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**AN EXPLORATION INTO THE ROLE OF FITNESS  
IN PHYSICAL THEATRE ACTOR TRAINING**

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

The University of Huddersfield

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## **Abstract**

Stemming from a personal interest in fitness, this thesis examines the role fitness plays within physical theatre and relative actor training routes.

A number of case studies are used including the work of Jacques Lecoq and *Frantic Assembly*, as well as other central figures in physical theatre and actor training. From these case studies the thesis draws out key principles of physical theatres and looks to identify to what extent fitness can enhance or limit these principles. Other benefits and limitations are considered that have relevance to wider the context of theatre and actor training.

The case studies also accompany some independent practical work that ran alongside the written research. This was an eight-month program working with four actors to implement fitness exercises in a practical actor-training/rehearsal process. The actors' comments are used to give insight to the difference that fitness made to their development.

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## Introduction

Over the last two years I have been researching the role fitness plays within physical theatre actor training. The research itself has been led and informed by two strands:

Firstly I worked with my own company *Brick Wall Ensemble* between November 2014 and June 2015. During this time I used fitness exercises (some created by myself, some pre-existing exercises) throughout weekly sessions to identify the implications fitness has on the development of acting for physical theatre. Secondly I have studied a selection of case studies, primarily two actor-training systems, to understand existing integrations of fitness and the benefits and limitations this has upon the actor.

The underlying inspiration for conducting this research stems from a personal interest in fitness and therefore a curiosity about its uses (and usefulness) in physical theatre actor training practices. I have been aware of the implicit presence of fitness training within physical theatre since joining university in 2011, and therefore am hoping that a better understanding of its uses will better inform future processes for *Brick Wall Ensemble* and myself.

The thesis explores a selection of attributes commonplace in actor training; posture and the 'neutral' body, proprioception and coordination, ensemble acting and energy and speed. These were attributes that became particularly prominent during the research period because of *Brick Wall's* style and approach to making theatre.

There have been a selection of resources that have been central to the research process. Firstly there have been texts relating to each of the case studies, these have allowed an insight into their history, their context within physical theatre and their processes for training; the primary of these being *Jacques Lecoq* by Simon Murray (2003) and *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre* by Steven Hoggett and Scott Graham (2009;;2012). Others case studies and their relevant texts have included *Vsevolod Meyerhold* by Jonathan Pitches (2003) and *Reverberations across small-scale British theatre: politics, aesthetics and forms (2013)* which contains a chapter about *Volcano Theatre* by Gareth Somers. This also gives unique insight into *Volcano Theatre*, Somers writes about *Volcano's* history, context within physical theatre, training lineage and insight into their aesthetic style.

Other central texts to the research have been concerned more broadly with physical theatre or actor training, some offering insight into both. These texts have given context and history to physical theatre and theoretical underpinning to the practices and processes of physical theatre. Such as *Physical Theatres: A critical Introduction* and *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader* both authored/edited by John Keefe and Simon Murray. The former of these gives a rich and detailed overview of Western Physical Theatre, including topics on; defining physical theatre, contemporary practices, actor training systems, role of the text and cultural considerations of physical theatre. The latter of the two texts provides a selection of essays on the same topics by significant figures in theatre. Other texts that have had relevance to physical theatre and/or actor training have been *Movement Training for the Modern Actor* by Simon Murray (2003) *Actor Training (2000)* and *Twentieth Century Actor Training (2010)* by Alison Hodge which both offer insight into actor training paths, the , *Encountering Ensemble* by John Britton (2013) and *Through the body* by Dymphna Callery (2015).

## A History of *Brick Wall Ensemble* and an Outline of the Process

Myself, Luke Johnson, Natasha Jarvis, Sean Thornhill and Adam Tolson (along with ten others) began creating theatre together under the alias of 'Brick Wall Ensemble' in September 2012. At the time we had done a year at the University of Huddersfield and this year had inspired us to begin creating our own student-led work. Previous to this we had been staff-led at the university with staff members prescribing the theatre we created with their own training, academic focus and ways of working. *Brick Wall* allowed us to create work free from this influence, not that we had any issues with neither the influence nor the authority of staff, but we were eager to create something that would be solely 'ours'. We wanted sole ownership.

During our time at the university we had explored uses of the body and undergone some movement training but it was eclectic in its approach and not geared to one style of acting. Also during the first year of university we were introduced to movement pieces that had little or no text, and for a few of us (certainly including myself) it was the first time we had seen anything like this (outside of the conventional dance world). It became a challenge that I wanted to tackle; how do you create a piece of theatre that can tell a story with no words? In lower education this was something I had never considered nor studied, I had naively and ignorantly thought that theatre *must* contain speech and if it didn't it was dance.

*Brick Wall's* first show was *Rose by Another Name*<sup>1</sup> was a retelling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which (because of our newly found curiosity) we chose to do as a physical score, using the script to identify key points in the story rather than as lines to be learned and redelivered. Whilst creating the show, we felt an obligation to condition physically; at this stage we may not have truly understood why. Perhaps still naïve; we didn't quite understand the importance of having a trained body only that we should work towards having one.

To do so meant sharing practice and knowledge from sporting predispositions and sharing any useful exercises that we had accrued thus far. Following our first show many of the company commented that they felt very good physically, we had produced a 45 minute physical score that by nature was exhausting to perform, containing lifts, flips, running, jumping, rolling, climbing and falling. Three months of rehearsals and a DIY approach to training had progressed our physical abilities; we had done so with no formalised training, no teacher with years of experience in the theatre-world, nor sport-world.

A year later we produced another show<sup>2</sup>, once again around 45 minutes in length, this time again we felt in a very good place physically. We had all pushed each other hard, long days

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<sup>1</sup> Friday 1<sup>st</sup> and Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, 2013. Milton Building, University of Huddersfield

<sup>2</sup> *The Remarkable Case of You* – performed May 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> at Milton Building, University of Huddersfield.

of rehearsing with tough warm-ups and exercises we had crafted ourselves. Once again the show was very demanding, containing even more daring lifts, flips, choreography.

For the style of theatre we wanted to create the approach we took to training seemed to have good results; the attributes we developed lent themselves to the style of work that we created. Largely I suspected it was because we had done lots of running, lots of push-ups, sit-ups, burpees, planking etc. These movements making us stronger for the lifts and jumps, more agile for the quick-paced choreography, more flexible for a better range and variety of movement.

The practical process for this research study began November 19<sup>th</sup> 2014. After recruiting Luke, Sean, Natasha and Adam to take part in the process, we began to meet for sessions usually once or twice a week. Each session began with a warm-up or exercise taken from the attached list (see appendices) During the sessions we also devised and rehearsed a show called *Lift*<sup>3</sup>, intended to be a bi-product of the process. The sessions were ongoing until June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016 which was the start of an intensive week of rehearsals before the show was performed on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> *Lift* is about four fictional characters that get stuck in a lift at the end of their working day in a fictional bank called Reeds. The close proximity of the lift forces the characters to quickly get to know each other. In the short time they are stuck in the lift they share some of their past experiences, memories and darkest secrets.

## Methodologies

Firstly because of the nature of this research (the subjectivity of the actors' development and experience) the research shall present commentary thoughts from the actors helping them "work towards an embodied understanding" (Bacon, 2006, p.135). Also it gives me an insight into their "feeling(s) of the experience, of the creative aspects that are specific to the research context". Embodied understanding and feelings about their experience are unique to the individual, using comments from the actors' gives a unique subjective insight into the process, one that couldn't be achieved through purely external observations.

Including commentary thoughts from the actors is a way for the actors to provide accounts of their experience of the exercise, whilst numerical measurement and recordings can provide quantifiable and objective data, self-reporting how one feels can provide qualitative and subjective data. Providing internal observations are intended to compensate for the potential researcher bias that may occur, for example external observations that will be done through assessments present their own bias and limitations. "Assessment bias, in other words, diminishes the validity of educators' test-based inferences about students" (Popham, 2012, p.6).

An example of a potential bias when using objective/quantitative analysis: whilst an increase of repetitions would suggest an increase of muscular strength, for example, it might be caused by the performer having a natural influx that day due to a temporary change in sleep pattern or calorie intake. Therefore asking the actors to give self-reflective comments and perform self-assessment provides internalised reflection and acts to counterbalance the potential bias inferences made by an external party.

Also using internalised reflection has been argued to be positive evidence-research:

Although self-assessments are often thought to have little veracity, there is reason to argue that individuals are often in the best position to validly assess their own abilities and behaviours and to predict their subsequent conduct. (Jones and Nisbett, 1971)

From Jones and Nisbett's comments it can be seen that one has unique acquaintance with one's own inner states, feelings, and dispositions, as well as with their changes over time. Further, empirical research has demonstrated that individuals are more sensitive than external observers to situational determinants of their behaviour and are less likely to over attribute the outcomes of their actions to dispositional factors (Jones and Nisbett, 1971).

Another benefit to using self-assessment is that people are continually observing others and comparing themselves with others, as social comparison theories (e.g. Festinger, 1954) have argued. Levine, a psychologist researching self-efficacy summarised the advantages of actors assessing themselves, saying: "we all have a good deal of time to verify, logically

and rationally, our feelings about ourselves and our performance, because we have lived with ourselves since we can remember" (1980, p. 261).

Also as a director and researcher, it is useful to be given feedback from the performers. As we work through the process there is the possibility of barriers arising such as injury, difficulty and individual difference (individuals excelling/struggling in different areas). By responding to this and informing the director the process can be adjusted to overcome these barriers and best suit the performer.

Self-awareness allows an actor to be conversational also, as the creative process takes place a relationship between the actors - director forms. This relationship is complex, and shall be explored later in the thesis, however when commenting on actor - director relationship, Taylor comments: "the process is a collaborative one with both sides expecting the other to give suggestions." (Taylor, 1994, n.p). Therefore, the comments taken from the actors could give the actors an avenue to express feedback about the process, their development and me.

## Chapter 1.1.

### **Towards Defining “physical theatre” and an exploration of where *Brick Wall* sits within this definition**

Physical theatre as a phrase is problematic as it: “is fraught with its own terminological problems, partly because as a single form it is borne out of a paradoxical mix of imprecision and pigeonholing.” (Pitches, 2007: 48). As Jonathan Pitches (researcher and professor of theatre and performance) comments the phrase has become a “pigeonhole” for critics, artists and audiences alike. Its popularity amongst audiences perhaps encouraging artists to use the phrase as a marketing ploy (Chamberlain, 2007). Pitches goes on to comment “its ambivalence resists that key aspect of a tradition which allows for a reference point to be drawn between practices” (Pitches, 2007, p.48).

Dymphna Callery, drama and theatre practitioner, claims that “practitioners resent the way their work is categorized as ‘physical theatre’ when they are maintaining that they are simply making ‘theatre’” (2001, p.6). On the contrary, when *Brick Wall* first began making theatre we held a shared intention that we would specifically explore “physical theatre”<sup>4</sup>. Although our naivety and perhaps immaturity meant a reductionist understanding of what “physical theatre” was. McDermott says of his own work that “we had not set out to create any particular kind of theatre except what we yearned to see.” (McDermott, 2007, p.201). In part this is true of *Brick Wall*, although ironically all the work we saw and wanted to see were companies that were marketed as “physical theatre”. Companies like *Frantic Assembly*, *Gecko Theatre*, *Kneehigh*, *Gravity and Other Myths*, *PUSH Physical Theatre* and *Complicité*<sup>5</sup>. Franc Chamberlain, author and professor of drama, comments on *Complicité*’s use of the phrase as a marketing tool:

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<sup>4</sup> The following extract taken from a Facebook event page I created to invite people to join what became *Brick Wall*: “Hi guys, You’re probably gonna think im bonkers and i probably am but I am wanting to get a couple of us together with regularly weekly rehearsals to experiment with physical theatre work and other parts of theatre we are interested in.”

<sup>5</sup> <http://geckotheatre.com>, <http://www.kneehigh.co.uk>, <http://gravityandothermyths.com.au>, <http://www.complicite.org>, <http://www.pushtheatre.org>

Complicité are defined as a physical theatre company irrespective of what they do or who's in the company. This seems to me to reduce the term physical theatre to a marketing label which, in the end, says nothing about style, approach, or training. (2007, p153)

Despite that Chamberlain implies repetitive use of the phrase reduces the connotations and connections it has with 'style, approach and training', certainly for me, there was something about the presence and use of the body in "physical theatre" that I had never seen before. I was drawn to the acrobatics; the physical virtuosity of the catches, the lifts, flips, jumping, running, rolling and the way these devices compelled narrative forward.

As we first began creating work, it was the aesthetical qualities of these companies that inspired us and thus fed into our devising. Consequently we worked towards creating what we thought "physical theatre" was. This meant that our work involved the following; movement as a primary narrative element, impressive physical feats (lifts, balances etc), choral imagery and choreography not concerned with technique nor precision (unlike dance I had seen such as *Phoenix Dance Theatre*<sup>6</sup>). Sian Dudley, a journalist who reviewed our first show, commented on our style saying:

Although the ensemble are not dancers in the traditional sense there are clearly some contemporary influences and the more expressive parts of the show employ motifs of reaching, contractions, lifts and counter balances (Dudley, 2013)

Our understanding of what "physical theatre" was, was concerned with a small selection of, what could be considered, mainstream companies. It was school curriculums or trips that brought my attention to these companies forming my understanding of "physical theatre". The work of these companies connected with my peers and myself because the physicality was captivating and the themes of the shows were often ones we could connect with. Mark Evans, professor of theatre at Coventry University, comments "their appeal to a young audience seeking accessible physical performance that speaks in ways and on subjects they relate to" (Evans, 1999, p.1). Hence I sought to see more "physical theatre".

It was only after being introduced to Lecoq, Grotowski and Berkoff (in second year of university) that I began to understand the "breadth of work covered" (Chamberlain, 2007, p.120) by the phrase is much wider than the selected few companies I knew of. The "field is characterised by a diversity of approaches and differences in emphasis" (Murray and Keefe, 2007, p.5) thus rendering the phrase problematic for critical discourse without further clarification. As Murray and Keefe comment "The physical or dance theatre of Pina Bausch looks very different from work anchored in the French mime tradition" (2007, p.4) yet we

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.phoenixdancetheatre.co.uk>

might consider both as “physical theatre”. It cannot be easily defined “but, of course, we all know that there’s something which we recognise as ‘physical theatre’” (Chamberlain, 2007, p.152).

Chamberlain in ‘Gesturing towards Post-Physical Performance’ (2007), discussing the lineage of the phrase “physical theatre”, agrees with Pitches that the phrase is complex. In the article Chamberlain offers three “lines” of physical theatre; work, models and systems that stem from different practitioners but at some point have been considered as “physical theatre”. (Chamberlain, 2007). The first for Chamberlain: “a mime lineage stemming from Copeau through to Decroux and Lecoq (and including Dario Fo)”. The second being: “a dance background where physical theatre ‘meant’ DV8.” Chamberlain offers a third, although comments “it had been obscured during the 1980’s”: the work of “Meyerhold, Artaud, and Grotowski”. A fourth line later being added by Gareth Somers covering the work of *Frantic Assembly* and *Volcano*.

To better clarify the phrase and contextualise the work of *Brick Wall*, the four lines of “physical theatre” shall be considered. An attempt shall be made to identify the principles and practices that are common across all four lines, if such things exist. And if not the differences shall be outlined giving a better understanding to the “style and approach” of “physical theatre”. These principles and practices underpin relevant training methods that shall be discussed in the next chapter. In drawing across the four lines and identifying common principles and practices I am not attempting to define or isolate “physical theatre” as a separate entity. Instead I am accepting that “the principles of theatre flow to and from one practitioner or style to another; thus encouraging the virtues of a clash of contrapuntal voices as these appear reappear in different places and guises”. (Murray and Keefe, 2007, p.5)

## **1.2. The principles that emerge across “physical theatres”**

Taken from the first of Chamberlains ‘lines’, there are a number of Lecoq’s ideas that have become principles of “physical theatre” that were found or adopted by Lecoq (which of the two will not be the concern here).

Lecoq had an “overriding curiosity with the body and how it moved” (Murray, 2003, p2) and thus his practices and teachings were concerned with exactly that. The resonance of his work being felt in practitioners like Berkoff, who I and other company members had studied at a younger age, and *Théâtre de Complicité*, who some of us had seen the work of. Also, as Murray offers: “His influence on a wider debate about actor training and the meaning of movement and physical expression within theatre has been substantial” (Murray, 2003, p.4), therefore is useful to consider to further explore and understand his ideas.

A stance that is adopted in Lecoq’s pedagogy is that his teaching is about “encouraging students to take risks, inviting them to fail and thus make discoveries” (Murray, 2003,

p.52). This is central to one of Lecoq's philosophies, *Le jouer*, meaning to play. Lecoq was conscious of the actor being in a position of creation, thus wanting to evolve an actor's ability to play, take risks and expand the way they interpret information. Callery comments that this is a "significant parallel" that emerges across the "field" of "physical theatre"; "the emphasis is on the actor-as-creator rather than the actor-as-interpreter" (Callery, 2001, p.19). Murray and Keefe comment

The training practices of all these innovative pedagogues<sup>7</sup> – but with varying degrees of emphasis – place the actor in a position of compositional creativity, rather than merely as the conduit for either the writer's script or the director's interpretation. All regard the actor as part of the shared authorial process of making the work in question. Strategies towards this ambition vary enormously, and none of these figures relinquish all directorial authority to their actors. Nonetheless, all certainly articulate a rhetoric which gives actors permission to share in the generation of the performance text rather than simply being its 'technical' executants. (2007, p.137).

If the actor-as-creator is considered a defining element of "physical theatre" Chamberlain comments that "DV8 [...] would fit neatly into the definition neatly enough" (2007, p.153). Callery comments that Newson "unlike many choreographers [...] encouraged his dancers to create rather than simply interpret" (2001, p.21). The premise that dance, prior to *DV8*, gave to skill and technique rarely saw the dancer creating choreography, rather this was done by an external figure. Callery comments however with *DV8* the "work was devised by the company through shared research and praxis." (2001, p.21). Murray and Keefe comment:

Throughout his working practice Newson harnesses the physical vocabularies and technical skills enjoyed by his dancers, but uses them in a process more typical of devised theatre making than contemporary dance. (2007, p.83)

Similarly, Pitches comments that Meyerhold disliked the concept of actors "merely illustrating the playwright's words." (Pitches, 2003, p.48) which was typical of Naturalism and "denied the spectator their most significant right in theatre – to *imagine*" (2003, p.49) thus Meyerhold also held playfulness as a key principle of his practice; "too little [playfulness] and the spark of creativity which is necessary for any kind of work in theatre can never catch light." (Pitches, 2003, p.116).

Both shows by *Brick Wall* were created and performed by the students involved, neither show was a predetermined concept in a director's mind; nothing was conceived and then brought into session. Rather the work was created within the sessions through tasks, improvisation, discussion and goofing around (*playing*). Therefore we were actor and creator, as well as producer/director and any other job that needed doing. Chamberlain says

When we put the idea of creativity together with the idea of movement as the basis of theatre then I think that we can begin to recognise something of what we used to mean, at least, by 'physical theatre'. (Chamberlain, 2007, p.152).

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<sup>7</sup> Referring to Lev Dodin, Eugenio Barba, Anne Bogart, Jacques Lecoq, Monika Pagneux, Philippe Gaulier, Joan Littlewood and Etienne Decroux.

This becomes problematic if it is then argued that “physical theatre” is only so if it is created by the performers. One reason being (as Chamberlain comments later in the same text), as audience members, how would we know? “If I’m watching a show created without a pre-existent (theatrical) text, how will I know whether movement/gesture has been the starting point?” (2007, p.153). Another problem that arises is whether we can consider dance as “physical theatre” because dancers “are not always trained to be creative artist in Craig’s sense, but interpreters.” (Chamberlain, 2007, p.153). And so

If it doesn’t exclude them then it seems to me that we fall back into some naïve positions which argues that dance is ‘physical-based’ whereas drama is ‘text-based’ and thus all ‘physically based’ theatre becomes dance. (Chamberlain, 2007, p.153).

Rather than excluding work from being “physical theatre” because it does not adopt the same principles as other works, there is acceptance that the phrase has shortcomings, hence the need for a new one or better clarification of the existing phrase (Chamberlain, 2007). This problem being a “reflection of the always messy, hybrid nature of theatres” (Murray and Keefe, 2007, p.5)

*Play* for Lecoq was one of “three linked states or dispositions which he regards as crucial both for the creative individual actor, and for the realisation of a sense of genuine ensemble” (Keefe and Murray, 2007, p.146). The concept of ensemble is another principle that emerges across “physical theatre”. If the actors are also the creators and “the working process is collaborative” (Callery, 2001, p.19) then certain qualities present in the individual and the collective strengthen this creation and collaboration. Murray and Keefe comment:

All these figures<sup>8</sup> regard their various approaches to training as a means towards forging a common spirit between every member of the group or company. For Lecoq this is complicité. [...]Ensemble is both the subject and object of the making process. (2007, p.137)

As Murray and Keefe comment, embed in the processes of each of the practitioners referenced is the “forging” and strengthening of ensemble, although again the practices and strategies of each vary. Similarly this occurs across the other three lines although the use of the term is not a given, in *Frantic Assembly’s ‘Book of Devising’*, there are recurring references to equipping the actor with tools for creation and improving group cohesion and communication yet only two instances where the word “ensemble” is used and neither are explicit references to the concept. However, implicitly in their exercises about creating trust (Graham and Hoggett, 2012, p.94) there are also target outcomes that are the key fundamentals and inner workings of the ensemble. Non-verbal/physical communication for instance is a targeted outcome of *Push Hands* “it helps participants get used to the non-verbal and essentially physical communication between performers.” (Graham and Hoggett, 2012, p.105) and “If all performers in an ensemble pay detailed attention to the communication between them, they create the possibility of crafting a genuinely shared performance.” (Britton, 2013, p.237).

Ensemble and collaborative creative processes have both been principles that *Brick Wall* have always been adopting, again there is an irony with us even calling ourselves “Brick

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<sup>8</sup> Referring to Lev Dodin, Eugenio Barba, Anne Bogart, Jacques Lecoq, Monika Pagneux, Philippe Gaulier, Joan Littlewood and Etienne Decroux.

Wall Ensemble". Our first introduction to ensemble was working with John Britton, author of *Encountering Ensemble*, and his company *Duende Ensemble*<sup>9</sup>. This was during our first year of university and the two weeks with *Duende* was the springboard for the formation of our own ensemble two months later. To us, ensemble has always been centered around principles we learnt from DUENDE and principles taken from Lecoq, whom some of studied in our second year. For Britton, like "physical theatre", "ensemble" is a nebulous term, he comments:

This lack of definition – the sense that I could taste the 'desirable quality' of a moment but could neither describe nor capture it – led me to start using the word 'it' to describe my sense of ensemble-ness. While training an ensemble I would ask performers to sense when 'it' was in the room. Sometimes, in the middle of a scene or an improvisation, 'it' would leave. Sometimes the performers (once they had finished) would tell me that they had felt highly connected when I, their audience, had felt no such connectedness. They may have felt 'it', I didn't. At other times, I would sense deep and instinctive interconnections between the performers but they, after the event, would describe themselves as having felt a little lost. Then there were times when we all felt 'it', all knew 'it'. (Britton, 2013, p.13)

At times, similarly I felt *Brick Wall* had found 'it', certain rehearsals we would have a "sense of deep connection between the members that enables them to think and act at the same time" (Bonczek & Storck, 2013, p.7). All of us were responsive and open and we seemed to bounce off one another with ideas and creativity. In part I think this was due to being *playful*, due to our passion for body percussion, which embed collective rhythms within us, and our friendships/shared goals enhancing our sense of *disponibilité*. All three of which were working practices of achieving 'ensemble' for Lecoq (Murray, 2003, p.70 – 71) or Meyerhold (Pitches, 2003). Also the qualities of ensemble were strengthened by exercises we took from *Duende* and Lecoq. We also forged a strong relationship outside of the rehearsal space, the primary reason I invited the original members to the event was because they were friends. Our 2 years enhanced this friendship bringing with it a sense of trust and camaraderie which enhanced our ability to play and be *disponible*.

Another principle emerging across "physical theatre" is that "spoken word is regarded as just one element of the performance idiom"(Callery, 2001, p.24) and that it is "the physical and visual signs of stance, gesture, angle, movement, juxtaposition and scenography that work *with* the word within the overall *mise-en-scène*" (Murray and Keefe, 2007, p.159). To an extent, as Keefe and Murray articulate, this is true of all theatre, "when was the last time you went on stage without your body?" (McDermott, 2007, p.207) thus "all theatre is physical" (Murray and Keefe, 2007, p.159).

However the use of the text in "physical theatre" challenges stereotypical integrations of the text seen in realism and the realistic, artistic director of *Improbable*, Phelim McDermott comments:

If we look at the emphasis on 'physical theatre' during the 1980s and 1990s in context, we can see that it was a reaction to a perceived over-intellectualised

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<sup>9</sup> <https://ensemblephysicaltheatre.wordpress.com/duende/>

approach to performing and the historical emphasis on text as the primary source of creating theatre. (2007, p.203)

Murray and Keefe comment:

With the rise and continuing dominance of realism-naturalism, these have become equated with what is the norm for theatre (and film and television); a hierarchy of signifying systems with verbal, psychological, physical and emotional truth at the top of this pyramid. (2007, p.165).

Murray remarks that Lecoq was a "central figure" on this "loose movement" that began to give premise to the body over the text: "it is the body and its movement through and in space that is the crucial generator of meaning and significance in contemporary theatre" (Murray, 2003, p.34). Lecoq therefore had a "commitment to a dynamic visual theatre where movement and physicality are the primary motors of dramatic expression" (Murray, 2003, p.32).

By rejecting the text as the primary narrative tool environments and worlds are created onstage by actors and design elements provoke the imaginations of the spectators, rather than furnishing the stage with literal replications of life. (Callery, 2001, p18) Thus physicality brings a visual element and can create a response that text cannot, McDermott says

What is it that physical theatre can give us which simple text work can't? Remember it as a means to a freedom of the imagination. Use the physical in the creation of worlds of the imagination and mythological realms. (2007, p.207)

This principle was uncharted territory for myself and *Brick Wall* and led to a conscious choice to exclude text altogether in our first show. A lack of a script or spoken word in *A Rose by Another Name* meant that it solely relied on imagery as its propellant to guide the audience through the narrative. *The Remarkable Case of You* (our second show) was scripted, although the text only served the purpose of framing and introducing the physicality.

Although it might be pretentious to call *Brick Wall's* work "dynamic visual theatre", the visuals have certainly been an internal focus. One example for instance being the regular use of physical images created by manipulation of the body and its limbs: a balcony, wedding dress and a coffin were created in *A Rose by Another Name* and a dinosaur, an armchair and a video camera in *The Remarkable Case of You*).

Chamberlain's lines of physical theatre, and Somers' 4<sup>th</sup> line later added, give us some way of distinguishing and tracing the lineage of such a broad spectrum of work. By identifying key principles that emerge across the four lines, and identifying examples, we can go some way to identifying what "physical theatre" is, however none of these can be taken as certain to appear across works of "physical theatre" and even when they do, they often take different forms. By locating and discussing *Brick Wall's* use of the principles, I have intended to give the reader a better understanding of *Brick Wall's* situ within "physical theatre". These are the basic principles that underpin actor-training processes and other principles within physical theatre.

## Chapter 2.1

### The Fourth Line and its aesthetic

In Gareth Somers' article *Volcano: A Post-Punk Physical Theatre* (2014, p.41 – 60) he outlines a selection of British companies, forming in the 1980's and 1990's, whose working practices and aesthetic styles were established outside of Chamberlain's 'three lines'; often 'director-less' companies adopting a "do it-yourself spirit" for devising theatre, "which was informed by a variety of external forces and was defined by the skills and limits of performers' bodies, aspirations and ideas." (Somers, 2014, p.44). These companies have become "orthodox components of British theatre culture." (2014, p.43)

This chapter of the thesis shall consider the aesthetic identities of two of these companies, *Volcano* and *Frantic Assembly*, and outline the extent to which their 'DIY' approach (that used fitness training and sporting dispositions) shaped their aesthetic. In doing so I am attempting to give some insight into the inspiration for much of *Brick Wall's* work. Also some consideration shall be given to the implications of using fitness training and sporting predispositions in their working practices.

As Somers comments, the work of *Volcano* and *Frantic Assembly* didn't follow nor show appreciation to any one 'line' of physical theatre training:

Volcano's approach had developed outside of British actor training academies and, for some, their untrained voices then seemed an important part of an anti-'legitimate' theatre aesthetic providing a challenge to conventions of speech and correct diction. (2014, p.53)

In Somers' interview with, founding member of *Volcano*, Steve Fisher, Fisher is asked if their aesthetic is part of "Meyerholdian training or Lecoq style sport-influenced approach?" (2014, p.54), to which he responds

No. Despite what some academics claim about the lineage of British Physical Theatre we hadn't heard of these people in the early days, or at least, we didn't sit in the rehearsal room thinking 'what would Meyerhold have done?'.(2014, p.54)

Rather there was a 'punk' ideology that dissociated the connection between training processes and performance. For *Volcano* training or education wasn't necessary to create theatre: "one of the precepts of punk was that training wasn't directly related to output (three chords and off you go)." (Fisher, 2014, p.52). *Volcano's* training and working practices were instead informed by military-fitness training and sporting predispositions, which "contributed to an emergent aesthetic" (Somers, 2014, p.45). Fishers comments:

I'm not sure we were conscious of a physical theatrical training. We were not like dance people who were trained. The three of us had the fitness of youth. Paul was a black belt in karate, I did karate too and we spent a lot of time in the gym." (2014: 53)

The introduction of these practices into their creation of theatre was an attempt to fuse the energy and excitement that Davies, Smith<sup>10</sup> and Fisher saw in sport, that they didn't see in theatre. Davies comments,

I lived in Swansea and did Karate. Never been to a theatre in my life actually. Didn't do A-Levels, went to University and had high hopes of going to a theatre, thought it might be interesting, it was really boring. So I thought, why isn't this as exciting as doing a sport. (1999, p.4)

Both companies reject the technical precision and control of dancing or acting; instead principles of energy, embodiment, strength and speed are key aesthetic traits underpinned by the use of fitness training, and for *Volcano*, Karate. As Evans comments these qualities are visually materialised in "the physical nature of their work, the leaps, catches and falls" (1999, p.3). He goes on to comment

Within such training the personal is valued and sustained and aesthetic considerations take second place to energy and meaning. There does not appear to be any attempt to be or become 'expert' within the limitations of a dance or theatre aesthetic; that is to say to be more graceful, more technically precise or more 'careful'. The body is empowered through direct physical engagement with other bodies and with its own energy. (1999, p.3)

Again we are reminded of the impact of the cultural, social and historical context on practitioners. For *Frantic* and *Volcano*, their early development was during a time when sport was "entering into a new dynamic both physically and culturally where increasingly achievement is losing its fascination and being replaced by an emphasis on the bodily experience of sport." (Evans, 1999, p.4). Thus sport and fitness training was a vehicle of exploration that opened up performance elements "of risk, of danger, of pleasure and of uncertainty" (Evans, 1999, p.5).

As Evans goes onto comment, whilst we might consider other forms of actor training as 'using' the body as a 'tool' or an 'instrument' or a 'means of expression', for this selection of companies the use of fitness training and sport utilises the body as a "battleground for the impulses for that expression" (1999, p.4). They can therefore explore the elements of risk, danger and pleasure through qualities ascertained in the sport and fitness training (strength, speed, balance and coordination) leading to a heightened physicality; containing lifts, jumps, catches, balances, falls, throws. Fisher comments

there is something about the balance of direct aggressive control in karate: it lends a certain stance and physical presence. It even affected the way we walked downstage to the audience. We were attracted to it for those qualities; we stood in rows pumping our legs and arms. We weren't skilled in any creative physicality – our training was exercise and karate. Beyond stamina and strength there was no real attempt at that time at developing a 'system'.

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Davies and Fern Smith are also founding members of *Volcano*

As Fisher then adds, for both companies, “the physical aesthetic was to do with jumping, lifting, throwing, catching and running.” (Fisher, 2014, p.54).

Therefore the devising process and working practices rely centrally on fitness strategies, which can prepare the body for these types of theatrical devices. Fisher says of the working process:

We spent hours in a room with gym mats on the floor practicing jumps – we just wrestled and tried stuff. We looked for intuitive ways of moving the body particularly in lifts. We often hurt ourselves. I remember dropping Fern as we tried an ambitious jump and catch in Greek once in the students’ union poly at Elephant and Castle: I leapt and cracked my head on the air-conditioning, I was virtually concussed and we carried on. I crept off to the back stage area, checked myself out and tiptoed back on. The tension of the potential for disaster or danger was always there. (2014, p.56).

As Fisher alludes to, the aesthetic of the companies is born from qualities that they already possessed or could develop in their ‘DIY’ approach. As an example, Hoggett comments, “We deal in speed perhaps because our lack of technical skill and expertise would make us look slightly ridiculous trying to embody a sense of poise and grace.” (Hoggett, 1999, p.3). We see this evident in their exercises; in a workshop with *Frantic Assembly*, I took part in their *Relays*<sup>11</sup> (2009, p.118) exercise, which involved lots of high intensity running. Whilst they introduce the exercise as a tool to ‘break-the-ice’ in nervous groups, there’s no escaping that the primary principle of the exercise is running. It is a simple exercise that prepares the performer in agility, speed and explosiveness, hence why these qualities feed into the choreography.

Another example, focusing on lifts particularly (a common trait of both companies); fitness training conditions the bodies of the performers to have the appropriate attributes to perform the lifts. Fisher comments that they heavily relied on push-ups and sit-ups (2014) to equip the performer with upper body strength and core strength, integral to holding your own and others’ weight. Similarly, Scott Graham, artistic director of *Frantic Assembly*, comments that

Invariably, what we end up with is a company of fitter, stronger performers pumping out press-ups like athletes. You might ask, ‘what has this got to do with making theatre?’ The answer is not much unless that show requires you to move in any way, catch, hold, lift embrace, etc. (2014, p.94)

As Graham comments, for their aesthetic identity there is a link to strength, which is therefore a focus in their working practices.

For *Frantic* the attributes of fitness are often integrated into their warm-ups, which for them are multipurpose: “it makes the creation of physical work possible, it makes for great

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<sup>11</sup> Ignition Workshop – October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013, West Yorkshire Playhouse.

results, it ensures safety.” (Hoggett and Graham, 2014, p.91). The warm-up for *Frantic* is a tool for both short and long-term preparation; the immediate effect of a warm-up for them is

the muscles being flexible, the blood running sufficiently through the veins, the respiratory system being called into action, the skeletal form being in some form of alignment, the balancing systems being switched on. (Hoggett and Graham, 2014, p.92).

For the long-term it’s a process of preparation that equips their performers with the appropriate attributes (speed, agility, strength, balance, coordination) for their aesthetic, which relies on these attributes for its lifts, catches, balances etc.

Murray and Keefe comment that training “presupposes or directs the object-subject of the training regime towards certain kinds of theatre practices or forms rather than others.” (2007, p.118), thus highlighting the connectedness between training and aesthetics. For companies like *Frantic* and *Volcano* then the use of sport and fitness as training tools directly link with their aesthetic. Somers comments

The aesthetic identities of these companies were shaped by their members’ physical propensities, and augmented by serendipity and by a theatrical vocabulary that was partly assimilated from a variety of external sources. (2014, p.43)

To summarise, both companies were born out of a DIY approach to creating theatre. What this established, in both companies, was reliance upon sporting predispositions and fitness training as processes of preparation. As Somers comments, this paved the way for British Physical Theatre, as it led to a ‘charged’ aesthetic where the elements of risk, danger, physical virtuosity are presented through the lifts, catches, balances etc.

## Chapter 3.1.

### Actor Training Systems

Like the sheer breadth of “physical theatres”, the array of actor training opportunities is equally broad and diverse. Therefore similar tensions arise when trying to classify, compare and comprehend relative actor training avenues. Murray and Keefe comment:

Explicitly, unconsciously or covertly, models of training are predicted upon complex – and disputed – webs of philosophical thought concerned, for example, with human behaviour, motivation, learning, corporeal construction, power and freedom. (2007, p.118)

Leading “us into contested and often ideological territory” (2007, p.118).

As Murray and Keefe comment, actor training is largely a “twentieth-century phenomenon” (2007, p.119) stemming from the professionalisation of theatre. The varying approaches and principles of actor training “enshrine, whether consciously or not, different models of the body’s construction and behaviour on the one hand, and diverse visions and aspirations for theatre practice on the other” (2007, p.158). This chapter of the thesis shall explore a case study to identify the relationship between its approach and desired body and vision for theatre.

Lorna Marshall, researcher and author of *The Body Speaks* and *Getting It Right*, offers a framework for understanding the components of actor training, intended to “give clarity about the training journey” (2007, p.160). For my purposes, it also offers a way to approach the development of a new training journey.

The framework separates training into three elements; these are outcomes, processes and applications. “Outcomes” are the aims of the system, Marshall puts it “what we desire training to achieve.” (2007, p.160). “Process” is the delivery of the training; “the exercises or technical systems that the student experiences in order to achieve some aspect of the desired outcome.” (2007, p.160). “Applications” are the “factors that promote or impede the work”. Outcomes and processes shall be explored here, as a framework to analyse an existing training journey and my own.

### 3.2 Outcomes

Marshall comments that the outcome is the end-goal of the training journey and recommends starting with the outcome when formulating training, so the creator clearly knows what they want to achieve. Similarly, as Hodges comments, a practitioner seeking to train actors should first identify the principles that they want to address, which will be relevant to the context of their work.

Ultimately, practitioners have eschewed the notion of a comprehensive system in favour of identifying first principles within their own particular context. These principles are made manifest through specific actor training techniques and amplify distinctive ethical positions.” (Hodges, 2010: xxv)

The development of a training-program then must start with identifying specific principles; this ensures affectivity within the process “does process X offer the best means of achieving outcome Y?” (Marshall, 2007, 160). Marshall goes on to comment:

If your desired outcome (on the level of physical skill) is slow, relaxed flow of movement, then Tai Chi is a good process. If your desired outcome (also on the level of physical skill) is sharp reactions and rapid changes in rhythm, then Tai Chi is no longer the most effective alternative, and you would need to look elsewhere. Defining your outcome clearly and precisely at every level of the training journey enables process exercises and techniques to find their appropriate context and role. (2007, p.160)

Here Marshall comments on the correlation between process and outcome, once a practitioner has identified their principles, an appropriate array of exercises and techniques can be selected. Both the principles and exercises that a practitioner selects are distinctive and relative to the aesthetic, social, historical and political context in which they are situated.

Meyerhold’s Biomechanics (here used as a case study) as Pitches comments, sought to equip the actors with skills that were for Meyerhold “fundamental to the craft of acting”, these were “precision, balance, coordination, efficiency, rhythm, expressiveness, responsiveness, playfulness and discipline” (Pitches, 2003, p.112). Thus these principles are the outcomes of Meyerhold’s *Biomechanics* training and therefore embedded in his exercises;

These skills are interdependent, they support one another and, although we can discuss them in isolation, separating them out in practice is far more difficult [...] they underpin the work in biomechanics. (Pitches, 2003, p.113).

The principles that Meyerhold’s teaching adopted were the result of the social, historical, political context in which his work was cultivated. As Murray and Keefe comment “Meyerhold’s relentlessly innovative pedagogies have to be understood and contextualised by his early experiences alongside Stanislavsky” (2007, p.120). Therefore the principles were created and informed by such things as his contention with ‘Stanislavsky’s Naturalism’. Pitches says

Meyerhold’s mode of expression was exaggerated, elongated and stylised. He wanted to build stage pictures which expressed the central idea of the scene without the need for words, and he wanted his actors to have the wherewithal to do this. (Pitches, 2003, p.115)

This was born out of Meyerhold’s desire to challenge the naturalistic style that he saw and performed in:

The spectator at a naturalistic piece was, as far as Meyerhold was concerned, passive. They were simply being spoon-fed the director's interpretation of the author's words through the agency of the actor. Meyerhold wanted something different. He wanted the spectator and the actor to have equal responsibility in creating the play, to be co-creators in the making of a drama. (Pitches, 2003, p.49).

Therefore the desired outcomes of a training program address the demands made upon the actors by the trainer, which are influenced by their situ in the social, historical and political context of their time. For *Brick Wall* then, the selection of desired outcomes are relative to the context of our work. This means identifying the style and approach we take to making work.

Firstly because the desired aesthetic of our work (see chapter \*\*) is inspired by Somers' fourth line of physical theatre, an attempt is made to enhance the actors' speed, agility, strength, balance, and coordination. These are qualities that correspond with *Frantic's* and *Volcano's* high-octane, visceral style of choreography; often containing physically virtuosic devices such as lifts, catches, balance, leaps and choral imagery. Also other attributes of the actor shall be addressed: proprioception and coordination (see chapter \*\*) (giving the actor better awareness and control of their bodies), postural alignment and the 'neutral' body (see chapter \*\*) and *disponibiité* and playfulness (see chapter \*\*).

### 3.3 Processes

To address the 'outcomes' a relative 'process' needs to be configured. The process of *Biomechanics*, for example, embeds Meyerhold's principles of acting as outcomes of exercises and etudes, each of these exercises emphasising different principles. As Pitches comments "depending on the intended outcomes of your work you may emphasise different aspects of the practice, choosing specific exercises." (Pitches, 2003, p.117). Therefore Pitches offers, in the selection of exercises he includes in *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, the principles that that exercise will address, for instance *Tap Steps* develops: "precision, balance, coordination, rhythm, discipline and responsiveness". (Pitches, 2003, p.122). By recommending the reader choose practices that are most relevant to them, there is an acceptance from Pitches that each actor's journey is different from the next. This again reinforces Marshall's notion of the relativity between selecting processes with outcomes insight.

Also the mode of delivery is considered in the creation of an actor training journey; Murray and Keefe offer that delivery of actor training in the twentieth century is "marked by at least four schematically different overlapping modes", listed as:

The director of professional theatre practitioner as teacher and trainer. [..]

The emergence of professional academies whose purpose is largely to train actors but also to prepare for other roles in the theatre-making process [..]

The highly significant role of the modern university [..]

The growth of the short workshop as a training opportunity[..] (2007, p.121)

A tension that arises throughout these modes, and when studying actor training, is the separation of training and making into two separate processes. As Murray and Keefe comment: "the issue of the separation of training from actual theatre making is a tension which recurs in many different guises" (2007, p.149):

if we also conceptualise training, less as the deliberate and systematic acquisition of new skills, and more as the slow, daily extension and modification of existing dispositions and abilities then it becomes inseparable from the generative experience of members of an ensemble working productively together over a long period of time. (2007, p.120).

Murray and Keefe's definition here encompasses 'fourth line' practices, which offer "an alternative practice which critiques existing discourses" (Evans, 1999, p.1) where the processes of making and training are elided.

This notion however is then problematic for separating 'outcomes' and 'processes' of a training journey. Returning back to the principles that were found common of physical theatre and *Brick Wall*, certain processes become inseparable from outcomes. For instance the actor-as-creator is both a process of creating the work and an outcome of the training. Throughout this process, which has elided training and making, the principles were considered as both parts of the process and as outcomes. So the implications of fitness training on these principles<sup>12</sup> are considered in this instance.

For my research, the process will make use of fitness training as the primary tool for training the actors. As shall be explored throughout the thesis, fitness training is not exclusive from current physical theatre training practices, but is implicitly embedded, whereas in this process the intention is to make explicit use of fitness exercises and techniques. As Marshall comments<sup>13</sup>, it is not wise to choose the process before outlining the outcomes but for the sake of research, here process was established before the desired outcomes.

Sports journalist Suzanne Allen defines fitness as:

Physical fitness is defined as a set of characteristics enhancing performance of physical activity and decreasing your risk of premature health concerns. Your fitness level is the product of a combination of healthy behaviors, such as exercising and eating a balanced diet. (2015, Np.)

She goes onto list the attributes of fitness as "body composition, flexibility, cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and muscular endurance." (2015, np). 'Fitness training' covers the broad spectrum of activities that enhance these attributes, although different trainings enhance each attribute at varying rates. For instance training for long distance and short distance runners is very different because of the nature of each sport:

Distance runners are often viewed as representing efficiency in a way that is rarely seen in sports [...] lungs, muscles, and a heart that are incredibly adapted to handle long periods of stress. Sprinting focuses on power, explosiveness, and maximum

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<sup>12</sup> These principles were established as: actor-as-creator, a collaborative/ensemble making process and movement and gesture as central narrative tools.

<sup>13</sup> "When designing a training journey (for yourself or your students) it is important to start your thinking with *outcome* not *process*" (2007, p.160)

speed. The body type of sprinters is also dramatically different from that of their sinewy distance counterparts. Sprinters exhibit a much larger muscle mass and are more capable of high speed and rapid acceleration. (Bushnell, 2004: 5).

The physical adaptations of the two different types of runners sees the attributes of fitness in a hierarchy that is optimal in relation to the demands of each type of running. To a varying extent all of the above attributes are commonplace in physical theatre, although the extent to which depends on the desired bodily disposition.

## **Chapter 4.1**

### **My Role as Director**

"Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century professional directors and actors have been centrally involved in the training and preparation of performers" (Murray and Keefe, 2007, p.121). As Murray and Keefe comment, my role as director also encompassed the training and preparation of my performers. Considering the fitness focus of the process, I drew upon skills and tactics often employed by sports coaches. Drawing from my experience, this chapter of the thesis shall look at the role of the director and the similarities between the process of a sports coach and the director, and the extent to which the prior can inform the latter.

Director Declan Donellan says of his relationship to actors "I make it very clear that I'm not in the position of a teacher towards an actor but I am maybe in the position of a coach towards an athlete. (2004, 216)". Hastrup draws from this:

The position of the coach is one of authority, as we know. The coach knows the coordinates of the possible and how to enhance the chances of getting good results. The athlete need not know in the same way, but should follow the advice given and do his or her own best. (Hastrup, 2004, 216)

Donellan and Hastrup draw similarities between coaching and directing because both are concerned with the progression of 'players'; both are seeking to maximise performance output of their player. Like Donellan suggests, I, as the coach, looked at the actors' entry level of fitness and sought to enhance it.

A clear difference though between teaching and coaching is established for Donellan (his reasoning also having resonance for our process) as he opposes:

The idea that we're predigested experts. I don't feel in any way like that. When I go into a play I can feel I have confidence, because something has happened before, which is rather different from having technique to rely upon. (2004, 216).

As Donellan suggests, there is a required sense of humbleness for both the coach and director. The actor must know that a director is responding to what is being presented to them and then offering respective guidance. Neither has an ultimate solution that is guaranteed to succeed, rather they have the position of 'outside eye', observing and making suggestions to improve. Graham comments that this makes the relationship conversational:

It is amazing to see them take you to places that you have not thought possible. And that takes time. At the moment I have to be satisfied that we, as directors, may be taking them to places they had not thought possible (Graham, 2006, day 3).

The relationship between director/actor and coach/athlete is therefore developmental for both, Graham's comment supporting this notion. The actor presents something that the director then progresses, similarly the athlete demonstrates and the coach looks for ways of progressing. Certainly for being particularly present in our process, my lack of experience directing being addressed by the responsibility of guiding the performers towards progress; me responding to their needs and vice-versa.

Katie Mitchell, professional director and author of *The Director's Craft*, also comments the director should be able to: "pinpoint accurately where the strengths and weaknesses lie in the directing or acting – thereby improving your own skills." (2008 ,131). As Mitchell comments here, the progression of the piece is not solely dependent upon the progression of acting but also direction, supporting Donellan's clear distinction between being a figure of coaching and not teaching.

## **4.2 Selection of Performers and the initial assessment**

The starting point for both coach and director involves an initial assessment of the performers, this is a tool to select performers with specific qualities or, if the director/coach isn't given the power of choice of performers, a way to assess the starting ability of the prescribed performer. Mitchell comments that "Casting is about choosing the right actors for the play and the right actors for your rehearsal process" (2008, p.99).

Like Mitchell comments the initial assessment allows a director/coach to understand whether the performer is suited to the the style of working. Both director and coach perform initial assessments so the specific needs of the performer can be ascertained thus informing their programme. For a sports coach:

This usually takes place out in the sporting field and can consist of a number of hours of simple observation and getting to know each other with an aim to establish a good rapport and trust. (James, 2015, n.p).

The initial assessment has a number of uses in both theatre and sport, for sport:

The reasons for administering fitness tests may be to determine a baseline measure so that fitness can be monitored throughout the season; to help performers set fitness goals for the season; to allow assessment of a training programme; to identify areas of perceived need in a performer's fitness; and to investigate the fitness requirements of a particular position in a team game (Robinson, 2010, p.121)

For theatre, particularly our process, the assessment would provide a measurable baseline, improvement is expected but a baseline gives a point that can be reflected on. For theatre it can also outline any barriers the performer faces, also can give an insight into their style of working and outline their ability to work/respond to others (Mitchell, 2009).

For theatre the initial assessment takes place both in the audition process (where the Director and his/her team will assess actors to see if their abilities match their desired qualities) and in the first session(s). An example of this can be seen in Scott Graham's rehearsal diary written during his time directing *Pool (No Water)*. With this diary he attempted to "touch on the discoveries and details of the process" whilst wanting to give "an immediate and honest appraisal of each day" (2006, day 1). The diary gives an insight into the rehearsal process and the methods in which Graham and, fellow director, Hoggett worked.

Day 1 of the diary sees Graham introduce the way they will be working physically: not only to give the actors a "taste" of *Frantic's* approach but also to give himself and Hoggett an idea of the starting point of the actors (the initial assessment). He comments:

We decided to give the actors a taste of the warm-ups we will be putting them through. Possibly not the wisest thing after waddling back from lunch but it had to be done and if it proved anything, it showed that physically we have a long way to go and that the physical development of the actors must not be overlooked in the early stages. We cannot afford to spend too much time on the text, despite the presence of Mark in the first few weeks, if the performers are not being given the time to build strength, stamina and technique. (Graham, 2006, day 1)

Despite that Graham doesn't offer his reasoning, suggesting that they have a long way to go implies he has assessed the actors' ability, offering attributes such as "strength, stamina and technique". Completing this observation at the start of the process can inform the structuring of the rehearsal process; if Graham has identified particular areas that need to be improved, he can then plan for this.

In this particular process there was no audition process as the actors were part of the company and therefore cast internally, because of this personal and well-established director/actor relationship I entered the process with a good understanding of the actors abilities, for instance I knew that Sean had a limited range of motion because of his suppleness. Not only though does the initial assessment identify the areas of improvement, it also provides a point of reflection: "The tests can be used as a feedback tool on a performer's fitness progress" (Robinson, 2010, p.121).

### **4.3. The initial assessment within our process**

The initial assessment for our process encompassed several tests so the baseline provided a wide variety of data that could provide points of analysis at the end of the process. Doing so may prove unexpected benefits to the process that arose. Having worked with the actors for over two years, there were elements that weren't tested based on the presumptive knowledge I had of the actors.

Firstly the actors were given a set of questions and asked to write responses (a subjective internal analysis). The questions that were given to the actors were taken from the NHS' self-assessment fitness surgery. Because of the public profile of the NHS, the supporting research is reviewed regularly (the latest being July 2015). Also the wording of the questions will be specifically written for accessibility, any jargon is defined so the reader (regardless of their knowledge of fitness) can easily access the questions thus useful for my actors whom have only basic knowledge of fitness.

Also, as Levine (Levine, 1980) discusses there are certain benefits to using self-assessment because of its internal, subjective nature therefore providing responses that I could not examine objectively. The questions were worded as so:

"The Department of Health recommends adults are moderately active for 150 minutes or vigorously active for 75 minutes each week. In an average week how close are you to achieving this? If you do achieve this can you comment on the types of activities that you engage in? If not could you list the barriers that prevent you doing so?"

The responses were as follows:

Sean: "I play football every Friday with some friends from work, we play for 90 minutes and usually have a warm up. I don't get there every Friday but generally I get to most. I don't do anything else really, although I do the deliveries at work which is generally an hour of lifting box's up and down the stairs." (19.11.2014)

Luke: "No I probably don't do that much other than walking to around town and that. It (being fit and that) just don't interest me I suppose. I think every time we do a show I get a lot fitter but other than that I don't really have a need to be". (19.11.2014)

Adam: "I think I do just hit that weekly. I do biomechanics (Meyerhold's biomechanics) training with Proper Job weekly, that's 3 hours and very physically demanding, load of push-ups and upper body work but sometimes I can't go because of work. I do have a road bike that I sometimes take out but not that often, definitely not weekly, I sometimes go to the gym too to do weight training but I probably don't get there weekly either." (19.11.2014)

Natasha: "No not lately I've definitely not been achieving that. Just been far too busy with work and life. I used to do zumba classes and go to the gym a few times a week but it's dropped off lately." (19.11.2014)

The NHS assessment tool suggests the amount as a precaution of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, although for this process it gave a useful insight into the actors' prior activity. This information would inform the programme, as it suggested at what pace we could enter the rehearsals.

Similarly, a director may need to identify particular attributes a performer possesses so that exercises or extra rehearsal time can be factored into the process. This is relative to the performance, for instance characters may have accents that the actors need to replicate, or a fight that requires stage combat skills.

As well as this self-assessment, there were also some initial workshops with the actors that would give them a taste of the process and also allow me to make observations about their current ability.

#### **4.4. Planning and inclusive scaling**

Once an initial assessment has been completed and the areas for improvement have been identified, session plans can be developed. The UK National Sports Coaching foundation lists this as an essential skill of a coach: "plan and organise sessions and programmes to meet performers' needs and guide their development". A session plan can specifically address the areas the coach has notified as needing development, Robinson comments: "A session plan is an organized scheme of work that allows the coach to deliver, monitor and assess specific aims and objectives of practice." (Robinson, 2010, p.99).

The foundation lists two types of plans, micro (session plan) and macro (season plan). Individual sessions are planned to fit the overarching long-term targets of the performer so that each session contributes to their development. This allows a coach to respond to the areas of improvement that may arise during the process whilst keeping the end-goal insight. Similarly a director considers the Macro plan, which for them is the performance they are working towards. Each Micro session contributes towards the macro plan.

Throughout our process each micro session was planned to improve the actors' level of fitness, thus planning exercises and tasks that would achieve this. Whilst also being conscious of the show we were hoping to produce alongside the program. Each session would therefore contain training exercises and time to create and rehearse the show. Having both micro and macro plans allows flexibility within the program, if a session doesn't achieve what it needed to, the coach can respond and alter their future session plans to so they can still achieve targets for the season. Robinson comments that a plan:

should be flexible and have a contingency; it should identify and account for every performer's needs; enough practices within the session should be planned to fulfil the aims and objectives and account for performer needs. (2010, p.100)

One of the principles embedded in this definition is scaling; for both sport and theatre, performers will enter the process each with different areas for improvement. Scaling allows the exercises to be adjusted so that they are neither too hard (which may damage the performer's confidence) nor too easy (which will not challenge the performer). A director should consider this when planning their sessions. For many of our warm-ups, and generally, this could be changing the amount of repetitions of a movement or distance/weight depending on the exercise.

One particular example would be an exercise where the performers were asked to use the weight of another performer as resistance in various different motions. Not only were all performers at varying levels in strength, all were varying in weight also. Allowing the performers to choose which of the other performers they would use would allow them to scale the weight of resistance.

Scaling provides individuality in-group exercises whilst not neglecting the spirit/sense of team. This is important for both sports-teams and ensembles; requiring “negotiation and balance between the individual performers who form it, and the shared language and behaviours that emerges from their interactions. Individuality and collective orientation both benefit from attention.” (Britton, 2013,p.23)

## 4.5. The Coaches ability to self-evaluate

Another attribute that Robinson comments as being a fundamental of the coaching process is the ability to evaluate ones own performance. This has particular prevalence for myself, a relatively inexperienced director because it is only through evaluation that areas for improvement can be identified and then developed. Robinson comments: “Constructing the post-session or post-season evaluation, developing the ability to self-reflect, and reviewing and evaluating coaching performance are all parts of an ongoing and continually learnt process”. (Robinson, 2010, p.76), suggesting the progression of the coach is routed in his or her own ability to self-evaluate.

Similarly, Frank Hauser and Russell Reich in their *Notes on Directing* (Hauser a professional director having earned a CBE for his work, Reich also a professional director) offer that:

Some things must still be learned and understood not through words, but through experience. The work with others, the inevitable failures, the rich discoveries and unanticipated rewards that arise from persistence, experimentation, commitment and enthusiasm are still [...] for you as a director to develop and earn on your own. (Reich, 2008, p.xxv)

Like Reich suggests, my studying but also my experience have influenced my development as director. By following Robinson’s suggestion to analyse sessions, one is given an insight into the effectiveness of their guidance. Robinson suggests doing this several days after the session in an attempt to remove any emotional bias from the analysis; he also offers some useful questions to structure the analysis. “Were the practice’s aims and objectives achieved? Was the content appropriate to the needs of the participants? What changes are required for the next planned session?” (Robinson, 2010, p.76). Throughout Graham’s rehearsal diary, there is a sense of constant judgment of his own performance, although because of his experience he doesn’t need to objectify it in such a way as Robinson prescribes for the coach. Without such experience, formalising the assessment of ones performance gives guidance and structure. It informs and strengthens the quality of the directors self-assessment.

## Chapter 5.1.

### Fitness training and the ensemble

This chapter of the thesis shall consider the role that fitness plays in the development of the ensemble, both for the collective and the individual. As Britton tries to define ensemble he raises the question whether the word should be considered adjective or noun, in this instance it shall be considered as adjective; as a quality in the actor(s) evoked through rehearsal/training.

*Brick Wall* have always considered ensemble, like Brook does, a 'desirable quality' (Brook, 2013, p.13), because the creation of our work has relied on collusion and connection between the individuals involved. The quality itself is difficult to define, trying to identify it with relevant synonyms does little justice for 'ensemble', Murray comments

Here, I sense, that collusion suggests much more than the anodyne and neutral 'working together' or 'cooperation'[..] Implying perhaps a landscape where rules and laws are transgressed, and where boundaries are tested and extended – not for some wicked purpose, but in a spirit of shared, gleeful pleasure: more the camaraderie of rogues and revolutionaries, than the quiet, self-satisfied handholding of saints. (2003, p.70)

At times in previous *Brick Wall* devising processes this feeling has been palpable, some kind of connection between cast members has led to daring, explorative, playful devising that often produced our favourite work. For Lecoq, whose "quest for ensemble is crucial to [...] the creative compositional process" (Keefe and Murray, 2007, p137), the quality of ensemble can be linked to an actor's sense of *le jouer* and disponibilité.

Whilst a sense of *le jouer* and disponibilité has specific relevance to the actors of *Brick Wall*, because of our duty as both actor and creator, the qualities are not exclusively beneficial to 'creators'. Keefe and Murray comment:

these practices are essentially heuristic strategies and devices which operate at two reinforcing levels: as imaginative metaphor to facilitate a different way of seeing and being in the world, and as pragmatic teaching instruction to help students open themselves up corporeally and psychologically to a range of possibilities which will help them as actors and theatre makers. (2007, p.146).

Therefore both have prevalence in the wider context of actor training, not just for physical theatre, as they render the actor more malleable, more responsive and more open.

Similarly Murray comments:

Indeed, it is hard to imagine any teaching of acting or performance not wanting students to be disponible. The quality, therefore, is not peculiar to Lecoq's teaching, but is certainly strongly emphasised, especially in its relation to play. (Murray, 2003, p.70).

The relevance extends wider further, as shall later be explored, into other contexts reliant upon the qualities of collusions between collectives, sports teams for example.

Murray comments that the vocabulary of the English language does little justice translating the term of *disponibilité*, its direct translation into English being 'availability'. Murray offers

that the quality of *disponibilité* means more than just being available, offering that it is “a precondition for play” (2003, 71) and that “it puts him in a state of discovery, of openness, of freedom to receive” (Lecoq, 71: 2003).

## 5.2 Balance and *Disponibilité*

For Lecoq “the route to *disponibilité* is through the body and movement” as “physical and emotional/psychological openness are in symbiosis with each other” (Keefe and Murray, 2007, p.147). Fitness training and physical exercise therefore play significant roles in rendering the actor *disponible*. Murray comments

The *disponible* actor does not need to be an athlete or a gymnast, but it is almost impossible to imagine such a quality in any performer who is physically closed and corporeally unresponsive. (2003, p.70).

For Lecoq, there is no separation between movement and acting classes, as he considered that the ‘driving motors of emotion’ were embed in movement:

In Lecoq's work with the neutral mask, for example, he is trying to return students to a condition where they only know the world through gesture; movement and touch, all of which in his analysis originally preceded the word. (Keefe and Murray, 2007, p.27)

It figures that his exercises were largely rooted in physical action and exploration, yet the outcomes were never limited to just physiological benefits. Rather, each part of the body and its functions holds ‘dramatic potential’, Lecoq gives the example: “I have discovered, for instance, that when I move my head in ways dictated purely by geometry (side, forward, back) the result is: ‘I listen’, ‘I look’, ‘I’m frightened’” (2007, p.187)

As Murray comments, the exercises used by Lecoq, rooted in movement, have other outcomes, he was concerned with “exercises that enabled the student to interrogate and develop their own physical expressivity and that were also dramatically resonant” (2003, p.73).

‘Moving off balance’ for instance, subtly and intrinsically employs multiple principles, which is described by Murray

Working in groups of three with one person between two others - one in front, one behind, and keeping both feet firmly placed on the ground, the person in the centre moves off-balance towards the other one in front. He catches him, pushing him gently back to upright and over in the opposite direction towards the person behind. (2003, p.133)

Whilst the primary outcome of the exercise is improving participants’ sense and use of balance, other benefits of the exercise include experiencing “a state of calm openness”, playfulness and sense of trust between participants. (Murray, 2003, p.133)

As Murray comments, the exercises allows “the actor to recognise – in a playful way – that the experience of calmness and openness can be achieved only by accepting the perpetual motion between balance and off-balance” (2003, p.133). Thus we see that a principle of fitness training, introduced under particular parameters, can have other benefits for the actor.

This particular exercise has usefulness for achieving *disponibilité* and establishing interconnectedness between ensemble members; subtly the actor is exploring openness by playing with the fluidity of being balanced and unbalanced and also establishing trust and rapport between himself and his 'catchers'.

Extensions of the exercise see further challenges to balance, trust, openness and playfulness. The second extension requires the person falling to exhale as they do so which "removes tension in the body when encountering the unknown" (Murray, 2003, p.133). The primitive reaction to falling, because of the fear, would be to inhale. By challenging the primitive function of inhaling, the actor begins to try and enjoy the thrill and the rush of the unknown, finding a sense of glee and excitement; working towards being *disponible* as they begin to find pleasure in discovery.

A third extension sees the participant explore their own balance by 'play-falling' in a variety of directions and catching themselves just before the fall. Here, the subtle workings of fitness training again arise; physiologically the performer is learning a response to imbalance that prepares them with an equivalent reaction:

Balance training facilitates body awareness about the relationship of mass (hips) over the base of support (distance created between the feet or over one foot). While playing sports, this is a difficult thing to sense, but in a controlled training environment, these "feelings" can be introduced to athletes. The benefit is in "remembered" reactions to imbalance created in training situations. Balance awareness becomes an innate, automatic skill. (Nottingham, 2015).

However, once again, the exercise has other embedded benefits; playfulness (*Le jeu*), by finding pleasure in risk, and *disponibilité*, by creating attentiveness, awareness and responsiveness:

bodies can attend better and more sharply, not only to themselves, but also to the perpetual stimuli of the human and material world around them. These exercises help to nurture a generous and responsive alertness which will prepare them for theatrical play at another stage in their development. (Hodge, 2010, p.227)

### **5.3 Stretching and *Disponibilité***

Another rudiment of fitness training is stretching. Stretching and flexibility exercises are used throughout fitness training for improving range of motion, for enhancing "aerobic training and muscular conditioning, and as part of cool-downs, which "reduces stress in the exercising muscles and releases tension developed during the workout." (Human Kinetics, 2016)

Stretching also has benefits for the actor. Firstly it increases their range of movement; the performer can reach further, they can bend and contort more extremely and movement becomes more fluid. Also stretching oxygenates and 'awakens' muscles, which prepares the

body for movement, and stretching releases any physical tension that has amassed outside of rehearsal times<sup>14</sup>.

Stretching, by releasing tension and tightness, also renders the actor more emotionally 'ready' as emotions are rooted in 'physical circuits', Lecoq comments:

actions lay down circuits in the human body, through which emotions flow. Feelings, states and passions are expressed through gestures, attitudes and movements similar to those of physical actions. (2007, p.189)

Working through a variety of positions and incorporating a variety of actions emancipates and sensitises the body, removing blockages that inhibit the flow of emotion. Hodge comments: "these actions trace a physical circuitry in sensitive bodies in which emotions are imprinted" (Hodge, 2000, p.68). Also this then opens the actor and makes him or her available (*disponible*), Murray comments:

Hence, in the quest for the disponible actor, physical work on the body which aims, for example, to free it from unnecessary tensions and render it more supple and flexible, is at the same time helping to induce a spirit of psychological or emotional openness. (Murray, 2003: 70)

Throughout our own process exercises<sup>15</sup> were used to increase the actors' flexibility and balance. The stretching throughout the process was done in a way that would evoke *disponibilité* through physical connectedness. The four actors were split into pairs and then stretched each other in turn, the actors were encouraged to stretch the partners until they were at their limits, the participant would communicate when they had hit that limit (if this wasn't apparent with non-verbal communication).

This type of stretching falls under Vardiman, Carrand and Gallagher's third category of stretching, "Assisted stretching". As the trio suggests, the partner-assisted stretches were done at the end of the session: "while static and partner-assisted stretching should be performed during the cool-down" (Vardiman, Carrand and Gallagher, 2010: 32). Working this way evokes trust, confidence, and communication, without these qualities *disponibilité* cannot be achieved. Sean comments;

I'm glad it's<sup>16</sup> done this way; I hate stretching where you all sit in a circle and look at each other. Doing it this way I'm less conscious and more confident - it helps that Luke is of a similar standard. (17.05.2015)

Suppleness and flexibility for Sean were one of his weakest areas, countless times in past rehearsals I have seen Sean dismiss the stretching during warm-ups because he'd adopted the mindset that 'he just wasn't flexible'. This would seem to knock Sean's confidence, and he often became corporeally and emotionally closed. Partner-assisted stretching then also

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, tension and tightness that occurred for Adam prior to many rehearsals if he had been working; his job at the time involved 8 – 12 hour shifts sitting down. Long periods of sitting have been linked with muscle atrophy, lower back and hamstring tightness (Livestrong, 2016)

<sup>15</sup> Appendix: E13.3.

<sup>16</sup> Referring to stretching with a partner.

helped benefit Sean's and Luke's connectedness and openness to rest of the ensemble – both at physical and emotional levels.

Therefore the quality of *disponibilité*, based upon Lecoq's assumption that physical and emotional processes are united<sup>17</sup>, can be enhanced through balance and flexibility exercises. In turn the actor is more available, open, attentive and responsive which fairs them better for ensemble work; Bonczek and Storck, authors of *Ensemble Theatre Making*, comment "if you can start with people who possess the fundamentals of self-awareness, listening, flexibility, and openness, then no matter the purpose of your ensemble, you've got a strong foundation" (2013, p.66), supporting the benefit of these attributes in and for an ensemble.

## 5.4 *Complicité*

To work towards a better ensemble the qualities of *le jeu* and *disponibilité* have been identified as centrally involved. Lecoq noted another quality, which connects to *le jeu* and *disponibilité*, titled '*Complicité*'. Again, a simple translation does little justice for the term, its direct translation being "rapport". Murray offers that *complicité* is a "spirit" or a "condition" that is constituted of "two separate but related territories: the quality of ensemble, and the nature of the performer–audience relationship" (Murray, 2003: 71).

Murray and Keefe comment: "an authentic and profound sense of ensemble cannot be achieved without *complicité* between participants [...] *Complicité* recognises - and celebrates - that we are in the shit together" (2007, p.147). *Complicité* is the outcome of successful collusion between ensemble members; a synergy that underpins 'collective imagining'.

For *Brick Wall* there have been times where I have felt that everyone was *complicit* in the devising process. Sometimes in *Brick Wall* devising processes there has been a individual(s) that have been quite passive in the creation of work. Other times it has felt like we've all shared one mind, one goal, and through a joint sense of responsibility have created the work.

Murray's comments suggest that the quality of *complicité* is dependent on the relationship between the members of the ensemble and their shared motives. Murray refers to the ensemble as a collective and does not separate individual from individual ("Rogues", "shared", "saints" (2003, p.70)).

Whilst the concept of *complicité* here has had particular association and relevance to theatre, it is not exclusively a theatrical phenomenon. The principles of ensemble (and therefore *le jeu*, *disponibilité* and *complicité*) are mediums for success in other contexts. An example that shall be drawn from here is sports teams; in doing-so one can identify the

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<sup>17</sup> "In all Lecoq's work is an attack on the dualism espoused by the philosopher, René Descartes (1596–1650): a position which presupposes a body separate and disconnected from mind and spirit. Like many of the great twentieth-century theatre teachers, Lecoq's pedagogy – almost at every stage – challenges this separation. " (Murray, 2003, p.70)

connection between fitness training and these qualities, to test their applications to a theatre ensemble.

Although the assumption has been that “ensemble” is a ‘desirable quality’, therefore an adjective rather than a noun (“this company is an ensemble” (Britton, 2013, p.13), the term denotes particular connotations that identify what an ensemble is/isn’t. If it is considered an adjective then these are the parameters in which the quality can arise. If it is considered a noun then these are the principles “ensemble” encapsulates. Firstly there is an acceptance that “ensemble” refers to the collective, a group of people rather than one individual, Bonczek and Storck say it may be “a cast, a class, members of a program, students, amateurs or professionals” (2013, p.7) but always a plural, “they’re all groups” (2013, p.7). Secondly, that the group is working towards one goal: “all of the members are in pursuit of a common artistic goal (to tell a story, put on a show, learn a technique, practice skills etc.)” (Bonczek and Storck, 2013, p.7). Thirdly, a “deep connection between the members” that implies more than just being in the same place “at the same time”; “being in sync”, “the group mind”, “being on the same page”. (Bonczek and Storck, 2013, p.7).

Based on this definition we see ensembles exist in a variety of platforms where similar parameters are present like groups of musicians/orchestras, teams in the workplace, sports teams and collectives in military organisations. Peter Senge, a major figure in organisational development, ponders “how a group of people collectively enhance their capacities to produce the outcome they really wanted to produce” (Senge, 2015, n.p). The answer for Bonczek and Storck is again that ‘deep connection’, the spirit of *complicité*: “have you noticed that those that have winning seasons have that amazing chemistry of supporting each other, which allows them to stay loose, take risks, make great plays, and truly win as a team?” (2013, p.65). For sports teams it is what allows the players to work in harmony. Consider football teams for instance; the connection is what allows players to send a ball to an open space knowing that it will be picked up by a teammate, without any preconception.

It figures that the spectrum of approaches to achieving such a connection is diverse and broad, in theatre to do so, for Lecoq and Meyerhold, is through non-verbal communication and rhythms. (Murray, 2003)(Pitches, 2003). I used fitness exercises in our process to understand to what extent these would achieve a sense of *complicité* for actors.

An example of one of these exercises was a group-targeted workout<sup>18</sup>. During this workout the four actors were given a target figure of repetitions that they must complete, within a capped time and as a collective. Another rule implemented into this activity was that no two actors could be doing the exercise at one time but the amount of repetitions each individual did was up to the collective.

This firstly meant a discussion was centered on individual targets and expression of one’s abilities, creating an understanding of strengths and weaknesses. When asked about sharing the target, Natasha responded: “I like that we can split the target because we can play to our strengths, someone else can do the things that I’m not so good at”

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<sup>18</sup> See appendix E14.1.

(18.04.2015). In response Natasha was asked: "To what extent does this mean that you aren't challenged?":

Well I suppose I could do the bare minimum and just put the pressure on everyone else but then someone else will have to do more and that's obviously not fair. I want to pull my weight as much as everyone else. (18.04.2015)

By introducing the shared target within this activity, as Natasha comments, the motivation for one's actions have to consider more than just personal benefit. As Bonczek and Storck comment

if you can get people to commit to the ensemble instead of to what they're going to personally get out of being a part of the ensemble, then you strengthen the likelihood of its success. (2013, p.65)

Also, the metaphorical 'weight' of a warm-up task can be distributed; Luke, for instance, often struggled sustaining his energy during longer warm-ups, his cardiovascular endurance being weaker than the others. Often Luke seemed to be frustrated by this, which was often vocalised externally to his fellow actors. Having a group-target that can cater for individual difference, whilst still giving a collective sense of achievement, is therefore beneficial to counter these problems, as *Frantic Assembly* comment:

If there were an odd number we would opt for a three rather than having someone on their own. It meant that a rehearsal room that could easily have been filled with respectful silence reverberated with encouragement and support. This approach to warm-ups helped create the team mentality but also presented each with personal goals. (Graham and Hoggett, 2014: 99).

Presenting the group-target raises the value of each team-member because it allows them to play to their strengths. Bonczek and Stork comment, "every player has something that they're good at, and they were selected to fulfill the needs of the team". (2013, p.65). Similarly these exercises allow each member to chose, and therefore, do what they are good at boosting their confidence and their status within the ensemble.

The collective nature of the exercise saw the ensemble come together; it allowed them as individuals to have confidence and reliance upon each other. Also it aided their cohesiveness:

From an applied standpoint, results suggest that team expertise starts with the establishment of team cohesion. Following the establishment of cohesiveness, teammates are able to advance team-related schemas and a collective sense of confidence. (Tenenbaum, 2011).

As Tenenbaum, sport psychologist, comments this can advance team-schemas, which takes us back to the idea of collective thinking. This was evident in the exercise; towards the end of the exercise the laps around the studio were the final component to be completed. Luke had been allocated an amount and was the last to complete, without so much as a nod or a word, Sean took over his runs. Afterwards Luke and Sean commented: "I could just tell he needed help", when asked "how?" he responded "don't know, just knew". Whilst one is only speculating, I suspect Luke's reaction was only positive because there was sense that the group-target was a greater stake than his pride.

*Frantic Assembly* comment on the benefits of partnering/grouping-up during physical warm ups, doing so creates respect, encouragement and support:

Insecurity will always find its way into a rehearsal room but we had performers (and directors and stage management) that would start the day feeling good about themselves because improvement was tangible. And that only really happened because we were all in it together, looking out for each other in the moments where we struggled. (Graham and Hoggett, 2014: 98).

Subtly we felt the quality of *complicité* begin to form from this exercise; externally I noticed the qualities of confidence, teamwork, support, communication and encouragement were all enhanced. The role of physical exertion was central to this, each ensemble member saw the effort inputted by their peers which was visible from the sweating, heavy breathing and difficulty speaking. The implication here is then that sports teams also rely on a sense of *complicité* because they similarly are reliant on one-another to achieve a shared target, there needs to be confidence, trust and rapport within the team as the target is unachievable for the individual alone. Much of this commitment to their peers arises from a palpable sense of your partner's efforts and exertion, which was apparent between Sean and Luke in our example.

## 5.5 The ego and the Ensemble

Clive Mendus, associate of *Theatre de Complicité*, also comments on the (sometimes) egotistical nature of the actor "searching for the spotlight" (Mendus, 2006: 266). As Bonczek and Storck comment, "they [egos] have the potential to create divides within an ensemble or destroy them outright and they can be challenging for leaders because they tend to push our buttons" (2013, p.48). Although *Brick Wall* has worked together for two years prior to this process, there were instances where big and small egos took hold.

Mendus comments that the ego in a *complicité* ensemble should work to serve the collective, the individual knowing that the quality of his or her own work contributes to the overall quality of the ensemble. Instances where this isn't the case however often need to be addressed so that the actor turns their "energy outward, giving to the group and the goal" (Bonczek and Storck, 2013, p.144).

The format of a group-targeted workout can go some-way to achieving this, by turning the actor's attention to the 'bigger picture'; to serving the collective. Mendus comments: "The idea is to compete for the quality of the show and your own work and to co-operate in order to do it." (Mendus, 2006: 266). The big ego, who would potentially overestimate themselves, feels pressure from his team-mates to deliver what he promised. The small ego, who would underestimate themselves, is given encouragement and support by their team-mates.

Sean commented: "I know that I'll end up doing the most squats but that's fine as long as you guys pick up some burpees" (18.04.2016). Sean expresses that he knows his own importance but also stresses the support he'll need from his fellow actors. A subtle example of where the ego is turned outwards.

Goal setting in fitness training is key for progression<sup>19</sup>; the added element of a group-target (and therefore collective responsibility) puts added pressure on the athlete, which potentially gives them extra motivation. A notion that is also suggested by *Frantic Assembly*:

Our circuit training warm-ups were brutal and there were days where the only things that got us through them was the encouragement of others and the desire not to let anyone down. (Graham and Hoggett, 2014: 98).

The small ego is given extra confidence and motivation knowing that they are supported by their peers.

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<sup>19</sup> To have something to work towards, to track progress and for incremental improvement.

## Chapter 6.1.

### Fitness training and Proprioception and Coordination

Annie Loui, director and choreographer, comments, "physical actors use all their senses, intuition, and intellect, to "inform" their physical being and actions on stage" (Loui, 2009, p.2). This chapter of the thesis shall explore the two qualities that facilitate these functions for the actor (proprioception and coordination), considering the extent to which fitness training has enhanced these qualities in my actors. Various actor-training systems address these qualities like Lecoq's (Murray, 2003) and Meyerhold's (Pitches, 2003) and therefore some attention shall be paid to existing methods of improving proprioception and coordination.

The quality of proprioception arises in a variety of actor training systems but usually under different terminology, Laura Haughey, physiotherapist and theatre practitioner, comments:

The variety of differing terminology and its importance across so many fields makes the claim for proprioception to be more widely known within the theatre field. The many different terms used, from 'awareness through movement' (Feldenkrais in Potter, 2002), 'kinetic awareness' (Loui, 2009), 'physical awareness' (Batdorf in Potter, 2002) all pertain directly to proprioception. (2013, p.50)

As Haughey comments proprioception's role in dance and sport has been more significant than it has in theatre; "The sports and dance fields have used such research to help tailor focussed training and therefore enhance performance of athletes and dancers" (2013, p.202). Whereas Haughey's research study into proprioception is one of only three in the theatre world pertaining to proprioception. She offers that proprioception is:

the means by which people naturally have a pre-reflective awareness of their bodies, and the mechanism by which performers (and others) can develop advanced levels of bodily awareness in the service of physical skill. (Haughey, 2013: 5).

As Callery comments, it is therefore an advantageous quality for the actor to enhance: "activating and sharpening the physical nature of perception is fundamental; it develops a consciousness linked to theatrical presence: being awake, alert, attentive, constantly being 'in the moment'" (2001. P.22).

Proprioception and coordination are intrinsically linked; Pitches says of coordination "the need to master your own individual moving parts and to exhibit overall control of these parts is essential." (2003, p.114). Together then these qualities give the performer better mastery and insight into their movements, gestures and facial expressions which enables the actor to "be able to learn new motor programmes quickly and efficiently, to have precision and control when moving, to have good balance and neuromuscular control" (Haughey, 2013: 95).

As Callery comments, some practitioners, like Lecoq, sought to enhance awareness and coordination because, as Haughey notes, we spend much of daily life in 'autopilot', which is problematic for the actor. We often don't need to give thought to an action that we are firmly acquainted with: "Whilst running and walking, or just undertaking daily activities and

interactions in life, we are very often on 'autopilot', meaning that little attention is paid to the bodies' felt experience" (Haughey, 2013, p.74)

One way in which Lecoq improved actors' awareness was by "isolation exercises", whereby a movement is split into its components and then learned/performed by the actor, which enhances "muscular awareness and control" (Callery, 2001, p.25). Murray comments, "the student has first to simplify and economise movement before elaboration and complex physical characterisation can be considered." (2003, p.76). By doing so the actor learns to control their gestures and movements to a greater standard; "movement becomes more fluent and economic whilst actions become more complex" (Callery, 2001, p.26).

Although this might be considered to suppress two other fundamentals of Lecoq's (play and *disponibilité*) by its rigid and codified use of movement., Evans, for instants, offers a counterargument, quoting Pradier who says : "the effect of repetitive physical activity to that of a dream state",

Sporting activities are equivalent to the dream state, but for the sensory-motor system: they stimulate motor schemes while cognitive functions are at rest. (2009, p.84)

Thus for Lecoq his isolation sequences broke movement down into units which could hold 'dramatic potential', Callery adds that in doing so they make the actor "more aware and controlled [...] you find more detail in the movement" (2001, p.25). The example she offers: "a simple turn of the head [...] if meticulously controlled and precise, can speak volumes" (2001, p.26). Controlling and engaging with sequential movement, therefore gives the actor a greater sense of awareness through "efficient alignment of the actor's physical resources" (Evans, 2009, p.85).

Again considering the principles of *Brick Wall's* work (actor-as-creator, somatic approach to creating material/choreography, commitment to ensemble and movement/physicality as central narrative tools), proprioception and coordination are useful qualities to enhance for our actors.

An exercise that we used was 'Hula Ball' (see appendix E15.1.). The intention of the exercise was to use accuracy, agility and hand-eye coordination to improve proprioception and coordination. The actor had to throw a ball through a target, sprint a short slalom, loop around, repeat the slalom travelling in the opposite direction and then catch the ball – repeating this process to accrue as many points as possible in an allotted time.

The intention of doing so was to increase the actor's awareness of their body, the pressure of a scoring system and a time limit would require them to be as efficient and responsive to missing a target or dropping a ball. "Proprioception allows us to know where our limbs are in relation to each other and the space around us without us having to look specifically at them." (2013, p.27). Similarly then this exercise worked on the assumption that aiming for a target requires us to look at that target, not the arm throwing the ball towards the target, therefore the actor has to 'sense' the appropriate speed and direction necessary to guide the ball towards the target. "Proprioception also gives us the information we need to be able to respond and react, with appropriate force and effort to stimuli around us" (Haughey,

2013, p.28) also then the actor develops proprioception by responding to stimuli (the ball) by catching the ball and responding to the target.

In response to "what were you aware of during this exercise?" Adam responded: "it quickly became quite rhythmical, like I got the target and the catch quite early and then just tried to do the same every time." As Adam comments he and the others fell into a rhythmical repetition. As an external observer, one noticed that after their first few attempts they discovered their own 'method'; resuming the same stance, position and choice of over-arm/under-arm catches and throws. Implicitly in their actions was a developing understanding and control of their physical displacement in relation to the task, which was partly down to 'muscle-memory'. Evans comments: "we can see the paradoxical role of muscle memory in enabling the spontaneous response" (2009, p.84). Despite that the exercise demanded a repetitive and disciplined response, the 'muscle-memory' therefore being relied on so the actor could repeat previous success, the actors demonstrated heightened reactions and rhythmical fluidity. As Callery comments "differentiating the separate parts of the body and clarifying the relationship between those parts, develops economy of movement which frees the performer to control the space around them" (2001, p.25).

Another exercise that we used was intended to challenge the actor's balance; imbalance creates a response to realign oneself: keeping still, leaning a certain way to restore balance, fraying the arms in panicked correction of imbalance. Haughey comments "Balance is achieved using information available through the proprioceptive system, along with sight, hearing and vestibular information." (2013, p.28).

The actors are asked to stand flat-footed on a raised surface, and then take half a step back off the edge so only the front half of their feet are in contact with the surface. Then the actors are asked to rise up onto the balls of their feet whilst maintaining a straight posture. An exercise like this requires attention being paid to the motion and brings a usually subconscious notion (balance) into the conscious awareness for the actors to become more bodily aware.

Luke commented (on the balance exercise and other exercises used to develop proprioception): "I reckon we probably take for granted our control over our bodies, it's only when you make us do something that is a challenge or is going to unbalance us that we think about it."

As Evans comments, the use of fitness in this context brings with it knowledge gathered from "developments in scientific understanding of the body" (2009, p.84) as proprioception, unlike 'dramatical awareness', "is also a term and concept that can be measured, evaluated and analysed" (Haughey, 2013, p.50). Therefore "specifically targeting proprioception is of high value to physical performers as it is the mechanism by which we can be aware of ourselves." (Haughey, 2013, p.75). Whilst I didn't seek to objectify the improvement, it can certainly be seen that exercises that demand physical awareness and coordination inhibit sharper reactions and responses.

However a limitation of using fitness training to enhance proprioception is that it doesn't "have the same emphasis on mindful movement leading to awareness of joint position and limb placement" (Haughey, 2013, p.75) as do, the examples that Haughey gives, Yoga or

Tai Chi. Haughey accounts that Yoga and Tai Chi are 'psychophysical practices'; "Psychophysical practices are those in which attention is paid to the role of awareness when working physically." (2013, p79). Despite that 'Hula Ball' demanded some level of awareness to appreciate the placement of the arm in the throw and the catch, this was limited by the objectification of the exercise. Because the aim of the exercise was to score as many points as possible in the limited time frame this encouraged efficiency in the performer which neglected the awareness. In hindsight the exercise shouldn't have emphasised the 'destination', rather the 'journey', as Lecoq says:

Movement is more than just a matter of covering the distance between points A and B. The important thing is *how* the distance is covered. The laws of movement have to be understood on the basis of the human body in motion: balance, imbalance, opposition, alternation, compensation, action and reaction. (Lecoq, 2002:17)

## **Chapter 7.1.**

### **Posture and the Neutral Body**

As Evans comments in *Movement Training for the Modern Actor*, the lineage of movement training has developed from placing an emphasis on 'control' of the body to now 'neutrality' of the body. This development contended the idea that the mind 'controlled' the body; "post Stanislavski, the challenge for the actor has been to achieve a kind of sincerity in performance whereby emotion is related to action and is release through a body that is open, flexible and responsive" (Evans 2009, p.86). Instead of separating mind/body, Stanislavki's practice recognised a connectedness, coining the term 'psychophysical', which connects the two, Marshall comments "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)

Following this, as Evans comments, actor training has sought to facilitate a 'neutral' body with which an actor can use physicality "to provoke feelings and emotional responses" and displays "an increasing sensitivity to the emotions generated by movement" (Evans, 2009, p.86). Therefore a focus of actor training is "improving physical alignment, to open up the body to respond as directly, physically, spontaneously and 'naively' as possible to emotion" (Evans, 2009: 86). This chapter of the thesis shall consider role of the posterior chain in relation to posture, and the extent to which fitness training evokes a 'neutral' body.

The 'neutral' body in movement training for actors is a way for them to "rediscover their own bodies";

'neutral' body training allows the actor to develop what might be termed 'active consciousness' – a state in which the actor can engage spontaneously in the dramatic moment and at the same time maintain the level of consciousness required to allow the body to signify to itself. (Evans, 2009, p.102).

The role of posture in relation to the 'neutral' body is significant, if the posture is open, poised and supported by the appropriate skeletal placement and muscular support then the actor is better connected to their "imaginative and emotional impulses" (Evans, 2009, p.94). Evans adds

Posture is identified as a major signifier in this context. 'Neutral' posture represents not only the ability to adjust and change postural alignment, but also the alignment of the body in such a way that physical co-ordination, sensory awareness and physical 'presence' are enhanced. (2009: 100)

Evans links posture with the openness of the performer: "Movement and posture are placed within a system of theatrical signification that 'is meant to create perceptible relationships and effects of meaning". (Evans, 2009: 237). However as both Evans and Marshall comment, there isn't a 'correct' posture that an actor is striving to achieve; "seeking to maintain a 'correct position' at all times tends to lead to rigidity, tension and fear of shifting" (Marshall, 2008, p.104). Rather than, individual difference is accounted for, Evans comments "movement and the experience of the body in performance can be a site for difference" (2009, p.102). So the desire is to achieve a 'neutral' or 'aligned' posture that isn't rigid or tense (which Marshall refers to as 'poison'), that will look different for each performer, but is commonly malleable, responsive and "a good starting place for creative decisions" (Marshall, 2008, p.105).

As Marshall comments, the process of aligning the posture is a muscular and skeletal process that attempts to relieve both bodily components of excess effort;

what this means in practice is getting the bones stacked properly one on top of another, so that muscles have only a minimum of work to do in order to keep you upright (2008, p.102).

The muscles that support the spine and posture (the posterior chain) are large and complexly connected, they are also notorious for being neglected in a common daily routine that involves lots of sitting: "Muscles like the gluteals (in the thighs) are used any time we walk or climb a step, deep back muscles and abdominal muscles are usually left inactive and unconditioned" (Ullrich, 2009). Therefore fitness training can strengthen and stretch these muscles, awakening them for use.

The posterior chain also includes the group of muscles that is integral to lifting strength; "The posterior spine muscle chain consists of the thoracic, lumbar and hip extensor muscles. Optimal condition of this muscle chain includes optimal motor control, strength and endurance" (De Ridder, 2013: 2). Thus for *Brick Wall*, optimising the posterior chain is also beneficial for expanding choreographic possibilities. Bodies become better able to support the weight of others or move with control; central qualities to our use of lifts, catches, choral movement.

Based on the following comment by Orthopaedic Surgeon Peter Ullrich: "Muscle strength and flexibility are essential to maintaining the neutral spine position" (Ullrich, 2009), exercises were used that strengthen the relevant muscles, and also stretch them. Using exercises to strengthen the posterior chain would help the support of posture; the muscles become stronger and are more efficient in holding the shoulders, arms, neck etc. Whilst using stretching to improve flexibility would release the tension in the tighter actors (Luke and Sean) that inhibits the openness and responsiveness of the body.

One of the exercises that we used was resistance training (see appendices E6.1 and E6.3) intended to strengthen muscles through repetitions of movement with weighted resistance. The two movements that have particular relevance are the deadlift and the squat, both engaging the quads, hamstrings, lower back and the gluteus maximus. For the resistance the actors used the bodyweight of fellow actors and completed a variety of repetitions. Over the eight-month period the exercise was repeated around once a week. During that period all four actors demonstrated an improvement in strength, either increasing the maximum count of repetitions they could do, or increasing the weight they could lift.

Adam commented: "doing the deadlift exercises and the squats has made me stronger and almost feel tighter but in a positive way. Kind of like I can hold my shoulders and arms much better." (9.5.2016). As Adam comments the resistance training strengthens the muscles in the posterior chain; this helps align the posture by better supporting the skeleton. The implications of this for actor training suggest that it is a useful preparative tool that can eliminate postural problems.

This had particular resonance for Luke; when starting the process Luke had quite a poor posture, his lower back and hamstrings were extremely tight meaning that he walked slightly hunched. Through the resistance training and stretching (see appendix E13.1 – E13.3) Luke became better supported by his posterior chain, this enabled a better stance in Luke and a better displacement of weight, he commented: "I feel like my posture has got better, I notice it when I walk and sit mostly, my bum, back and legs feel more packed which feels like it supports me better" (9.5.2016).

The resistance training and stretching proved to be a useful preparative tool in the sense that both exercises removed problems of tightness or weakness in the performers. Based upon the link between posture, the 'neutral body' and the responsiveness/openness at creating emotion for the actor, Evans comments "postural problems block the function of the imagination" (2009, p.89). He quotes Dowling who says, "when you hold your shoulders or your hips like that, what you're actually doing is you're stopping your imagination" (2009, p.89). Therefore the exercise can remove barriers for the performer that may hinder their neutral posture.

Also the actors' posture is 'purified'. If the actor possesses postural problems it is likely that they will counteract these with extraneous movements or other bodily displacements. Luke for instance has splayed-feet which is linked to an overly tight glute muscle which causes an over-rotation in the hip, this can lead to severe problems, some of which listed by *Runners World*<sup>20</sup>; "Your foot will over pronate, your arches will start to lose height, your shinbone is

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.runnersworld.co.uk>

more stressed and your knee will lose alignment.” (Hobrough, 2016). Therefore by strengthening the glute muscles this began to correct Luke’s splayed-feet. As Evans comments, correcting these ‘blocks’ “connects the body directly and without interference to the actor’s imagination and emotional impulses” (2009, p.94).

## Conclusion and Evaluation

The intention of this research project was to understand the subtle workings of fitness in actor training journeys. The process involved studying two primary case studies; the work of Jacques Lecoq, and *Frantic Assembly*, and others like Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Volcano Theatre* and *Complicite*. Alongside this I also worked with four members of my own company *Brick Wall* throughout a seven-month training/rehearsal process.

What emerged from the research and therefore became the key focus points were instances where fitness training had specific relevance; therefore the aesthetic of energy, mapping the coaching process onto the directorial one, development of ensemble, proprioception and coordination, posture and the neutral body.

The original intention was to identify more comprehensively the role of fitness in actor training but because of my involvement with my own company I perhaps excluded elements of acting that weren't adopted by *Brick Wall*.

It has proved though that fitness training is a useful addition to the actor-training journey, especially where that is part of collective development within an ensemble. Considering some final comments from the actors is useful to understand their subjective encounter:

Luke: Overall I think I've definitely improved, this is the third show that you've directed and each time when it's got to the show I've felt better physically than ever before. This is good because I suppose our shows are always physical and tiring, I need to be feeling this good so that I can do the show three nights running. Certain elements have really helped me, especially the stretching, the back stretching and lifting really helped for the character work. (13.6.2015)

Adam: Well I'm stronger than I was and I'm definitely a bit looser, I think the best thing has been that the warm-ups and exercises have matched the style of work we have been creating so any physical improvement has only made the work better. It's been a good way to create an ensemble too, we've felt "in it" together as a team and this is good for morale. (13.6.2015)

Sean: Any help I can get with my flexibility is a great one to me, it certainly isn't a strength of mine. I've enjoyed training in this way, it fits doesn't it with physical theatre, it makes sense to improve our bodies because we use them so much. I'm a lot more flexibility which means I don't move so much like a robot. (13.6.2015)

Natasha: At first I definitely thought, why are you making us work-out so much but in hindsight I can see that we have all prospered physically from it. It's been good training like this, I know a lot more about my body and what it can do, I feel stronger and quicker even if I'm not. (13.6.2015)

As is apparent from the actor's comments, to varying extents all of their fitness levels were increased. As well as this fitness supported the development of our ensemble, their proprioception and coordination, neutral posture and *Disponibilité*. The explicit use of fitness training as a training tool has been problematic, fitness training often focuses on objective improvements which for an art like acting has limitations. The sheer amount of fitness

training media online makes it a very useful and easily accessible resource however and from this research I will certainly be acknowledge and utilising these in future processes.

## Appendices

The exercises and warm-ups.

The following are the exercises that were used and developed during the rehearsal/training process:

### 1.1 The Bleep Test

Set-up: In a space a starting point and ending point are established with cones/floor markers. The common beep test sets these at 20m distant from one another.

Method: A track is played that beeps at different time intervals, with the length of the interval decreasing. Performers are asked to run from one marker to the other on the sound of the beep. The time decreasing on each run forces the performer to increase their pace and/or have less rest time.

The performers score is the level they reach and number of runs they achieve at that level.

### 2.1 Maximum Rep Tests

This tests the performers maximum quantity of repetitions at a particular movement. (With resistance or without).

Set-up: The performer is given a motion (a squat, a press-up, handstand hold for instance). A timer or someone to count may be needed.

Method: the performer will try and repeat the movement as often as possible in the allotted time, or hold the motion for the longest time, depending on the motion.

Variations:

**2.2** - One of the first variations of this task we used was during the initial assessment, the performer was asked to complete maximum repetitions of a press-up. Directly after, they were given a minutes rest, and then asked to complete maximum reps again.

**2.3** - Another variation, also used during the initial assessment; the performer was asked to hold a handstand position (either against a wall or with a partner holding legs)

### 3.1 Circuits

Throughout the program circuits were used often. A circuit involves 2+ stations in which the performer completes a certain time or number of repetitions of a movement at that station.

Set-up: Each station should be set-up with the appropriate equipment and enough space, prior to the test starting performers are acquainted with each movement.

Method: Performers are given 1 minute at each station, followed by 30 seconds rest before moving onto the next station.

Variations used:

**3.2** Station 1: Skipping, 2: burpees, 3: Air squats, 4: Squat-thrusts

**3.3** Station 1: Skipping, 2: Kettle-bell clean and press (12kg), 3: Press-up, 4: Handstand hold

**3.3** Station 1: Squat Jumps, 2: hand walk outs, 3: Jumping lunges, 4: wide-armed push ups

**3.5** Station 1: sprints, 2: Star-jumps, 3: kettle bell swings, 4: Plank-hold.

#### **4.1 Suicide Runs**

Set-up: In a space a starting point is established. From this starting point two other points should be established (this can be done with cones or floor markers), each at roughly equidistant from the other. As an example the first may be 10 metres from the starting point, the second - 20 metres and the final being 30 metres.

Method: From the starting point the subject should run to the first point at maximum speed (Sprint) and then run back to the starting point at a lower speed (jog), when returning back to the start they should repeat but this time to the second point, finally they should then repeat but to the third point.

Variations:

**4.2** The method should be followed as above but when the performer finishes their sprint to the third and final point they should then do a set of repetitions of a particular exercise (this could be press-ups, air squats etc.)

**4.3** This can be set-up as a race between duos/groups.

#### **5.1 Hand-jabs**

Set-up: A performer stands in the middle of two other performers approximately a meter from either performer.

Method: The performers on each side should raise their hands and keep them soft as targets, the central performer should dart between the two making contact with both hands. The objective is to hit as many targets as possible. The outside performers should vary the position of their hands each time, altering the distance and location to challenge the performer's agility and reach.

Variations:

**5.1** Whilst we did this to a time target, it could also be done to a numerical target

**5.3** The number of outside performers could be increased, 3,4,5 etc.

**5.4** The performer was asked to make contact with the targets with other parts of their bodies, for instance their elbow.

### **6.1 Resistance Training**

Set-up: using the weight of another performer as resistance, a performer should assume the starting position of a movement.

Method: A performer should try and complete a number of repetitions (the number can vary, we used: 3 x 8, 5 x 5 and ladder sets; 1 rep, rest, 2 reps, rest, 3 reps etc.)

Variations:

**6.2** Assuming a performer in the firemans-carry position a performer should squat.

**6.3** Performer assumes a press-up position; a fellow performer should apply some resistance with one hand to the center of their partners back.

**6.4** Performer lays on the floor with their arms and legs crossed. The lifter stands to one side of their partner, at the midpoint between where the arms cross and the legs cross. They then put one hand between their peer's legs and grip on leg, the other hand underneath the arms. The person being lifted can support their partners grip by squeezing their arms and legs; interlocking with the lifter.

### **7.1 Human Slalom**

Set-up: All performers stand in a line, equidistant from the others, all facing the same direction. The distance between them can be changed ranging from 1m – 5m. The performers should ideally start far back in the rehearsal space as the line of people will gradually progress forwards.

Method: The performer at the back of the line should slalom through the other performers as quick as possible, once reaching the front then staying still to form a new marker in the slalom. The process repeats.

Variations:

**7.2** If there are enough performers then two teams can be made and this can then be a race to get each person through the slalom.

**7.3** The performer can sprint through the slalom, when they reach the front they should then return back through the slalom whilst still facing forwards.

### **8.1 Planking challenge**

Set-up: Performers split into two teams (for us this was two couples). Each performer is

given 3 lives.

Method: One person from each team should begin planking upon "go", they should hold that position for as long as possible, once they can no longer hold it they must communicate to a team-mate to take over by also assuming a planking position. The first performer can then relax but has now lost a life. This is repeated until all performers have lost all lives. The winner is the team that lasts the longest.

### **9.1 Stick/box hurdles/high-jump**

Set-up: Somebody (this may require two people depending on the apparatus) should hold a stick loosely in their hands roughly in the centre of the room.

Method: Performers should run towards the stick and then jump over the stick. Each time the stick getting higher.

Variations:

**9.2** The performers can run and then jump the stick but then loop back in a figure of 8, also jumping the stick on their return. With a group of performers they should respond to each other's timing so that there is a constant loop of jumping performers.

**9.3** Using a static box, the performers should follow the above procedure, running towards the box, this time though there are no requirements for how they get over the box, they can jump, climb, roll etc.

### **10.1 Jumps (8-4-2-1)**

Set-up: This exercise works best with a track that has BPM that can be matched by jumps.<sup>21</sup>

Method: Performers run around the space until somebody counts them into the jumps. The performer then jumps 8 times, then turning 90 ° to their right they should then do the same again, they repeat until they have jumped 8 times facing all four different directions. The performer then repeats doing 4 jumps, then 2 jumps and finally 1. The performer is aiming to match each jump with beat of the music<sup>22</sup>.

Variations:

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<sup>21</sup> Our own preferred track Sweet Nothing – Calvin Harris ft. Florence Welch (128 BPM)

<sup>22</sup> We used the chorus of a track for the jumps, during the verses the performers would run around the space responding to numerical instructions. ("1": touch the floor, "2": Jump as high as possible, "3": Mime bowling a ball, "4": star-jump)

**10.2** The exercise can be increased to 16, 32 jumps etc.

**10.3** Different tracks can be used for different difficulties; the quicker the track, the quicker the jumps.

### **11.1 Passing the clap**

This is a common drama game. Our variation involved the performers running around the space and attempting to catch the clap as though it was always slightly out of reach, involving diving and jumping as though catching an astray cricket ball.

Set-up: Performers walking/jogging around the space.

Method: A performer is chosen to start with a clap, they then send this to another performer, firstly making eye contact and then clapping towards them. The performer receives with another clap and then sends it following the same procedure; eye contact then clap.

Variations:

**11.2** we also performed this using a tennis ball.

### **12.1 Cyclone runs**

Set-up: Performers should run in a circle at a moderate pace, initially it is useful to outline the circle with objects, one of these should be known as the start point.

Method: One-at-a-time, whilst still running, each performer should step out of the circle at the start point and run around the outside of the circle twice, their objective is to return to the starting point so that they fit back into the inner circle in front-of and behind the same people as they started at. The question being can the performer sprint two larger tracks of the circle in the time it takes the inner group to do one lap at a slower pace.

### **13.1 Stretching**

Set-up: Performers stood in adequate space.

Method: Performers work through a variety of stretches targeting all areas of their body led by the director/trainer.

Variations:

**13.2** Around the circle of performers, each performer introduces the next stretch.

**13.3** Performers split into partners, with each stretch the other performer should apply very light pull/push pressure to limb/body-part being stretched.

### **14.1 Group targeted workouts**

Set-up: The actors are presented with a group target, comprised of a selection of exercises, that they have to achieve as quickly as possible, no two actors can be doing one exercise simultaneously.

Method: It is up to the collective to negotiate how the target is split and the order of how they shall complete the exercises. Our target was: 60 laps around the studio, 100 squats and 60 burpees.

### **15.1 Hula Ball**

Set-up: two points are established in the space. One is the starting point, the other is the "goal line". At the goal line a hula-hoop should be held or propped horizontally making the target. In between these two lines 3 - 5 markers should be established.

Method: Each performer starts behind the 'start' line, equipped with a tennis ball. They throw the ball aiming for the target, upon its release they have to slalom round the cones, around the hula hoop, back through the cones in the opposite direction, resuming their next lap behind the start-line. A fellow performer should be poised behind the area to receive and return the ball.

Scoring: A performer gets a point for every lap they make, every time they score through the target and everytime they catch the returned ball. Points are deducted for missing the target and dropping a catch.

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