up, in circles, moving forwards, backwards, over the right and left shoulders, etc. Then we would move down to the shoulders, moving both up, down, just the right, just the left, etc. All these movements were done in “isolation”, i.e., without moving the rest of the body, and in Marshall’s terms “waking up” those parts of the body, the muscles and joints that we don’t normally pay attention to with our conscious minds.

What I wanted next was to obliterate what Marshall calls “management gestures” (2008, p.52), i.e. pulling down a t-shirt, tucking hair behind ears, scratching an itch; any gesture that would “disrupt the flow of impulse and response” (Marshall, 2008, p.52). This meant that there was less unconscious movement, so that at times where there was “nothing to do” (Britton) stillness really meant stillness, any movement was completely

deliberate, full of intention, and owned by the performer, and the movements were much more physically precise.

Loui offers an extension of her "Mannequin Exercise" on page 78-81 of her book: the "Statuary Garden Exercise" (Loui, 2009). In this manifestation of the exercise, the partners have a stimulus to work from: "This statue will reflect an emotional state of heroic proportions, much like statues in formal gardens" (Loui, 2009, p.79). Loui gives the topic of "triumph", and suggests that the pairs work for three minutes, before the group who have not been sculpted "tour the sculpture garden" (*ibid*, p.80). When we worked this exercise in the studio, I gave the group other stimuli: triumph and defeat; excitement and disappointment; poverty and greed; [heaven and hell](#)¹³; life and death. The group noted that the precision of the image can completely determine how it is interpreted - for example, in "greed", Sean noted how Kathryn's eyes were wide open, which made a lot of difference to the image itself, and if we alter these small details, "the whole picture is somewhat altered" (Loui, 2009, p.80).

If we look at the basic skills that can be taken from this exercise, we realise that it is not just about reading body language, but how, as we are manipulated, as we notice the muscular tensions, the weight in our feet, and the way our arms and legs are articulated, we can "feel" when the position is 'right'. That is to say:

"The physical self remembers emotions connected to posture. A triumphant sensation can be evoked with an uplifted chest and arm, just as the muscles of the face employed in a smile can trigger emotions of happiness"

(Loui, 2009, p.81).

So here we learned to pay further, closer attention to our bodies, and thereby to maintain stillness without the "management gestures" (Marshall, 2008, p.52) we so often use almost without noticing. The training therefore also allowed the participants to recognise the socialisations and patterns our bodies fall into. Oida points out that "Any human body is heavily influenced by its culture (country, class, social group, etc.). The personal history of the individual also shapes the physicality" (1997, p.26). For example, we no longer have to think about how we walk, stand, brush our teeth, or wash the dishes, it is merely a matter of habit. Our bodies obediently repeat these patterns of behaviour, and "become selective about how they engage with the world" (Marshall, 2008, p.3). Marshall reminds us to remain open to "other physical possibilities, other ways of moving" (*ibid*. p.11), and to "avoid assuming that the unfamiliar is automatically impossible or 'wrong'." (*ibid*.) To do this would be a block in itself. The "Statuary Garden Exercise" did cause some

¹³ <https://youtu.be/7Uovm0-WXi8>

problems however, as the group started to incorporate narrative into the work. The solution to this problem is discussed in Chapter 3, under the heading "Tableaux Exercise/Image Sequence".

I found that the best exercise for paying attention to our bodies and eliminating management gestures was the 3/5 Minute Sit, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Focus

My next job alongside cultivating an awareness of our bodies (for I often dealt with several concerns at once) was to work on my participants' focus. In this context, I use the word *focus* to describe the longevity of attention the performer can maintain, whereas the word *attention* I use specifically to talk about the mindfulness of the performer whilst undertaking tasks - how they observe by listening and attending to their task, their bodies and impulses, and other's bodies, in the space, in that specific moment. Attention therefore is a part of focus. For example, the instructions "pay attention" and "focus" in our sessions had different meanings. "Pay attention (to...)" was an instruction for the participants to turn their minds to a specific thing - their breathing for example, where their weight was in their feet, the other people in the space, or what was happening in that specific task. "Focus" was a more general instruction, and served as a reminder for the participants to remain 'present', engaged and awake in the moment, as opposed to letting their minds wander. This was an ongoing task, which I worked on until the presentation itself.

I have already spoken about how Loui's "Trust/Nod" exercise encouraged focus amongst the group, which then helped to dissolve blockages. There was one other exercise which I have previously mentioned which we practiced regularly: "The Ball Game" (Britton, 2013, p.330). I use Britton's name for this exercise because although there are several other practitioners (Michael Chekhov, David Zinder, Clive Barker) who use balls as training tools, I have firsthand experience of Britton's "Ball Game", which for me, contributes to its effectiveness. The exercise is very simple. The group stands in a circle, facing each other. A number of balls (I liked to use between 3 and 5 in a group of 7) are thrown. Britton points out that this "is not a learning to catch exercise. The exercise encourages flow; the flow of impulse to reaction. Flow is equally important (and equally possible) whether a ball is dropped or caught." (*ibid.*). By asking the participants to pay attention to the balls, and how we react to them, we started to notice what was stopping us from catching them. If a person missed one that was easily obtainable (ie, thrown at a good speed and easily

catchable), we realise that we weren't paying enough attention, and that we weren't focussed enough to enable us to catch the ball. In this way, the exercise also encouraged the dissolving of blockages, taking away the thought process which gets in the way of pure impulse-reaction. A video of this exercise can be found [here](#)¹⁴.

Focus was important because I needed my performers to maintain their attention for long periods of time: if the participants are to use the training practically in other performances or rehearsals, this is a very useful tool. If the performer becomes distracted, they have the potential to lose all the other qualities we have worked on - their awareness of their own bodies, awareness of other people, their responsiveness to impulses and their focus on the task itself. However, when an actor has a fuller awareness of his/her body, as well as a focus and commitment to the task at hand, this all contributes towards his/her 'presence' as a performer. This was the next quality I attempted to cultivate.

Stage Presence

According to Marshall, having a good stage presence requires three things of a performer. Firstly, they must have an 'available' body, meaning "that every part is working and able to move well..." (Marshall, 2008, p.31). This would make for a performance which is "technically interesting to watch" (*ibid.*), but if there is no connection between the mind and body, and we only work from the outside, the performance will be artificial, clinical and cold. Secondly therefore, a performer must have a connection between their mind and their body's movements, as "a body that is inhabited in the sense that you know something is going on inside, but where the body can't follow the impulse of that moment, will look 'clogged'..." (*ibid.*). Oida uses a metaphor of a box to describe the same need for inner/outer connection. If the box is beautiful but doesn't contain anything, then an audience cannot be moved by it because there is nothing interesting inside. On the other hand, if an actor only concentrates on their "inner life" (Oida and Marshall, 1997, p.67), and there is no 'box' to contain it, we cannot see anything. Oida says that we "need to construct an interesting 'box', and then ensure that it is filled with something equally interesting" (*ibid.*). Lastly, there needs to be a full commitment to the task at hand. Participants need to be committed to the work, and must want to "return to the work again and again, with a willingness to encounter both [themselves] and the rest of the ensemble, afresh and in the moment, each and every time" (Morris, 2009). Without this 'ownership' of the material, "you sense a lack of commitment to what is happening" (Marshall, 2008, p.31). None of

¹⁴ <https://youtu.be/PgWADPxIx-I>

these three factors on their own would be enough for a good stage presence; all three are required to make sure that the performance isn't dull, sterile, or withheld.

I believe I was successful in creating a good stage presence in my performers, particularly David, who was at first lacking in his commitment to the tasks, possibly as a result of coming into the process later than the other participants. He commented in his exit interview:

"I think the first part of it is turning up, and part of it is being ready to do something or being committed to doing it, 'cause if you're not then it's really hard to work off-of people"

(Personal Communication, 21.08.15)

David noted that at the start of the process he felt like he wasn't committed to the tasks at hand, and that he must have been "a pain to work with" (*ibid.*) because of this. In his exit questionnaire, he rated himself from a 3 at the beginning to a 5 at the end of the process in *presence* and from a 3 to a 4 in *commitment to tasks*, showing an overall improvement in this area. The "Trust/Nod" exercise and "The Ball Game" were both instrumental in this improvement, because for the exercise to be a success, they required a desire to carry on doing the task over and over again, with the same energy every time.

Each of the other participants also showed an improvement in these areas.

Playfulness

To ensure that my group remained enthusiastic and willing to return to the work, I injected an element of playfulness into my rehearsals, using some light hearted tasks, games and trying not to take the work (or ourselves) too seriously. If the performers do not find a sense of playfulness and joy in the work, it becomes a chore, a task we are not willing to undertake. And if each individual member is not completely committed to the work, if we are using willpower to "force [ourselves] onwards", we are "working from the wrong place" (Marshall, 2008, p.11). To discover this sense of playfulness, I first needed my performers to be disponible. Coined by the French practitioner Jaques Lecoq, the term *disponibilité* describes the "state of discovery, of openness, of freedom to receive" (Lecoq quoted in Murray, 2003, p.70) which is required of an actor as "a pre-condition for play" (Murray, 2003, p.70). This element of playfulness is inherent in the work of several psychophysical practitioners: Loui; Marshall; Frantic Assembly; and of course, Lecoq. One of the underlying motivations to inject a sense of play into the work was also the way in which Slava Polunin plays both with the rest of the cast and the audience in *Slava's Snow Show*. In her book

Serious Play: Modern Clown Performance, Louise Peacock quotes psychoanalyst and paediatrician Donald Winnicott, who writes "...in playing, and perhaps only in playing, the child or adult is free to be creative" (Winnicott, 1971, p.71). Peacock points out here the clear link between this and "Lecoq's view that the performer can only be truly responsive when he is able to play" (Peacock, 2009, p.12).

I was always sure to inject an element of playfulness in all of our improvisations, allowing the cast a wide variety of exercises in one improvisation session which they could often choose between. This way, they were free to change the energy of the piece, experiment with what would happen if they suddenly decided to run, stop still, or take a partner.

Annie Loui's "Fishes Exercise" (Loui, 2008, p.40) also helped to add some playfulness to the rehearsal sessions. I had also hoped that it would help the less confident members of the group to come forward a little and lead the group. In this exercise, one of the group leads, and the others crowd closely around the leader. They must not touch, and they can be in any position relating to the leader (so in front, behind, to the side). The leader then walks wherever they choose in the space, and the group must follow as closely as possible, always facing the same direction as the leader. As the leader changes direction, the group finds itself with a new leader, and the layout of the group is constantly shifting as people take new positions. The effect (when the exercise is done right) is of a shoal of fish always moving in the same direction. Here, the group can really 'play' with the pace of the exercise, they can make it more challenging by turning more often (meaning the leader changes more), or the leader can surprise the group, mixing up the pace, or turning full circles.

Marshall points out that:

"the energy (and ease) that the actors contact when they allow themselves the pleasure of 'playing' [...] is very important, since tension and seriousness are often closely linked. The more seriously you approach the work, the narrower and tighter your concentration becomes. And the muscles tend to follow the same pattern."

(Marshall, 2008, p.133)

I found that Jak had a tendency to be particularly playful during the "Fishes Exercise", which in turn helped Emily to be less anxious, losing her inhibitions and leading the group more as a result of her enjoyment of the exercise, which is exactly what I was looking for. This was also a good exercise for group awareness, which I will talk more about in the next section. The exercise can be seen in a video [here](https://youtu.be/0ofj82qUZ6U)¹⁵.

¹⁵ <https://youtu.be/0ofj82qUZ6U>

Another exercise we used was Britton's "The Ball in Pairs", in which we stand in pairs, facing each other, and throw two balls individually from person A's right hand to person B's left hand, and vice versa, so that the balls never cross over the centre line down the body. The idea is to keep the 'flow' going, so if your partner drops a ball, you must carry on, treating the two sides of the body as though they are completely separate. We should not "force the balls into rhythm with each other or hold them back to make it simpler (for yourself or your partner)" (Britton, 2013, p.332). This exercise is a challenge (and a playful game) for this reason, as one struggles to get the ball from the floor with their left hand, the other ball is already coming towards their right. The lesson in the exercise is not to help one another by making it easier, so that "The two impulses are experienced and responded to independently" (*ibid.*). If we are 'helpful', our partner cannot learn, and cannot experience the separation of the left side from the right. The playful element here aids the actor's "instinct and ability to respond" (Marshall, 2008, p.133), helping to release any physical and/or mental tension (*ibid.*).

Group Awareness

One of the most important things for ensemble training is group awareness. This encompasses a range of qualities such as openness to others, working without forming opinions, and a willingness to react, here, now, in the moment to your co-performers who share the space.

Zarrilli identifies a heightened perceptual and sensory awareness which is "opened both inward and simultaneously outward toward the environment and others in the environment" as one of the "six primary psycho-dynamic [...] principles" of psychophysical training (Zarrilli, 2008, p.83). Each individual in the ensemble was required to possess all of these qualities because, as Britton says, "The ensemble emerges through each individual doing her job" (Britton, 2013, p.326). If one member becomes distracted, isn't open to others or willing to react to what is happening in that moment, *then* we are no longer an ensemble: "The moments when the group connects are perfectly clear from within the exercise and to an observer [...]. Ensemble is realised in these ephemeral instances" (Morris, 2009).

The "Fishes Exercise" discussed under the previous heading was a good exercise for the improvement of group awareness, firstly because, as discussed, it encouraged the less vocal members of the group to take a more prominent role, and because we had to pay close attention to the leader in order to stay close to them, and quickly adapt to new leaders to keep the exercise going. We needed to have a heightened perceptual awareness so that we could stay close together within the group without touching.

Another thing that was important for group awareness was learning to give and take others' weight comfortably and safely. In *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre*, I came across the exercises "Rolling 1" and "Rolling 2" (Graham and Hoggett, 2009, pp.99-104). These exercises show participants how easily the body can be moved. A volunteer is asked to raise the knee furthest away from their partner, who in turn must gently pull the knee towards them, across their partner's body, turning the volunteer over (Graham and Hoggett, 2009 p.99). "If this is successful, you will see how the body leads with the knee, twists and allows the rest of the body to follow in a logical order until gravity takes over and completes the turn" (*ibid.* p.100). Once this has been observed, the volunteers attempt the half-roll without being pulled, merely following their partner's hand on their knee. Next, this is repeated backwards; the partner places a hand on the back of the volunteer's head, and the volunteer is to move towards the hand, this time following a ripple down the body. We found that often, the volunteer would get stuck at the shoulders, but at this point, they were to be reminded of the "natural logic we found in the first roll" (*ibid.*), so that they could overcome this block, and complete the roll. The partners swap roles.

The second stage ("Rolling 2") requires two volunteers to lie next to each other and roll across the floor in the same direction, trying to maintain contact so that the person at the back rolls over the other. Graham and Hoggett advise that both partners concentrate on pressing down, letting the rolling over happen as a consequence of the exercise, not because they are trying to roll over their partner. David and Jak in particular struggled with this at first, trying to 'hook' onto their partners, and concentrating too much on getting up and over their partner, rather than maintaining the contact and friction between them. These difficulties and their solutions will be discussed further in chapter 3 under the heading "Marcia Takedown", which is the follow-up to this exercise. A video of Rolling 2 can be found [here](https://youtu.be/r7F7hP1Dlyc)¹⁶.

The group found this to be a useful exercise in giving weight with confidence. Additionally, we learned an important lesson about the practicalities of giving and taking weight: "Equally distributed weight is easier to handle and [...] this exercise demands total relaxation and giving of this weight" (*ibid.* p.104). This is another exercise which normalised touching and being touched, encouraging the group to become more comfortable with one another, and I was sure to ask the participants to swap partners regularly, so that eventually we had all worked with each other. Graham and Hoggett advise that it "might be useful to point out to them that they have done this without placing their hands on their partners. The momentum and strength has come from their core and not their extremities" (*ibid.* p.105). This filled my group with confidence, because before, there were comments, particularly from David, that he felt he needed to use the strength in his arms. I noticed

¹⁶ <https://youtu.be/r7F7hP1Dlyc>

that in doing any physical tasks before, he liked to use the strength in his extremities instead of his core strength, so this exercise changed the way that David moved people, giving him more confidence and conviction in what he was doing.

Annie Loui's "Amoeba Exercise: "instant art"" (2009, p.39) is a mixture of negative space work (responding to the trajectory of a partner's still image as seen [here](#)¹⁷) and tableaux, techniques that were useful in developing group awareness:

"One person in the group takes a position in space, and one by one the rest of the group add to the original configuration, positioning themselves in response to whatever shape is already constructed"

(Loui, 2009, p. 39).

In creating the configuration, they become the 'amoeba'. Once a command is called from a member of the group outside the 'amoeba', it moves slowly, and then freezes completely still. The individual's position should be influenced by the trajectory of the group as a whole, the placement of weight, and the physical movement of the others in the 'amoeba'. This exercise particularly promotes non-visual awareness, as there may be moments where one group member cannot see any of his/her co-workers, and so they must 'listen' to what the group are doing by other means. The group must also start and stop the movement together, meaning they must pay very close attention to the action of the group. This exercise can be seen [here](#)¹⁸.

¹⁷ <https://youtu.be/QVkJMw4opIn8>

¹⁸ <https://youtu.be/DFVqIGhYDyk>

Chapter 3: Task, Attention, Movement: Research Presentation

In my research presentation, I gave a demonstration, with my group, of the most effective tasks which I had used in the training. These were the tasks which summed up the principles and skills I was trying to teach the best. I used these tasks, the ways of working, and the training process itself to devise material which I could show to an audience. Obviously, the ensemble members were aware of, and reacting to the audience's presence, unlike in our private training sessions. In his exit questionnaire, Jak said "I still feel the level of focus was apparent with the ensemble and myself [in the first performance] but not as much as it could or had been in rehearsal" (Bowler, Personal Communication, July 2015). In fact, everyone bar David mentioned in their exit questionnaires and interviews that they felt nervous, particularly in the first performance. Sean noted that he: "felt quite nervous and it was difficult to get into the right frame of mind in order to successfully carry out the tasks" (Sewell, Personal Communication, July 2015), and Kathryn noted that she felt self conscious (Blackburn, Personal Communication, July 2015). Melissa in particular was affected by the audience, to the point where she became disorientated half way through the performance and lost her place, in an attempt not to be distracted by the audience (Sert, Personal Communication, July 2015). However, most of the participants noted that they just needed to remind themselves of the training, and of the way that "all we had to do was carry out the tasks as we always have done" (Sewell, Personal Communication, July 2015). David said in his exit questionnaire that the audience did not really affect him at all, apart from them being there as "a marker to not run into" (Field, Personal Communication, August 2015), and he said in his exit interview (following the questionnaire) "I just got it into my head that it doesn't really matter if they're there or not, I'm still doing the same thing, I'm still trying to focus on what I'm doing and let my body move" (Field, Personal Communication, 21 August 2015). In this way, the training we did was the most effective for David, because in a performance context, I wanted them to be able to maintain the same focus as we did in rehearsals.

In this chapter I will talk about each exercise in the order in which they were shown in the presentation.

3/5 Minute sit



Figure 1

This exercise was demonstrated both at the very start and the very end of the piece. The task is written about in its original form both by Yoshi Oida (1997, pp.22-23), and Annie Loui (2009, pp.90-91), and requires the participants to go from a standing to a sitting position, taking 5 or 3 minutes to do so, respectively. It asks the trainee to explore how their body functions in the act of moving from one position to another (Oida and Marshall, 1997), to pay attention to the effect of gravity, how their weight shifts as they move, and to the “natural lines of energy and structure innate within our bodies” (Loui, 2009, p.91). Loui describes it as a “physical meditation”, a way of paying attention to the minute details of a physical movement. I took this as the core principle of the exercise. It struck me that the act of sitting was not the most important part, that one could take any movement which normally only takes around 2 seconds, and then dissect it - breaking it down into its smallest components.

Using words that described our training process as a stimulus, we each came up with two images, found a way of moving from the first to the next, and then slowed the movement down to around fifty seconds. We noticed anything that stopped us moving effectively and precisely, addressed it, and tried again. The next step was to try to replicate the movement backwards as exactly as we could - an extension of our physical meditation, which is what was seen at the end of the piece. This exercise required a large amount of focus as we attempted to move not only precisely the same each time, but then replicate the move as precisely as possible backwards at the end of the piece. We needed to pay meticulous attention to our body's movements, down to the smallest detail, and those of us working in partners and sharing each other's weight needed to pay very close attention to their partner as well.

This exercise is a good example of how the group were able to reach a slow consistency in the work and still maintain their focus, and reach Grotowski's trance state as discussed under the heading "Dissolving Blockages and Responding to Impulses" in Chapter 2. Emily particularly struggled with this exercise at the beginning, 'throwing away' movements and letting her concentration fade towards the end of the fifty seconds. My advice to her after watching her do this routine was to keep the focus going *past* the end of the movement, so that the end of the movement wasn't the end of her performance, but simply the point at which she became still again. This meant that the movement didn't seem to 'trail off' any more, and it was completely controlled until the end (and then afterwards), improving Emily's stage presence and her awareness of her own body.

A video of this exercise can be seen [here](https://youtube/gbQYY9AL5og)¹⁹.

¹⁹ <https://youtube/gbQYY9AL5og>

Tableaux Exercise/Image Sequence



Figure 2

This task was rooted in tableaux exercises, of which there are many variations. I developed this particular exercise as a response to the cast trying to incorporate narrative and character into some previous tableaux work. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, we had used Loui's "Statuary Garden" exercise in one workshop, where half of the members from the group have to 'sculpt' the others and move them into a position based on words such as "triumph" "disappointment" and "greed". There were comments from the group that a certain tableaux image reminded them of a story, or that they could pick out characters from the images they had created. To address this and dissuade them from imposing representational meaning or narrative onto their work, I asked my group to write a few paragraphs about what the principles of my training meant to them. I took 16 words from their writing, put them into a sequence (e.g *look, hold, open, change, notice*) and then asked the group to create 16 different individual images with their bodies, using the words as stimuli, so that the stimuli was derived from the training itself. We learned the sequence, memorising the minute details of the still images, and then we had a sequence of 16

images, inspired by the training, with no narrative or characterisation. These images remained the same until the performance itself, and the exercise was always in the same place in the presentation. The fixity of the sequence was very deliberate in the work, as, just like in the "Absent Ball Exercise" (discussed later in this chapter), the participants were asked to pay close attention to the small details of the movements and then try to replicate them exactly every time. Of course, it is impossible for each image to be precisely the same and there is always at least a small margin of human error, but the aim of the task was to create each image in the same way each and every time.

What was so useful in this exercise was that not only did it discourage the group from thinking about narrative in their work, but it also used many of the other skills I had been attempting to cultivate. Initially, the group had to respond to impulses to stimuli (the 16 words). The close attention to detail meant that the group were concentrating on their bodies, the awkward and difficult positions the bodies were in meant that each individual had to rid themselves of their self consciousness in order to allow themselves to be observed by the audience, the stillness between images required focus, and in addition, the group had to maintain awareness of each another, so that we would all move together, from one individual image to the next.

A video of this exercise can be seen [here](https://youtu.be/OfOKWsuXbqE)²⁰.

²⁰ <https://youtu.be/OfOKWsuXbqE>

Improvisations



Figure 3

I used improvisation exercises specifically to encourage my group to respond to impulses without having to think about what the body would do next. It was the dissolving of blockages which I was so keen to cultivate. In many ways, the ability to improvise is a skill in itself, but I used it in my training to bring out this quality in my performers.

There are so many different suggestions for improvisation exercises by many different practitioners. I comprised a concise list of the exercises we used in workshops and the practitioners from whom they came, as well as a very brief description on 'handout B', which was given out before the presentation, and which can now be found in the Appendix. Below, I will analyse some of the improvisation exercises which we used most prominently. The improvisations in the research presentation were a combination of some/all of the listed exercises, as well as some exercises which are listed on 'handout B'.

In "Milling 1" and "Milling 2", from *The Physical Actor* (2009, pp.33-34), the participants walk forwards or backwards in the space. To avoid collision, they do not slow down, but pivot or turn. They can choose partners at will; walking together, moving towards

or away from each other, or any other “variations of physical floor patterns in relationship to one other person” (Loui, 2009, p.35). Participants can choose new partners or move back into the group whenever they please. The goal is “to continue to work within the group, letting the continually shifting patterns of motion and individuals take you along with them”. (*ibid.*) I also added an element of Britton’s exercise “Walk/Run/Stop” (2013, pp.336-337), giving people the choice, to either ‘Mill’/walk, run through the space, or to stop and be completely still. I encouraged the group to walk ‘from the hips’, to give them a low centre of gravity (which would come in useful later in lifting and taking other’s weight). The effect I was looking for was that of the body “being effortlessly transported about the stage by the feet” (Oida and Marshall, 1997, p.25). Oida calls this space the “Hara”, which Marshall explains is “the centre of gravity of the human body” (Oida and Marshall, 1997, p.10), and, in Japanese culture, “the core of the entire self [...] the centre of a person’s strength, health, energy, integrity, and sense of connection to the world and the universe” (*ibid.*).

We also took several improvisation exercises from *The Body Speaks* (Marshall, 2008), namely “Listening to the Body” (pp.26-27), “Responding to the Room via Listening to the Body” (pp.42-43), and “Responding to Music” (p.47), amongst others. “Listening to the Body” requires its participants to focus on where in the room the body wants to be, and what it wants to do, and give the body exactly that, for as long as it wants to do it (Marshall, 2008, p.26). Marshall points out that the aim of the exercise is to let the body, as opposed to the mind, take charge. She reminds us that we should always be aware, because our impulses could quickly change, and we need to be able to respond to them with immediacy. In the very early stages of the training (October 2014), we did this exercise with our eyes closed to enable us to tune into our bodies more easily, and not be distracted by the other bodies in the space. This also helped Emily to feel less conscious, as she knew that people were not looking at her. Melissa noted that doing the exercise with closed eyes also gave her a sense of safety and helped her to concentrate just on herself, rather than the people around her. Once the group had gained more confidence we were able to do the exercise with eyes open.

Next followed “Responding to the Room via Listening to the Body” (Marshall, 2008, p.27). This follow-on exercise bids that the participants notice and engage with what the body wants to do *in relation to the space*. Perhaps it wants to feel the cold of the floor, or has a particular reaction to the high ceiling which makes it reach up into the air. The aim is to really ‘listen’ to the body’s impulses in order to open “the gate to a two-way dialogue between the inner landscape and your body”. (Marshall, 2008, p.27). Marshall poses that we should try and connect to and remain in this state when working creatively. When we did this exercise on the 28th October, I wrote in my logbook:

“For the first time I think I managed to fully get rid of my self-consciousness. I felt like I was really present in the moment. I wasn’t thinking about anything else at all. [...] At one point I really felt I was paying deep attention to my fingers, concentrating on every move. A lot of the time I felt like I wanted to move really slowly, and felt connected to the floor and the walls in the space.”

(Personal log book entry, 28.10.15)

This was the first time I managed to access the connection between my ‘inner landscape’ (that is “thoughts and feelings [...] images, sensations, memories, dreams and indescribable impulses” (Marshall, 2008, p.31)), and my body. I felt an impulse and was doing what my body wanted before I had a chance to think about it.

Next, we started to work with music. Marshall is very clear in saying that when we listen to music, we should “resist the pressure of the rhythm; don’t get trapped by the beat” (Marshall, 2008, p.47). Instead, she instructs us to keep ‘listening’ to the body, and respond to it.

I noted early on at the end of October 2014 that the music had a profound effect on the group, making them more focussed, concentrated and ready to work. Music therefore started to play a huge role in our training and rehearsals, and then I made the decision to have a complete soundtrack for the presentation. This was partly to be used as a focussing mechanism, and partly to be used to demarcate the different sections of the performance - letting the performers know, without my having to tell them, when they were to start a different exercise. The two tracks used for the improvisations in the presentation had not been heard by the cast until that point, in an attempt to ensure that the improvisations were truly unrehearsed and authentic. Upon reflection, and with the benefit of hindsight, I would not use music so much were I to undertake the process again. It became clear that in the end, the participants were more reliant on the music than I would like, needing it sometimes to concentrate, or to “blank everything out” (David Field, Personal Communication, 21 August 2015), as opposed to simply using it as a stimulus, or as a cue to change exercise.

One of our group improvisations can be seen [here](#)²¹.

²¹ <https://youtu.be/TZ6xzHxtbuA>

Absent Ball Exercise



Figure 4

For this exercise in its initial stages, we used juggling balls, and worked out a sequence of moves each where the ball was passed between partners. A video of the exercise in its early stages can be seen [here](https://youtu.be/WQOw0v4crm8)²². When devising for the show, we worked out a sequence of 10 moves between ourselves and the floor, and then another sequence between all of the members of the ensemble. The sequence was then learned without the balls. It is an exercise inspired by one I first encountered in January 2013 in Britton's workshop *Self With Others*, in which we would pass the ball between pairs, learn the sequence, and then get rid of the ball, and repeat the sequence as exactly as we could without it, the point being to pay attention to the small details of the sequence, or as Britton calls them "subtasks"- that is, the details that "underpin each individual movement- the shifts of balance, the changes in what they are looking at, the sequence of breathing" (Britton, 2013, p.359). If the exercise is done with due attention, one should be able to

²² <https://youtu.be/WQOw0v4crm8>

replicate the movement (almost) exactly as it was when the ball is taken away. There is a similar exercise written about in his book, where pairs design a “sequence of physical interactions” (Britton, 2013, p.359) (without a ball), memorise them, and then repeat. Again, the idea here is to pay attention to the “subtasks”, and I found that asking the trainees to do this encouraged them to pay closer attention to their bodies and the minute details of their movements. This close attention to detail meant that this exercise too (as well as the “Tableaux Exercise/Image Sequence”) had a certain fixity within the work.

Although I didn’t feel that we were forcing ourselves to do the work- at least there was no point where I didn’t enjoy it, or where I noticed someone else taking no pleasure in the work - this exercise is a good example of how the playful side of the work didn’t come across in the presentation. When speaking to John Britton afterwards, he asked me where the pleasure was in the exercise, and said that he felt “a sense of reluctance to liberate the playful side of the work in fear of disrupting the ‘seriousness’” (Britton, Personal Communication, 17 June 2015). This is due to the blank faces which I had encouraged in this task in order to discourage any imposing of narrative onto the work. I had knowingly set up a contradiction here, because of course, with blank, expressionless faces, there was no way that the playful side of the work could manifest itself physically. There was, then, a tension inherent in the training, and in retrospect, these two things (blank faces and asking the performers to be playful) were not easily held together. A video of the exercise which was eventually seen in the performance can be found [here](https://youtu.be/3aZ4M6SPeSg)²³.

²³ <https://youtu.be/3aZ4M6SPeSg>

Marcia Takedown



Figure 5

From *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre*, (Graham and Hoggett, 2009, pp. 106-109), this is the follow-up exercise to "Rolling 1" and "Rolling 2" (discussed in chapter 2). As mentioned previously, David and Jak (particularly when working together) really struggled with this exercise, their bodies stiff instead of relaxed. When David (intuitively) *tried* to roll over Jak, lifting his legs in an attempt to move on top of Jak, the result was Jak being unable to carry the concentrated weight of David, and the task would inevitably fail. The biggest lesson we learned was not to help each other, even though this seemed counterintuitive. The most successful way of being lifted over your partner was to relax, allowing your weight to be spread evenly over them.

Once we had mastered this, the group walks around the space and one person (the initiator) puts their hand on the back of another's neck. The chosen person is lead around the space with their eyes closed by the initiating partner. The initiator then gives a small squeeze on the back of their partner's neck, their partner falls to the ground on their side, and needs to be "rescued". To rescue them, anyone can slot in behind them in a 'spooning'

position, and pull the rescu-ee towards and over the top of them. Again, the lesson here is not to be helpful, but relax, and to allow your weight to be rolled over your partner. This is something we could apply to the rest of the training - for we found that if one tried to be overly-helpful, this would often impede the effectiveness of an exercise. Instead it becomes dominated by one person, and therefore the ensemble is broken. I used this 'rescuing' exercise as a pre-cursor for the counterbalance and lifting exercises, showing the group that it was very possible to move anyone's weight, even if that is the lightest and the heaviest person in the group. A video of this exercise can be viewed [here](#)²⁴.

This exercise is similar to Loui's "Body Surfing", which can be found on pages 116-119 of *The Physical Actor* (2009).

²⁴ <https://youtu.be/gT3CPKxbQ68>

Counterbalance and Weight Support Exercises



Figure 6

This penultimate section of the presentation was a demonstration of the acrobatic skill of the ensemble, the group awareness and the range of movement we had achieved. It was choreographed using improvisations, preconceived ideas and sometimes, even, by 'happy accidents'. There were lifts such as the 'Christ Lift' in which Melissa was hoisted up into the air in a crucifix position on her front, the 'Superman' lift, which involved being lifted onto the shoulder of another group member into a 'flying' position, and the 'Calippo' lift, in which the group must collectively concentrate on pushing one of its members upwards, whilst the person in the middle keeps their body rigid. This section required constant focus and attention to other group members, without which the routine would not only fail, but also be very dangerous. We needed to take responsibility for each other's safety, making sure we were always alert, and in the right place at the right time.

The routine also required a certain amount of practical skill, for example, not just using our appendages to lift one another, but our core strength, which as discussed, David

had struggled with throughout the process, preferring to use his arms as opposed to letting his body do the work. For example, in Melissa's Christ lift, with Melissa above our heads, and our straight arms supporting her, David's arms were often bent. I reminded him that it would be much easier and more practical to bend his legs (which are much stronger than arms) instead. He also had a tendency to hold his breath whilst carrying out strenuous physical exercises, and was often reminded to exhale.²⁵ A video of the process of creating the routine can be found [here](#)²⁶, and a video of the final routine [here](#)²⁷.

²⁵ This tendency was so strong (and sometimes David's face so red), that the other ensemble members would also remind David to breathe from time to time!

²⁶ https://youtu.be/o_NmClS2Cc

²⁷ <https://youtu.be/oMeEHfpi6GM>

Conclusion

The training undertaken from October 2014-June 2015 produced massive improvements in the participants' stage presence; physical control and precision; group awareness; focus and attention. We became an ensemble, which was realised in the "ephemeral instances" (Morris, 2009) where everyone in the ensemble connected. The research presentation, I feel, was a good demonstration of all of these skills, but perhaps the one thing it was lacking was an example of the playful side of the ensemble. This element was clearly present in rehearsals: "I think that's what the whole process was all about, enjoying what you're doing" (Jak Bowler, Personal Communication, August 2015). However, in the presentation, this failed to come across, the blank serious faces characteristic of some psychophysical work portraying a certain sense of seriousness and purpose, without allowing the playful element of the performance to manifest itself physically. Having said this, this contradiction was deliberately set up in my training, but as discussed in Chapter 3, the two things were difficult for the ensemble to maintain at the same time.

I believe that the training we undertook also created many skills that are transferrable to other performance/training contexts, all of the participants agreeing that they will use the training in the future. Emily, who wants to act as a career said:

"it helped me become more aware physically. One of the things I really wanna do when I'm building characters is give them their own physical profile, so it'll definitely be really good for that"

(Personal Communication, 21 August 2015).

Jak also picked up on this element of the training, saying:

"I will look to utilise the skills and developments I have acquired during the process in any way I can during performance [...] I feel like the process has helped me grasp the precision needed to be a performer."

(Personal Communication, July 2015).

Sean said:

"I felt with our group, because it was a small group, we became much more aware of each other [...] and I think that helped us draw in a much tighter focus quicker than with other groups that I've worked in before, and that made it really easy for me to know where people were and how they were in the space, and since then I've been able to apply that sort of focus in other situations, which has been really helpful."

(Personal Communication, 21 August 2015)

David said:

"Every time I practice or rehearse I use the awareness exercises to really ground me into the moment, and become aware of my surroundings and the task ahead. The impulse exercises we used have transferred onto my skills now, letting me flow with more instinct and not be held back by any thoughts or restrictions I might have. It enables me to be a better performer and better with the creation of content as I feel I don't hesitate with direction"

(Personal Communication, 21 August 2015)

Melissa and Kathryn both said that they would use the skills they had gained from their training going into their third year at university. Melissa noted that the best skill she had learnt was maintaining stillness: "for me I just think that's the really important skill, just doing nothing like [...] I think it's a really difficult thing to do: not do anything" (Personal Communication, 21 August 2015), and that she would use this during the remainder of her course. Kathryn also noted that the warm up exercises that we had done in the sessions would come in handy in her third year of university, and also all the work on impulses was "really transferrable":

"when I was having impulses and thinking, how did I get that impulse? Where did it come from? Did it come from someone else, or from me? Then I could develop it. Stuff like that I think is really transferrable"

(Personal Communication, August 2015).

So the training was a success, and I achieved what I set out to do: each of the participants felt that they would be able to use the skills they had gained in other performance contexts. What was a (pleasant) surprise was that some of the participants expressed how the training was also transferable outside of theatre and performance itself, Melissa commenting that: the training had made her less nervous around people, and that it had made her “grow up” (Personal Communication, 21 August 2015), and Emily noting that it had helped with her anxiety in everyday life. In fact, the training had such a big impact on Emily in her day-to-day life; she said that her self confidence had improved “quite a lot”, she felt healthier and even said that members of her family had commented on how she was much more comfortable around other people. (Personal Communication, 21 August 2015). On a personal level, this was the biggest success of all.

Appendices

Handout A

Handout A

Dear examiners,

You are here today to watch a short demonstration of the research I have been undertaking for the last nine months. My research questions are:

- In psychophysical training and devising for ensemble-based performance, which tasks are the most effective at cultivating a specific set of skills and why?
 - What qualities in particular am I trying to cultivate in my performers and why?
 - How can I pass this training on?
- How can one make a piece of work using tasks, ways of working, and the training and devising process itself?
- Where does my research fit into a broader context in the field of 20th/21st century European performance training?

I find John Britton, the director of the DUENDE ensemble, provides a definition of *psychophysical* which is synonymous with the way I have been working, that is:

“A psychophysical training is an integrative training, one that recognizes that what one does and how one pays attention to it are intimately connected – and that both require training simultaneously.

A psychophysical approach asks a performer to pay attention to her experience of her body’s actions, and to the processes of thinking that underpin those physical actions.”

(Britton, 2013, p. 283)

In October last year, we started our training process, beginning with ice-breaking exercises, and taking the first steps in exploring our bodies. We have also been working on our focus since the beginning, trying to maintain our attention over longer and longer periods of time. Next we started to work on getting rid of the blockages which stopped us reacting to impulses. Once we had done this, we worked on following those impulses, looking for the “freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction” (Grotowski, 2002, p.16). We have also worked on physical precision and control, honing our attention in on the micro-movements and tiny details of our bodies in motion and in stillness. Last but not least, we have worked on group awareness and ensemble work, trying to achieve a sense of *Complicité*, which Callery eludes, is the “crux of ensemble practice, a shared belief which depends upon intense awareness and mutual understanding” (Callery, 2001, p.88).

I have introduced all of these principles and ideas with task-based exercises (please refer to your A6 sheets) which is what you will see in the manifestation of the work. I have worked, re-worked and developed exercises from artists, practitioners, ensembles and companies such as Frantic Assembly, John Britton, Jerzy Grotowski, Annie Loui, Lorna Marshall and Yoshi Oida all who work in the realm of “physical” or “psychophysical” theatre. The training and devising work we have done has culminated in this performance. I felt this was the best way to test whether my training has worked, to see whether my ensemble can maintain their attention to their bodies and other’s bodies, to their tasks whilst also having an awareness of other’s tasks, all whilst in a “performance” context. By working with tasks in this way, my participants and I are not “representing” something or pretending to be a character with a back-story in a fictitious world. We are doing an exercise. This way of acting is interesting to me because it is efficient; the actor maintains complete control over their body and mind, not being distracted by emotions, or thoughts outside of the exercise, and there is a real sense of ownership of the material by all who partake in it. I have passed on my training to a group of second year students, who have kindly given up four to six hours of their time every week since October last year.²⁸ We have also worked a lot with

music, using it as a stimulus for devising and improvisation exercises. The soundtrack to this piece is inspired by my original research into spectacular theatre, which uses loud, very evocative music. This will be discussed further in my thesis.

Please note that the following exercises are not the only ones we have done, but the ones which were more prominent/sum up the principles I was trying to teach the best.

Before you entered the space this afternoon, we have warmed up our minds and bodies. We have stretched, and done the "**trust/nod**" exercise from Annie Loui's *The Physical Actor*. This exercise is simple: we stand in a circle and one person (having gained permission by the way of a small nod) walks to another's place. The person who has given permission now needs to find a new place in the circle before the first person gets there, they look for permission, and the exercise continues. The ensemble follows the trajectory of movement as it unfolds, and "the faster the pace [...] the more alert, complicit, and responsive the actors become" (Loui, 2009, p.43). This is an exercise in focus, attentiveness and readiness. In doing this exercise, we attempt to reach Grotowski's "passive readiness [...] a state in which one does not *want to do that* but rather *resigns from not doing it*" (Kumiega, 1985, p. 123).

1 It is worth noting that the group are still young performers with limited experience, not actors with years of experience and training, and so some errors and vulnerabilities may manifest in the performance. However, I do not wish to negate the effort and time they have put in- most of them had never done this type of training before and all have accomplished a lot in nine months.

Handout B

Walk/Run/Stop	John Britton, <i>Encountering Ensemble</i>	p. 336-337	This simple -but, as Britton points out, difficult- exercise, asks the trainees to “walk with energy and focus” and to “Keep the space balanced”. They may also run, or stop. They pay attention to when they have an impulse to change the energy state, to which the whole group accepts and responds. The exercise requires energy and focus.
Group Improvisation		p. 338	“Each performer, mindful of the evolving web of relationships, decides, moment-by-moment, how to serve the material, whether to initiate, respond, offer alternatives or do nothing.”
Continual Lift Sequence		p.340-341	“The group lifts someone, finds a momentary collective image with at least one person off the ground, then lowers that person back to the ground. The sequence is endlessly, seamlessly repeated.”
Milling 1/2	Annie Loui, <i>The Physical Actor</i>	p. 33-35	The participants walk forwards or backwards in the space. To avoid collision, they do not slow down, but pivot or turn. They can choose partners at will; walking together, moving towards or away from each other, or any other “variations of physical floor patterns in relationship to one other person”. Participants can choose new partners or move back into the group whenever they please. The goal is “to continue to work within the group, letting the continually shifting patters of motion and individuals take you along with them”. (Loui, 2009, p.35)
Negative Space		p. 136 - 140	Loui calls this “trading fours”- one partner moves and then freezes over four counts, and then their partner responds to the count of four. We took away the counting and stripped the exercise down to movement and reaction. It is an exercise in responding to others. Loui offers some variations on the exercise, namely “with isolations” (moving a single body part instead of the whole body), “at a distance” (Start across the room and move toward your partner), and “hands touching” (Loui, 2009, p.140).
Responding to the body	Lorna Marshall, <i>The Body Speaks</i>	p. 26	“tune into your body. Where in the room does it want to be? How does it want to be? [...] Then do that specific thing, focusing on giving the body exactly what it wants. And do it for as long as the body wants. [...] the point of this exercise is to let the body take charge, while the mind abdicates. But never tune out your awareness. Your mind remains in a state of alert 'listening', because the body's hungers could change in an instant.”
Responding to the room		p. 42-43	This exercise requires a wide awareness of the room, objects and the surrounding space. “You are not just looking for what your body wants to do with itself, but also what it wants to do in relation to the physical environment” (Marshall, 2008, p.42); does it want to touch something, move in the space, how does it want to move and where? This is about noticing impulses from the space, and engaging with that impulse.
Responding to the music		p. 47	The music played during the improvisation sequence is music that the cast have not heard or prepared for, to ensure that the improvisation is truly unrehearsed and “organic”, ie that it comes from a direct response to an impulse from a new stimulus. Marshall points out that responding to the music is not about dancing or interpreting the music. It is not about learned dance moves, or formalised movement. Instead, we let the music connect to us “directly [...] seeing what aspect of [our] physical life it ignites” (Marshall, 2008, p.46).

Presentation Postcards



SLOW MOTION MOVEMENTS

This exercise is demonstrated both at the very start and the very end of the piece. The task is written about in its original form both by Tony Oude and Annie Lau and requires the participants to go from a standing to a sitting position, taking 5 or 3 minutes to do so, respectively. It asks the trainees to explore how their body functions in the act of moving from one position to another (Oude, 1997), to pay attention to the effect of gravity, how their weight shifts as they move, and to the "natural lines of energy and structure inside within our bodies" (Lau, 2009, p.91). Lau describes it as a "physical meditation", a way of paying attention to the minute details of a physical movement. I took this as the core principle of the exercise: to structure that the act of sitting was not the most important part, but one could take any movement

which normally only takes around 2 seconds, and then dissect it - breaking it down into its smallest components.

Using words that described our training process as a stimulus, we each came up with two images, found a way of moving from the first to the next, and then slowed the movement down to around 50 seconds. We noticed anything that stopped us moving effectively and precisely, addressed it, and tried again. The next step was to try to replicate the movement backwards as exactly as we could - an extension of our physical meditation. This is what you will see at the end of the piece.



FRENCH ASSEMBLY'S MARCIA TAKEDOWN

This is a useful exercise in giving weight and taking weight. The trainees lie next to each other on their backs and both roll in the same direction. The aim is for the person at the back (let's call them person A) to roll over the other. They do this by maintaining contact and person A concentrates on pressing down as opposed to rolling over. The biggest lesson we learned was not to help each other. When the person A (sometimes intuitively) tries to roll over their partner (lifting their leg) in an attempt to move on top of them, the result was person B being unable to carry the concentrated weight of their partner, and the task would inevitably fail.

back of another's neck. The chosen person is read around the space with their eyes closed by the rotating partner. The initiator then gives a small squeeze on the back of their partner's neck. Their partner falls to the ground on their side and needs to be "rescued". To rescue them, anyone can get in behind them in a "scooping" position, and pull the rescuer towards and over the top of them. Again, the lesson here is not to be helpful, but relax, and to allow your weight to be rolled over your partner. This is something we could apply to the rest of the training: for we found that if one tried to be overly-helpful, this would often impede on the effectiveness of an exercise, instead it becomes dominated by one person and therefore the exercise is broken.

Next the group waits around the space and one person (the initiator) puts their hand on the

The exercise is similar to Lau's Back Sifting, which can be found on pages 118-119 of her book *The Physical Actor* (2009).



LIFTS AND AEROBIC SKILL

The routine evolved from Britten's continual fall exercise, as well as counterbalance and weight support exercises and from inspiration from other theatre/dance companies such as French Assembly and ONS. I originally started my Masters looking at the solo work Steve Pountney used his body, and so this exercise has its roots right at the start of my process when I was looking at "spectacular theatre" inspired by Sarah Snow Snow and the acrobatic routines of Cirque du Soleil and French Assembly. The aim was to get the cast to implicitly trust each other, learn to take weight, give weight and to take responsibility individually for making the image complete - realising what their job is in the ensemble and reacting appropriately. Some of the routine was also inspired by the music, which is a track used

for the advert for the GoPro Hero 3 (the camera they had been using to record the process). Some of the lifts happened authentically in rehearsals as a response to the music, or an improvisation, and some were learnt in the training process itself. The counterbalance and weight support exercises we learned the basis for from Lou Marshall, and French Assembly's *Book of Dancing Poetics*, all of which reminded us to keep a low centre of gravity and a strong base for lifts, to "breathe out during exertion" (Crabtree and Haggitt, 2009, p.216), and to move from the "centre" - the area just below the belly button - to give a better sense of stability.



IMAGE SEQUENCE

This task is rooted in tableaux exercises, of which there are many variations. I developed this particular exercise as a response to the cast trying to incorporate narrative and character into some previous tableaux work. We had used Lou's Story-Garden exercise (Lou, 2008, p. 79-80) in one workshop where half of the members from the group have to "sculpt" the others and move them into a position based on words such as "triumph", "disappointment" and "grief". There were comments from the group that a certain tableaux image reminded them of a story, or that they could pick-out characters from the images they had created. To address this and dissuade them from imposing representational meaning or narrative onto their work, I asked my group to write a

few paragraphs about what the principles of training meant to them. I took 16 words from their writing, put them into a sequence (e.g. look, look open change, rest) and then asked the group to create 16 different individual images with their bodies, using the words as stimuli, so that the stimuli was derived from the training itself. We learned the sequence, memorising the minute details of the still images and then we had a sequence of 16 images, inspired by the training with no narrative or characterisation.



ABSENT BALL EXERCISE

For the exercise, we used juggling balls, and worked out a sequence of 10 moves each where the ball was passed between ourselves and the floor, and then another sequence between the members of the ensemble. It is an exercise inspired by one I first encountered in January 2013 in John Britton's workshop *Self With Others*, in which we would pass the ball between pairs learn the sequence, and then get rid of the ball. There is a similar exercise written about in his book, where pairs design a "sequence of physical interactions" (Britton, 2013, p.159) without a ball, memorise them, and then repeat. The idea is to pay attention to the very small details, or as Britton calls them "subtasks" - that is the details that underpin each individual movement: the shifts of balance, the changes in what they are looking at, the sequence

of breathing" (Britton, 2013, p.163).



IMPROVISATION

There are so many different suggestions for improvisation exercises by many different practitioners. I have attempted to compile a concise list of the exercises we have used in workshops and the practitioners whom they came from, as well as a very brief description on handout 8, which you can take away and read in your own time. The improvisations you will see this afternoon will be a combination of several of the listed exercises.

but to "communicate honestly" (Lou, 2009, p.42) with the other ensemble members. I like to use the word "authentic" to suggest the same thing: the participants are asked to be open, genuine and embrace "those elements of 'natural' behaviour which obscure pure impulse" (Grotowski, 2002, p. 16). The two tracks used for the improvisation have not been heard by the cast until this performance, in an attempt to ensure that the improvisation is truly unprepared and "organic", so that it comes from a direct response to an impulse from a new stimulus.

Marshall and Lou both speak about acting and re-acting "honestly" whilst improvising, pointing out that one should not try and "shape your response to make it 'better' or more 'acceptable'" (Marshall, 2008, p.36), and that we as performers are not here to impress the audience with sets,

Exit Questionnaire

Think back to the start of the process. In regards to the following categories, how skilful did you feel on a scale of 1-5, 1 being not at all, and 5 being very skilful?

	1	2	3	4	5
Less self consciousness and anxiousness					
Awareness of own body					
Physical precision					
Focus					
Presence					
commitment to tasks					
Awareness of others in space					
Working without forming opinions					
Reacting to others					
Open to ideas					
Playfulness					
Noticing and listening to impulses and responding to them appropriately (i.e, not blocking, but channelling your impulse into a physical response which served yourself, the space, or the ensemble as directed in each individual exercise) and honestly					

In regards to the following categories, how skilful did you feel at the end of the process on a scale of 1-5, 1 being not at all, and 5 being very skilful?

	1	2	3	4	5
Less self consciousness and anxiousness					
Awareness of own body					
Physical precision					
Focus					
Presence					
commitment to tasks					
Awareness of others in space					
Working without forming opinions					
Reacting to others					
Open to ideas					
Playfulness					
Noticing and listening to impulses and responding to them appropriately (i.e, not blocking, but channelling your impulse into a physical response which served yourself, the space, or the ensemble as directed in each individual exercise) and honestly					

Will you use the training now that the project is finished?

How were you affected by the audience's presence in the first performance?

How were you affected by the audience's presence in the second performance?

Describe the differences you felt when working with and without music.

Describe the differences you felt when the music was quieter in the first performance as opposed to louder in the second performance.

Bibliography

- Banes, S. and Lepecki, A., 2007. *The senses in performance*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Barrett, E. and Bolt, B., Dr, 2009. *Practice as research: approaches to creative arts enquiry*. Reprint edn. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Britton, J., 2013. *Encountering ensemble*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.
- Callery, D., 2001. *Through the body: a practical guide to physical theatre*. London: Nick Hern Books.
- Frost, A. and Yarrow, R. 2007, *Improvisation in drama*, 2nd edn, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Graham, S. and Hoggett, S., 2009. *The Frantic Assembly: book of devising theatre*. Routledge.
- Grotowski, J. and Barba, E., 2002. *Towards a poor theatre*. New York: Routledge.
- Kershaw, B. and Nicholson, H., 2011. *Research methods in theatre and performance*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Kumiega, J., 1985. *The theatre of Grotowski*. Methuen.
- Loui, A., 2009. *The physical actor: exercises for action and awareness*. London: Routledge.
- Marshall, L., 2008. *The body speaks*. London: Methuen Drama.
- Merlin, B., 2004. *Konstantin Stanislavsky*. 1 edn. London: Routledge.
- Merlin, B., 2001. *Beyond Stanislavsky: the psycho-physical approach to actor training*. Nick Hern.
- Mitchell, K., 2008. *The Director's Craft : A Handbook for the Theatre*. Hoboken: Routledge.
- Murray, S., 2004. *Jacques Lecoq*. 1 edn. London: Routledge.
- Murray, S.D. and Keefe, J., 2007. *Physical theatres: a critical introduction*. 1 edn. London: Routledge.
- Oddey, A., 1996. *Devising theatre: a practical and theoretical handbook*. London: Routledge.
- Oida, Y. and Marshall, L., 1997. *The invisible actor*. Methuen Drama.
- Peacock, L., 2009. *Serious play: modern clown performance*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Pitches, J. 2003;2004;, *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, 1st edn, Routledge, London.

- Radosavljević, D., 2013. *The contemporary ensemble: interviews with theatre-makers*. London: Routledge.
- Rainer, Y., 1974. *Work 1961-73*. Halifax, N.S; New York: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.
- Sierz, A., 2005b. Frantic Assembly. *TheatreForum - International Theatre Journal*, 26(26), pp. 3-9.
- Slava's Snow Show* by Slava Polunin (2013). Directed by Slava Polunin. [programme]. Lyceum Theatre, Sheffield.
- Slowiak, J. and Cuesta, J., 2008. *Jerzy Grotowski*. 1 edn. London: Routledge.
- Smith, H. and Dean, R.T., 2009. *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*. 1 edn. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Spaces-the-ensemble-theatre-practices-of-john-britton.pdf accessed, [13 10 14], Morris, E, (2009) 'Looking for The Empty Spaces' *Total Theatre Magazine*. Vol 21 (Issue 01) [online] Available at: <https://eilonmorris.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/looking-for-the-empty->
- Swain, R., 2011. *Directing: a handbook for emerging theatre directors*. London: Methuen Drama.
- Toporkov, V.O., 2001. *Stanislavsky in rehearsal*. London: Methuen.
- Winnicott, D.W (1991). *Playing and Reality*. 3rd ed. Oxon: Routledge. [online] Available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=gIDHJG81NjAC&printsec=frontcover&dq=playing+and+reality&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAGoVChMI1_yX9vnBxwIVBNMUCh3vqAIe#v=onepage&q=playing%20and%20reality&f=false [accessed 20 August 2015]
- Watson, I., 1993. *Towards a third theatre: Eugenio Barba and the Odin teatret*. London: Routledge.
- Wunder, A., 2006. *The wonder of improvisation*. Ascot, Vic: Wunder.
- Zarrilli, P.B., 2008. *Psychophysical acting: an intercultural approach after Stanislavsky*. London: Routledge.
- Zarrilli, P.B., DVD-ROM, Hulton, P. and Barba, E., 2009. *The psychophysical actor at work*. GB: Routledge Ltd.
- ZINDER, D.G., 2009. *Body voice imagination: ImageWork training and the Chekhov technique*. Abingdon; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Interviews with participants conducted on 20th- 21st August 2015.