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The Use of Meyerhold's Biomechanics Training and Principles of Composition in Contemporary Theatre

Chloe Beale
U1450399

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fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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Abstract

Taking Meyerhold's Biomechanics, I will analyze four key principles: *otkaz* (the preparation for action), *pocil* (the action with meaning), *stoika* (the end of the action) and *tormos* (the brakes or control of an action). Using a practice as research approach as outlined by Nelson (2013, p.10) I will explore these principles at three stages of theatre production: 1. The training of the actor, 2. Rehearsals and 3. Performance. The findings of the research are presented in three formats: the theatre production, the thesis and edited footage of the whole process from training to performance.

The research brings an understanding of how these principles, developed by Meyerhold throughout his career until his death in 1940, can be applied to contemporary British theatre practice. First taking *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika* - how can they can be used to train an actor from the very basics of the construction of a physical score to the development of character and ensemble? I will then include *tormos*, to bring a depth of understanding to how this and the tripartite can be applied to performance. They provide the tools for an actor and director to approach a production, giving a clear method with which to communicate to an audience.

Through this process it is possible to see the principles of Meyerhold's Biomechanics within a contemporary British theatre context. To understand how the fundamental parts of Biomechanics can be used today to find meaning within an actor's movements, to find purpose within a production and be used to create theatre which 'grabs us by the lapels' (Leach, 1989, p.174)

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Introduction

Meyerhold, the Russian theatre director (1874 – 1940), is renowned for his style of theatre. He is remembered today for breaking theatrical boundaries, such as his use of theatrical design and staging. He was a true innovator. At the heart of his theatre was the actor and central to this was his creation of the actor training system of Biomechanics. This system draws on many theatrical forms, both occidental and oriental. It is an holistic, rigorous and detailed approach to the work of the actor.

In this thesis, I ask the question: How can Meyerhold's Biomechanics be used in contemporary British theatre? To answer, I will subdivide this into two further questions: 1. What are the fundamental principles of Biomechanics? 2. How can these principles be used to create contemporary British theatre? I will focus on four principles which I consider to be fundamental to the actor training system of Biomechanics: *otkaz*, *pocil*, *stoika* and *tormos*. These principles alone will not fully explain Biomechanics or provide an exhaustive understanding of Meyerhold's theatre, but it is my hope that by concentrating on these four principles I will reveal the essence of Biomechanics. There are other principles which combine to create Biomechanics; *racurs*, *counterpoint*, *balance* and *rhythm*, all of these contribute towards the *études*. Then there is Meyerhold's theatre itself, the productions created by applying these principles. Meyerhold's achievements in terms of his many theatre productions, his innovation of staging and design, his approach to actor training, were vast and although I will touch on some of these other ideas, for this thesis I will focus on *otkaz*, *pocil*, *stoika* and *tormos*.

These four fundamental principles centre upon the physical movement of the actor; *otkaz* is the preparation for the action, *pocil* is the action itself with a clear intention and purpose, and *stoika* (often referred to as *tochka*, see page 36) is the end point of the action. *Tormos* refers to how the action is carried out, with control, which allows for precision and an intentional quality in the action itself. Basic descriptions of these principles do exist which will be the starting point towards understanding how each principle influences the movement of the actor in training, following this through to rehearsal and then into performance. The conclusion (found in clip 1,2 and 3 of appendix 1) is the application of these actor-training techniques within contemporary

British theatre. This thesis will link the analysis of the techniques, specifically the small and consistent details contained within Meyerhold's actor training, into the performance context. By focusing on these four principles it is possible to understand how the ideas contained within the smallest gesture of the actor build to a Meyerholdian approach to theatre.

Biomechanic actor training largely remains as that, *training*. Rarely is the system used to produce theatre to be played for an audience. The process recorded here began with a substantial part dedicated to training, but then progressed the actors into rehearsals and ultimately onto a touring production. This has shifted the focus from the ego-centric actor understanding how these principles affect her acting, to the spectator; what does the spectator see as a result of the rigour and intensity of the actor's training? The training provides the building blocks which make up the whole rather than being the focus themselves. However, to understand the larger goal of the production I will first focus on the principles.

I am presenting here three mediums by which to explore these four principles; 1. The footage of the performance of *Fewer Emergencies*, (appendix 1). 2. Recorded rehearsals with the company formed for the purposes of this research and edits from a workshop with Bogdanov (appendix 1). 3. The written thesis. I hope this will offer a broader understanding to essentially a physical approach, offering the opportunity to see the principles in action to help make sense of the process. This thesis brings together input from Bogdanov giving previously undocumented insights into Biomechanics in direct relation to the application of the principles in performance.

Meyerhold in Context

Meyerhold, when creating theatre, was not only concerned with the development of Biomechanics, he was working at a time of extreme political change. Influenced by these changes, he took the decision to consciously use his theatre for political ends. This ultimately resulted in his assassination.

Audience were encouraged to sound their approval or disapproval by clapping or whistling, the barrier between audience and auditorium completely broken down. Real time political events announced during performances. Actors in uniforms, very different from the silent academic atmosphere of MAT (Moscow Art Theatre). (Rudnitsky, 1981, p.269)

Theatre tickets were free at this time (1920) and the theatre became a 'meeting place'. The doors were left wide open and the winter's storm would blow in through the foyer and corridors...In the lobby, one could crunch nuts and smoke....Red army detachments and group of workers youth ...filled up the theatre with clamorous and exacting throngs. (Leach, 1989, p.34)

This change in the atmosphere of the auditorium was an attempt by Meyerhold to make theatre accessible to the proletariat, to bring theatre to the people with a political message. The political is a strong force within Meyerhold's theatre and ultimately it led to his death. However, outside of this context what does his theatre look like?

The nature of Meyerhold's death under Stalin resulted in his work being hidden and almost lost until Nikolai Kustov began teaching a handful of students in 1972. The continuing political situation in Russia meant that this reawakening of the work was confined within Russia until the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. For the purposes of this thesis I will attempt to extract this system from these sometimes overpowering cultural and political constraints. Of course, these influences cannot be completely ignored but in order to provide clarity to the ideas it is helpful to examine them outside of this framework. Without this prism, I hope to clarify the essence of the principles in respect of the actor and then more widely the theatre. I will be placing the principles within a contemporary British theatre context with the subject of the action being twenty-first century British society, specifically a trilogy of short plays, *Fewer Emergencies* by the playwright Martin Crimp. In this context 'Britishness' and the contemporary society will not be the focus of the work. These will be a framework with which the audience and the actors are already familiar. The focus will be on the technique and how this builds to theatre.

Previous productions using Biomechanics have tended to concentrate on texts used by Meyerhold himself, most notably Pitches and Shruballs' production of *The Government Inspector* (1997) and the Phoenix Ensemble's adaptation of Mayakovsky's *The Bathhouse* (1993). Talia Theatre produced work by both contemporary British playwrights and more traditional Russian texts (1998 – 2005)

however, until this point, these productions have not been documented. By now taking a contemporary text and employing the Biomechanics within a British play, played by British actors and a British director, I hoped to remove the technique as much as possible from its cultural heritage and to use it as an approach to theatre.

Meyerhold's rewriting demonstrates his understanding that the written text of the play was not an eternal object, but something that functions within specific cultural contexts. (Leach, 1989, p.136)

This illustrates Meyerhold's understanding of cultural context, at least with regard to the text of the play. What will Biomechanics bring to a text rooted in a current British cultural context?

Methodology

'We need a methodology that can account for the disorderly creative process and yet demonstrate rigorous planning' (Trimingham, 2002, p.55)

This research has been undertaken by practice in line with the model set out by Nelson:

PaR involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry. (2013, p.10)

The research in this instance has been largely through workshops, rehearsals and performance. The performance itself (recorded in Appendix One) is perhaps the most important part of this research process. This is informed by my own training leading up to this research which involved forty-two weeks of workshops,¹ twenty-four weeks of rehearsals and six productions with Bogdanov.² This gives a:

practical knowledge which might primarily be demonstrated in practice – that is knowledge which is a matter of doing rather than abstractly conceived and thus able to be articulated by way of a traditional thesis in words alone.
(Nelson, 2013, p.10)

It is reasonable to ask, with a continuing career as a theatre director using Biomechanics, the point at which this research begins. When does the day to day work of creating theatre stop and the research start? It is common for artists to come to a PhD later in their career with over 70% of PhD students coming to their research after having worked in career orientated situations, usually in their thirties and forties and beyond (Freeman, 2009, p.36). In comparison, slightly more than three quarters of scientists start their PhDs immediately after completing their first degree (Freeman, 2009, p.37). This is perhaps an advantage for the artist and their research, allowing for experience and knowledge to accumulate in a specialist field and thus inform the area of research. There is no precise point where the career of the practitioner stops and the research begins. The knowledge and experience of the practitioner necessarily feeds directly into the research and even before the research question is considered their practice is already informing that question. The Practice-as- Research (PaR) method allows for this knowledge of the artist to become specifically focused within their practice while continuing with their creativity.

Practice as research can be seen to be a process through which performance makers are able to develop and deepen the abilities they already possess to make reasoned, autonomous and often professional judgements. Through research, practitioners can develop an increased critical awareness of the

¹ Cardiff, two weeks, 1995, Berlin, six weeks, 1996, Copenhagen, one week, 1996, Lausanne, one week 1996, London, four weeks, 1998, Manchester, four weeks, 1999, Manchester, four weeks, 2000, Manchester, four weeks, 2001, Manchester, four weeks, 2003, Manchester, four weeks, 2005, Huddersfield, two weeks, 2006, London, two weeks, 2007, Huddersfield, two weeks, 2008, London two weeks, 2010

² *Alice in Wonderland*, four weeks, 1998, *The Duel*, four weeks, 1999, *Home*, four weeks, 2000, *Assilon Place*, four weeks, 2001, *The Vaudevilles*, four weeks, 2003, *Moliere*, four weeks, 2005

things they do in their own practice and of why they do these things in the ways that they do. (Freeman, 2009, p.57)

The research here undertaken will advance our understanding of the practice of Biomechanics by being the first PaR project to track these principles from training through to performance.

Within the PaR umbrella, Freeman makes a further distinction. Biomechanics has to be understood physically, through the embodiment of knowledge and it is this approach which Freeman would say is 'Practice-led'. Through Practice-led research each stage necessarily informs the next; training, into rehearsal, into performance. The study of the principles of Biomechanics is carried out through the process leading to the performance with the final performance forming the outcome of the research, standing as a proportion of the research. In this way, the research is not 'on the performance' but rather is closer to practice led.

when the research undertaken is likely to lead primarily to new and/or advanced understandings about practice, we can say that this is practice-led. (Freeman, 2009, p.63)

In the case of this research, the performance of *Fewer Emergencies* is the final part of the research process; however, it is only one part. The production demonstrates the use of the practice of Biomechanics in performance, however to reach this point the training and rehearsal have an equal, or arguably, more important role to the contribution of knowledge. The performance is not the 'object of study' as described in 'research into or on performance...in this sense, performance is less inclined to be the object of investigation as its ultimate aim.' (Freeman, 2009, p.64)

The method for the Practice-as-Research was chosen to emulate that of a theatre company following what could be described as a traditional rehearsal process; training, rehearsal, performance. This is the process Meyerhold adopted, the process Bogdanov used when working with Talia Theatre and the same structure I have followed since 1997. By following the process of training, rehearsal and performance undertaken by Meyerhold I can place the research within a similar structural frame as his original work. Placing these limitations on the research compelled me to engage with similar methods to overcome problems and find

solutions through the training which in turn feed into the rehearsal which inform the performance. The process also has a fluidity which allows for problems, questions and ideas to flow through the three defined sectors in any order, so an idea conceived by the director in a scene imagined as part of the performance can be tackled as a training exercise, with the director taking the role of teacher to train the physicality of the actor to be able to accomplish the requirements of the scene.

Working with Bogdanov from 1998 to 2005 following this 'traditional' approach, myself as the actor and Bogdanov as director, privileged me with a performer's perspective, understanding first-hand the relevance of the training. Following the training through to the performance elevates the training from the level of the physical, when the exercises may be considered as activities to improve strength and dexterity, to that of artistic endeavour. Stepping onto and from a table in repetition is not only to strengthen the leg muscles but to strengthen the leg muscles in order to allow the actor the ability to step with care and precision onto and off the table in a particular way. The purpose of this development is to fulfil the directorial ideas, from the larger concept down to the small details of stepping onto a table. The training is directly influenced by the larger ideas of the play. There is something more to achieve within the training than physical ability, the actor must keep the future perspective of the performance and with that, the spectator. The training has a greater purpose than the advancement of the actor's physicality.

For a director, the three-part process affords the physical development of ideas before training. With this method of the traditional rehearsal process, the director can begin work on the script whilst the actors are still in the training period, thus allowing the director to trial specific ideas inspired by the script, using the training to test both the aesthetic and the actor's skill, finding the limits of the actors and therefore the frame within which certain concepts can be achieved. If only four of the five actors can step down from the table in a controlled manner then the director's wish to have all the actors stepping from the table in unison is unachievable unless the fifth actor undertakes further training.

Between the training and rehearsal periods there is no definite stop, rather the two bleed together. Once the rehearsal period started, I followed the system Bogdanov

had used, beginning each rehearsal with actor training. This continuation allows the director the ability to circulate her directorial ideas from the script into training, testing them with the actors before building into rehearsals. The training is also used prior to each performance to both physically warm up and mentally focus. The training underpins the actor's work at every stage. The cyclical nature of the process is comparative to the spiral model described by Trimmingham:

The paradigm model of progress that allows for this is the 'hermeneutic-Interpretative' spiral model where progress is not linear but circular; a spiral which constantly returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding. Originally developed by a Gestalt thinker, Kurt Lewin, this spiral indicates that as one part of understanding changes, the whole changes too. (2002, p.56)

Relating the above spiral approach to this research; my directorial ideas borne from the script influenced the training of the actors which, depending on what was achieved in training, had an effect on the ideas we developed in the rehearsal process, which inevitable fed into performance. Both the training and the rehearsal became a place to physically trial ideas, the outcome of each influenced the other. Another starting point could be the actor, who's training, may inspire a scene; one actor's strength to lift another, a particular skill. As an example, one of my actors had trained as a dancer which I used as a way of showing her character's decent into madness at the end of *Whole Blue Sky* (pp.17-18) My understanding of the actor's skill gave me a renewed understanding of that character's development. The process of one part influencing the understanding and development of another. Even once the production has ended the actor will continue training and this training will now be altered by what the actor has learnt in the previous production.

The Structure

To establish the company, I first held open auditions which attracted twenty actors. With these initial twenty I embarked on a weekly training programme focusing only on the techniques of Biomechanics. At our first meeting, I outlined the ethical contract. I was offering the actors free training and the opportunity to become involved in the company, the production and the tour in exchange for their commitment to the project over its duration. Through discussion we defined the details of the exchange and both parties signed an agreement. Proper Job Theatre company covered any expenses incurred by the actors, outside of this, no money changed hands.

The training lasted for twelve months, at the end of which time I auditioned the now twelve actors with the intention of taking five through to the core ensemble. It would be these actors who would create the final production. Towards the end of the training the transition to rehearsals began and we applied the training to some short scenes from *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (Neilson, 2007), which were

performed at the University of Huddersfield (May, 2015) as a 'work in progress', (Clip 4, Appendix One). This will be discussed later.

The five actors chosen to move into rehearsals then began work on *Fewer Emergencies* by Martin Crimp. The rehearsal process became more intensive with the company rehearsing for two full weekends per month for nine months. The process culminated in a short tour to five studios and small-scale venues. This process has been documented and an edited version of the training and rehearsals and an unedited version of the performance can be found in Appendix One. Included in Appendix One is edited footage of Bogdanov's workshops in 1999 as part of The International Workshop Festival.

British Contemporary Theatre

To define contemporary British theatre, it is possible to take the definition offered by Theodore Shank in his book of the same title; 'Contemporary British Theatre' (1994). Here he refers to 'the work of those artists in Britain who are creating unique forms of theatre to express what it is like to be alive today' (p.3). Although first published in 1994 and therefore it could be argued that the definition itself is not contemporary, Shank's definition gives the possibility to stretch beyond the immediate with this definition holding current relevance. Martin Crimp's writing offers a stark view of what it is to be alive in Britain today. He belongs to a movement of writers expressing a particular sense of British culture, Aleks Sierz (London 2001) describes the movement as 'In-Yer-Face' Theatre.

To closely navigate through Sierz's argument to his arrival at his definition of 'In-Yer-Face' theatre it is useful to return to the roots of theatre itself: Greek theatre. In these tragedies, such as *Oedipus*, *Medea*, *Oresteia*, *Antigone*, to name but a few, we find extreme states of both physical action and emotion; 'brutal death, terrible suicides, agonizing pain, human sacrifice, cannibalism, rape, incest, mutilation and

humiliation.’ (Sierz, 2001, p.10). The Greeks, long before Meyerhold, were challenging the audience to sit up and take notice. A wife stabbing her husband to death or a son having sex with his Mother necessarily stirs strong emotion. This delight in looking at society through a lens of horror was continued in Jacobean theatre. There is murder, mutilation and incest found in the work of John Webster, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley. Shakespeare’s tragedies also view his ‘contemporary’ world as a place where eyes are gouged out, old men die in misery and power struggles result in murder. Even today these events can be seen as shocking but nevertheless accepted.

Between the Jacobean time and 1737 uncontrolled emotion brought to the stage by these writers came to be seen as dangerous. Censorship was introduced into British theatre in 1737, with modification in 1843. This meant that theatre in Britain was operating under strict rules. Plays were read and licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, the list of things which could result in the banning of a play was extensive; swearing, nudity, sexuality, suggested sexuality, homosexuality, political radicalism, representations of God, representations of the Royal family – the list went on. Unfortunately for the Lord Chamberlain, and as is the case so often with prohibition, the censorship encouraged writers to examine subjects precisely because they were forbidden and examine them in such ways as to get them past the censors, using metaphor, suggestion and comedy. Not to mention the fact that the writing about forbidden subjects served as a very effective form of advertising and a means to draw in an audience.

Throughout the time of censorship, the artists slowly chipped away at what was accepted. In 1891, critics of Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, were shocked by its illusion to syphilis while ‘Garnett’s *Breaking Point* (1909) couldn’t describe his central character as pregnant’ (Sierz, 2001, p.14). More and more the work of European artists influenced British theatre, continually pushing at the boundaries of what could be staged; Stindberg, Zola, Chekov, Jarry, Tzara, Wedekind, Brecht, Ionesco, Genet, Grotowski and Artaud. ‘especially Artaud. Not surprisingly, his radical ideas about a Theatre of Cruelty were derived from the Greeks and Jacobeans.’ (Sierz, 2001,

p.14). The Royal Court Theatre was at the edge of this fight back, staging John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1956 which gave way to a new wave of writer exploring a different 'contemporary'; Behan, Delaney, Arden, Wesker, Bond and Mercer. These writers brought the grittier, more real 'contemporary', something the 'man on the street' could identify with.

Censorship was finally abolished in 1969 which allowed for writers to explore contemporary British culture more fully and reflect the changes in society. Churchill examined feminism, Caryl Churchill reflected a Northern perspective, the first Black Theatre co-operative was established in 1978 and from this point black and ethnic minority artists begin to push their way onto the national stage, through artists such as Mustapha Matura, Derek Walcott, Jatinda Verma and Yvonne Brewster a multicultural perspective of Britain was offered.

Sierz argues that by the nineties these writers, who had shaped British theatre since censorship and whose work was inspiring the next generation of writers, 'produced work in that decade that was neither original nor thrilling' (2001, p.34) sighting Osborne's return to the stage in 1991 with *Déjà vu* as tired and expected. 'Suddenly it felt as if the old sensibility was past its sell-by date and that the times were crying out for something new' (Sierz, 2001, p.35).

It is to this point that the arrival of the 'In-Yer-Face' writers can be traced. Sarah Kane (*Blasted*, 1995), Jez Butterworth (*Mojo*, 1995), Mark Ravenhill (*Shopping and Fucking*, 1996), Patrick Marber (*Closer*, 1997) and Martin Crimp. This small group of writers in the nineties

'transform (ed) the language of theatre, making it more direct, raw and explicit. They not only introduced a new dramatic vocabulary, they also pushed theatre into being more experiential, more aggressively aimed at making audiences feel and respond...what characterized in-ye-face theatre was its intensity, its deliberate relentlessness and its ruthless commitment to extremes. (Sierz, 2001, p.xiii)

These writer's, having grown up in a world without censorship, were now able to express British contemporary culture far more freely. However, with this freedom

came the challenge of how to gain the attention of an audience acclimatized to a much broader approach to theatre. Using previously banned methods which a seventies audience would have found extreme (nudity, violence, sex) this group of 'In-Yer-Face' writers set out to engage. For the audiences of the nineties, who had already become familiar with such extremes through the post censorship writers, this new group needed to go further. They did this by digging deeper, exploring not only the 'how' but also the 'what', turning to the darker side of society and spreading it naked on the stage, forcing the spectator to watch the dirty underside of what we know exists but are still taboo; mental health, child murder, prejudice. Their writing took these subjects and put them in our faces.

Martin Crimp achieved this stark view of society in *Fewer Emergencies*, a trilogy of short plays which has only been performed once before, upstairs at the Royal Court (2005). His characters refuse to allow us to empathize with them even though we can recognize ourselves in them. Crimp gives the characters numbers rather than names, he won't allow us the easy explanation for their behavior; it's not a failing marriage, an abusive father, sexual frustration (*Face to the Wall*, pp.31-33) that causes this man to shoot the children, he chooses to do this and we know we have accepted that. This narrative is one we can recognize within our society.

His characters confuse 'financial well-being with emotional freedom and happiness' (Angelaki, 2015, p.147) perhaps something that might also strike a chord with a contemporary theatre audience. Our capitalist society promoting the life style based on 'stuff'; cars, clothes, holidays, marketed to us on thin, beautiful people with smiling children. Always showing our 'best side' on social media, Crimp exposes the other side, what is really going on behind the closed French windows around the bespoke oak table (*Whole Blue Sky*, p.13)

There are references to property and the falsely presumed prosperity it brings; the woman who surrenders herself to an unfulfilling marriage; the cycle of commonplace materialism that negates the possibility of understanding that life is not a mere commodity. (Angelaki, 2015, p.149)

It is this side of contemporary Britain which Crimp brings before us using shock tactics common to the 'In-Yer-Face' genre.

There are some parallels to be drawn between Crimp and Meyerhold, both striving to make 'audiences feel and respond', transforming 'the language of theatre' (Sierz, 2001, p.xiii). Although worlds apart in terms of their cultural background, Crimp and Meyerhold share this theatrical purpose. Angelaki argues that Crimp has an understanding 'of how history is conceptualized as an active process in contemporary performance making' (2015, p.143) which acts to further ease the time span hanging between Crimp's writing and Meyerhold theatrical style.

Angelaki also sees Crimp's work as favoring the female which suits a predominantly female cast.

[Crimp] tends to privilege a female perspective. Crimp's writing has delivered precise photo frames of women's roles historically, as female characters have come to envision their own position as subjects and agents of their destinies in so-called 'herstories'. (2015, p.144)

Fitting that, although himself a man, the female perspective is held at the forefront, something seen particularly in *Whole Blue Sky*, the first in the *Fewer Emergencies* trilogy. With four of the five cast members and the director all female I was able to come to this perspective from a position of experience, confidently telling the 'herstories'.

Crimp's characters described only as numbers, 'Female' or 'Male' offer a beautifully blank canvas on which to develop the biomechanics of the actor. To be able to begin with the physical exterior, the physiological clutter of the human mind stripped away to the simple lines. The chance to build the characters through the prism of Biomechanics, without the constraints of the writer's presupposed ideas. We must understand them through the context of the play, in line with Leach's reference to Meyerhold's 'refusal to 'identify' the actor with the part' (1989, p.170) This simplicity was a gift in respect to the research into the use Biomechanics in contemporary theatre.

Considering Crimp's play, his use of character, his view of contemporary society, his methods by which to look at that society, his lean towards the female perspective all give reason for the suitability of his work to be placed together with Meyerhold's Biomechanics and referred to as 'Contemporary British Theatre'. Placing Crimp's work within the wave of writers categorized by Sierz as 'In-Yer-Face', it is probable that Crimp would agree with Meyerhold's notion to grab the audience by the lapels (Leach, 1989, p.174).

Literature and Practice Review

Having considered the choice of play and methodology for this practice as research I will now move to review the wider literary context surrounding Meyerhold and his work. Our understanding of Meyerhold's theatre can be charted by the political and physical fact of the Berlin wall. Before the destruction of the wall writers such as Schmidt (1967), Hoover (1974), Worrall (1977), Braun (1979), Rudnitsky (1981) and Leach (1989) were only able to place Meyerhold within a theatrical and historical context. They give us very detailed accounts of Meyerhold's productions which lead us to the understanding of the devices employed and allow us a closeness to his theatre despite the fact that it existed in a pre-digital age. Schmidt, who worked alongside Meyerhold recording a number of rehearsal processes, offers a very intimate account of the rehearsal space inhabited by Meyerhold. Schmidt creates greater depth by pulling together first-hand accounts from colleagues who knew and worked with Meyerhold which gives us an idea of his personality, allowing us to appreciate the respect he drew from his associates, his vitality and his admirable work ethic.

Braun pulls together the actual writings of Meyerhold, so nearly lost after his death. These give us a glimpse of the beginnings of the system of Biomechanics and the rigour of training expected from the actors in Meyerhold's company. He provides us with a valuable translation of Meyerhold's own words. Braun places the words of Meyerhold within the context of his wider work giving detailed insights into his productions.

Leach offers us the rounder historical context, the full life of Meyerhold from his German family to his assassination, with each production chronologically located. Backed up with photographic evidence, this work is invaluable for placing Meyerhold's productions within a historical context.

However, what these writers cannot do, purely as a result of when they were writing, is give us an accurate, first-hand account of the experience of learning Biomechanics. It is, therefore, not surprising that the usefulness of this material in this particular context is limited. Until the fall of the Berlin wall on 9 November 1989, Russia, and Biomechanics, was largely shut off from the rest of the world. In respect of Biomechanics these authors relied on photographs of Nikolai Kustov, one of Meyerhold's collaborators and a teacher of Biomechanics, brought back by Lee Strasberg in 1934. Attempts were made by The Living Theatre to construct an *étude* from these photographs. Viewing the work of The Living Theatre from our current position it is possible to understand the distance between this and our now accepted knowledge of the *études*. The photographs alone cannot show the intensity of the physical training required by Biomechanical actors.

Post -1989 writers have emerged for the first time who describe actual contact with Meyerhold's technique of Biomechanics. This, combined with the development of Practice as Research, gives way to a different kind of connection with Meyerhold, one rooted in his technique and his practical approach. Baldwin (1995), Law and Gordon (1996), Pitches and Shrubbsall (1997), Pitches (2003, 2006, 2007, 2011 and 2014), Normington (2005) and Skinner (2011 and 2013), all write as a result of experiencing a Biomechanics workshop first hand and, with the exception of Skinner, apply their learning to theatre production. Perhaps we should take Law, Gordon and Skinner to be transitional practitioners without the depth of knowledge gained by the development of productions found within the other writers' work. It is with these writers that we hear, for the first time, some of the Russian words that define the technique of Biomechanics. The specifics of the language are referring to details from the training in the workshop. Until this time, this level of specification could not exist.

Jonathan Pitches, Professor of Theatre and Performance at the University of Leeds and also in attendance at the first UK workshop in 1995, was the first to use his practical knowledge in Biomechanics to produce a piece of theatre in the U.K. In 1997, in his then role as lecturer at the University of Northampton, he took the lead role, Khlestakov, in Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, under the direction of Anthony Shrubbsall. Pitches co-authors a documentation of the process (Pitches and Shrubbsall, 1997) where he talks about the structure being that of training followed by rehearsals, with the structure of the training being '1) Footwork; 2) Work with sticks; 3) Work on the etude' (p.103). He also goes into some detail of the études. He comes tantalizingly close to the vocabulary with 'i) intention, ii) execution and iii) reaction, counted 'i', 'ras', 'dva' - 'and', 'one', 'two'.' (p.106).

Jane Baldwin, an instructor of Theatre at the Boston Conservatory and the College of Holy Cross, trained with Bogdanov and Nikolai Karpov. Karpov had attended some of the training with Kustov as an observer. He was not allowed to take part as he was not an actor in The Moscow Theatre of Satire. Baldwin's training led into a production of Mayakovsky's *The Bathhouse*, adapted by Schmidt. Baldwin gives us the first description of what Pitches has hinted at:

Otkaz: (The refusal) a counterpoint, a preparation for the action which also signals the partner that the actor is ready to interact. M believed that all movement has a countermovement, no matter how minute, which initiates it.

Pacil: (the sending) both the commitment to and the doing of the action.

Tormos: (the brake) the restraint which must be applied simultaneously with the forward momentum of the pacil to maintain control.

Tochka (a point in space, a period at the end of the sentence) or Stoika (a stance) These terms are often used interchangeably. Both refer to the completion of the action at a specific point in space and time. (Baldwin, 1995, p.188).

Baldwin's description is the first published discussion in English of the fundamental principles of Biomechanics in reference to, albeit, American contemporary theatre.

Pitches then returns with a comprehensive book, *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, first published in 2003, where he brings together both the historical context offered by the

earlier publications and his own experience of directing and performing using Biomechanics. He now offers a fuller explanation of the basic principles of Biomechanics:

Otkaz is the Russian for 'refusal' and describes the preparation an actor makes before any actual action – crouching down before jumping or reaching back before throwing. It's a kind of gestural prologue if you like.

Posil (the verb 'to send' in Russian) is the action itself. Sometimes known as the 'realisation', the *posil* is the actual expression of what was suggested in the prologue, the jump or the throw itself.

Tochka marks the end point of a cycle of action. It is as a kind of frozen epilogue, but an epilogue which always suggests a new start. (p.55)

And he goes on to say, 'These three parts are the very building blocks of biomechanical theatre *Otkaz*, *posil* and *tochka* determine everything' (p.115).

Katie Normington, Professor at the Royal Holloway, University of London published an article (2005) following her practical research as movement director on Red Shift Theatre Company's production of Herman Melville's *Bartleby* (2004). Having trained with Bogdanov in a workshop in 1998 she applied her knowledge to a group of Stanislavskian trained actors. She also offers a description of the fundamental principles:

Otkaz, which is the preparation stage – in effect a type of refusal or anti-movement that precedes the actual movement; *posil*, the sending or the passage/pathway to the action; and *tochka* a point in space, or *stoika* a stance or position – the last two terms are used interchangeably. (2005, p.120)

Through these authors we begin to understand the practical principles of Biomechanics, those which, as a workshop participant, one would begin to embody. Skinner would argue that there is a difference between these practitioners' depth of practical knowledge, labelling some as 'adaptive' and others as 'purist' and explaining that:

The purist approach is the less common, in which workshop training is provided over an extended period of time. The purity is one of form, pure biomechanics attempts to recreate the formal construction of Meyerhold's system as it was envisaged by Meyerhold.

In contrast, practitioners whose work takes an adaptive approach emphasise aspects of Meyerhold's system, resulting in a wide scope of practice, ranging from that which broadly preserves key philosophical or formal elements of

Meyerhold's work, to that which makes significant alterations. (Skinner, 2012, p.95)

Skinner places the work of Proper Job Theatre Company in the 'purist' camp and that of Normington in the 'adaptive'. Interestingly she does not place Pitches' work in either.

The fall of the Iron Curtain didn't impact on the study of Biomechanics in the U.K. until 1995. It was in October of that year that the Centre for Performance Research (CPR), at that time based in Cardiff, held the first in a long line of *Past Masters*³ symposia, simply called 'Vsevolod Meyerhold' (Ley, 1996, pp.192-3). It was at this symposium that Gennadi Bogdanov and Alexey Levinsky first taught in the UK. In 1972 Bogdanov and Levinsky, as actors in The Moscow Theatre of Satire, were invited to join an actor training class taught by Nicolai Kustov. Kustov, by this time an old man and smoking heavily, had been part of Meyerhold's group of actors (Law and Gordon, 1996, p.99, pp.205-6, p.219) and later 'a teacher of Biomechanics at Meyerhold's theatre' (Law and Gordon, 1996, p.236). Kustov is also the actor famously documented in the photographs bought to the West by Lee Strasberg (Law and Gordon, 1996, p.186). Kustov did not immediately reveal to his students the significance of what he was teaching, no doubt still in fear of the reverberating Stalinist regime, but over the six years that Bogdanov and Levinsky worked with Kustov the direct link to Meyerhold became clear.

It was at this symposium that I first experienced Biomechanics. Along with my colleague, James Beale, I took part in the 'Biomechanics for Actors' workshop taught by Gennadi Bogdanov. The course was five days, six hours per day, culminating in the three-day symposium. I was inspired by the technique and by my teacher but if I took away anything from that workshop it was that I had only touched the tip of the iceberg, and so a period of further training ensued.

³ Artaud 1996, Decroux 1997, Brecht and Eisenstein 1998, Chekhov 1999, Kantor 2000, Tanz Theater 2001, Craig and Appia 2003.

It is appropriate to acknowledge that at this time Alexey Levinski was also teaching Biomechanics under the title 'Biomechanics for Directors'. Although Levinsky and Bogdanov learnt together in the same class under Kustov it is possible to see differences in their style, perhaps suggesting that there can be no such thing as a pure form as it will always be influenced by the teacher. Levinsky's 'style' of Biomechanics could be described as more fluid, less harsh than Bogdanov's, perhaps, less attention to the precision.

Following this first workshop I decided I needed to continue my training with Bogdanov. Then, as now, there was no permanent home for Biomechanics outside of Moscow. Therefore, Bogdanov taught wherever fellow practitioners understood the value of his work and invited him to their institutions. At that time, the most forward-thinking of these practitioners were based in Berlin. Bogdanov was soon to be teaching at Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts and Mime Centrum Berlin.

Researching the subject of Biomechanics, I took the following words of Meyerhold on the street performer very seriously:

The cabotin is a strolling player;the cabotin can work miracles with his technical mastery; the cabotin keeps alive the true art of acting. (Braun, 1969, p.122)

and

In order to rescue the Russian theatre from its own desire to become the servant of literature, we must spare nothing to restore to the stage the cult of cabotinage in its broadest sense. (Braun, 1969, p.123)

As a result, with my equally inspired colleague, James Beale, I set off for Berlin (February, 1996) with two street theatre shows to generate income, a camper van and with the firm intention of being trained in Meyerhold's system of Biomechanics. This harebrained scheme resulted in eight weeks of full-time training with Bogdanov in Berlin, five days in Lausanne and an International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) in Copenhagen. During this period, again inspired by another quotation from Meyerhold: 'It was necessary to have an actor who could do everything, an all-round actor' (Rudnitsky, 1981, p.295), James and I also trained for six- weeks with Gardzienice Theatre Association (Poland) and three months with Antonio Fava (Italy) learning the Commedia dell'Arte before returning to the UK.

Talia Theatre was established in 1997 with the intention of using this Biomechanics training to create and tour contemporary theatre. With the formation of the company we were able to invite Bogdanov to us, which we did annually from 1998 to 2005. These visits of four-weeks at a time were split into rehearsals for our production and training for actors. Working at the Zion Centre, Manchester, (now Z-Arts) we would rehearse from 10am till 4pm followed by actor training, which was open to all actors, from 5pm till 10pm. Each intensive four-week process resulted in a new touring production: *Alice in Wonderland* (1998), *The Duel* (1999), *Home* (2000), *7 Assilon Place* (2001), *The Vaudevilles* (2003) and *Moliere* (2005).

This was the time it took for our seemingly firm commitment to Biomechanics to waver. In 2004 Talia Theatre merged with Proper Job Theatre Company where we continued to produce theatre but we ceased to brand the work as Biomechanics. Proper Job Theatre company hosted Bogdanov twice more in 2009 and 2010 but unfortunately these visits were for workshops alone, without resulting in a production. It was unfortunate that, aside from a few short films, this work with Bogdanov is largely undocumented.

Since 2008 I have often been invited to teach Biomechanics at various Higher Educational Institutes and it is through this work that I have recently become aware of the uniqueness of my training. In the process of researching for this thesis I have become aware of the influence that Biomechanics has had on the work of Proper Job Theatre Company. What I see in our productions is not the 'brick walls, electric lights, and so on - the snapping on and off of the house lights, the bright stage lighting' (Leach, 1993, p.170), these productions now have sophisticated lighting designs, identifiable characters cast in line with the writer's intentions. There is no politics, no uniforms (Rudnitsky, 1981, p.269) and yet the Biomechanics can still be seen, which made me question the use of Biomechanics in contemporary production. How do the details of the technique of Biomechanics grow into the recognisable performance style? As Bogdanov would so often say "What is this?"

Having considered the journey from the arrival of Biomechanics in a practical form to the UK, let us now turn to the specifics of the actor. In Skinner's chapter, she brings together both the 'adaptive' and 'purist' in regard to time in which to train the actors:

Beale [James] notes the need for extensive training to establish a biomechanical ensemble.....Normington echoes the same issues of time constraints by concluding her reflections on the four-weeks of rehearsals for *Bartleby*. (2012, p.99-100)

Skinner goes on to identify these constraints within 'professional theatre practice' as a reason why there is a 'shift to HE as a preferred arena for biomechanical experimentation' (p.100).

Knowing that Meyerhold worked within 'professional theatre' and placing myself within the same sphere I wanted to achieve the training preferred by Beale (J. and co-founder of Talia Theatre) and Normington in settings outside of Higher Education. I also wanted to work with actors with some experience and knowledge of performance, again outside of HE. To achieve this, I held auditions for what was to be a weekly, twelve-month training period held at Proper Job Theatre Company. The initial group was made up of twenty actors, varying in age from twenty-five to fifty- two with varying professional experience, wanting to take the opportunity of regular actor training. The rigour of Biomechanics inevitably saw the initial group shrink in size. However, I established a core group of twelve actors committed to the training. During the year we studied the key principles of *otkaz, pocil, stoika, tormos, racurs* and some études, which demonstrate the application of all the principles of Biomechanics. We also trained with sets, objects, rhythm and musicality. With the vision that this training was ultimately to end in a production I consciously moved the group in this direction completing the year with presentations of short scenes taken from Neilson's *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (2007). (work in progress, Clip 4, Appendix One).

The culmination of the year- long process of training was more auditions, this time for the five parts required for *Fewer Emergencies*. This smaller group embarked on a nine-month rehearsal process of two weekends per month with an intensive block of three weeks towards the end of the process. The training of these actors would now be tested as there was a noticeable shift from training to rehearsals which I will examine later.

Taking only the principles of *otkaz*, *pocil*, *stoika* and *tormos*, the first principles learnt by an actor training in Biomechanics, I will now analyze, through the process of (a) my own training, (b) the training of the actors, (c) the rehearsal process and into (d) the final production, how these specific parts of Meyerhold's system of Biomechanics contribute to the Meyerholdian approach.

Otkaz

I first heard the term *otkaz* in the workshop at CPR (1995). We were in a small, rather run down studio, somewhat tucked away and there were about ten people in

the group. I unfortunately don't remember everyone in the group by name, just a few. Twenty-one years later I remember Linda Kerr-Scott from the Royal Shakespeare Company, Tulus who had come from a theatre company in Japan, a clown from Switzerland, a writer for *Total Theatre*, David Bower, best known for his role as Hugh Grant's deaf brother in the 1994 film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and another actor who had travelled from Copenhagen. At twenty years old and attending only my second theatre workshop, the first being a clowning workshop in London, I thought this make up of participants was, perhaps, usual.

The presence of Gennadi Bogdanov was immediately felt. Small, stocky in stature but commanding, he was quietly spoken, controlled, measured, perhaps the personification of Biomechanics. He commanded respect which gave him the ability to drive the group to a physically high level. This is the first aspect of Biomechanics that each participant feels: it is physically demanding.

Working through a translator, we tackled a number of Russian words that started to become familiar; *Brava stapa*, right foot, which was where we always began our training, *ruki*, arms, which always seemed to be the part of the body I left hanging and *rabota*, work, a word he repeated often. Moving through the initial pain barrier of the first few days Bogdanov led us through the physical training towards the principles, the first of which was *otkaz*. Bogdanov was not content with a one-word translation, the word was a concept which we needed to embody and the way we did this was through physical training.

For example, to take a jump. In order to lift my body from the floor I must first bend my knees. I throw a ball. I must first pull my arm back in order to throw the ball forward. If I pull my arm back further I am able to give more force to the ball and throw it further. Similarly, with the bending of my knees, the deeper the bend the more force I am able to give to the jump. The direction is also important. A hundred-meter runner pulls back in the opposite direction from which she intends to run. An arrow is pulled back in the bow in the opposite direction from which the arrow will fly. This is the essence of *otkaz*.

To put this with the other descriptions we have:

Otkaz: (The refusal) a counterpoint, a preparation for the action which also signals the partner that the actor is ready to interact. Meyerhold believed that all movement has a countermovement, no matter how minute, which initiates it. (Baldwin, 1995, p.187)

Otkaz is the Russian for 'refusal' and describes the preparation an actor makes before any actual action – crouching down before jumping or reaching back before throwing. It's a kind of gestural prologue if you like. (Pitches, 2003, p.55)

They refer to 'any actual action' or 'all movement'. With a ball, a jump or an arrow the *otkaz* is clear but when I start to walk? It appears that I move forward immediately. However, if we break this movement down further from standing with equal weight on two feet it is necessary to transfer my weight from two feet to one and slightly lean backwards in order to walk forwards. Of course it is not usual for us to make this transfer of weight consciously, but it is nevertheless there. In Biomechanics, we strive to make all movements conscious, even the smallest gesture. (Bogdanov gives a full explanation of *otkaz* in Clip 5, Appendix One).

I thought I understood the concept and yet when I practiced the *otkaz* of my walk I leant backwards and bent my knees. I was producing a separate action, one unconnected to the walk. My lean backwards had no effect on the walk forward, it was not connected as the pulling back of the arrow is connected to its flight. The *otkaz* must be connected to the action as it is the *otkaz* which gives the power. Sergei Eisenstein, the film director and student of Meyerhold, offers an explanation of this connection:

This is one of the basic laws of movement, and as soon as you must make a movement with a genuine expenditure of energy, you immediately feel, instinctively and correctly, that organic law; without observing it, you simply are unable to carry out the desired movement – to jump over an obstacle or to drive a nail into a wall. (Law and Gordon, 1996, p.193)

The idea of *otkaz* is not unique to Biomechanics although the phase is. Grotowski describes something similar which Barba calls *sats*:

What one would call anti-impulse, anti-movement which Barba describes with

the Scandinavian term *sats*. And it is very concrete, it exists. It can occur at different levels, as a kind of silence before a movement, a silence filled with potential, or it can occur as the suspension of an action at a given moment. (Grotowski, 1991, p.236)

Although Grotowski's description is beginning to stray from that of *otkaz* he goes on to make the point that it is the universal existence of what he calls *sats* which can be found in varying forms across many oriental art forms. He offers 'Japanese performers, Balinese performers and the different forms of Indian theatre' (p.236). In a chapter on 'Opposition' in the same book Barba describes how the 'Chinese performer always begins an action with its opposite':

According to the opposition principle, if one wants to go to the left, one begins by going to the right.... If one wants to crouch down one first rises up on tip toe and then crouches down. (Barba, 1991, p.176)

Finding similar versions of what Meyerhold named *otkaz* in other theatrical forms suggests that it could be widely understood within a theatrical context. In Biomechanics, it is to give a clear and conscious start to any movement. Through the *otkaz* an actor is fully engaging the body and the mind. The *otkaz* is linked to the action itself giving direction and force. With this clarity before the action takes place the communication between the actor and the spectator can become more precise, something Barba finds when he explores the reason for opposition:

The performer develops resistance by creating oppositions, this resistance increases the density of each movement, gives the movement altered intensity and muscular tone (1991, p.184)

Barba also suggests that the opposition gives the movement 'amplification' which 'dilates' the movement:

By means of dilation in space, the spectator's attention is directed and focused; at the same time, the performer's dynamic action becomes comprehensible (1991, p.184)

Otkaz can be found in other theatre forms described by different terminology but this principle does not only apply to the physical action of the actor. *Otkaz* can perhaps be more concretely understood through training with objects. In Biomechanics training with sticks and balls, is done in order to prepare the actor for work with props. In our workshop in Cardiff we began with sticks. The initial task was to hold the stick at one end, approximately ten centimeters from the end, throw the stick through 180° and catch it at the other end. To begin with my attention was on the

throw and the catch. Bogdanov explained that my focus must be on the *otkaz*, the pulling back of the stick and the bending of the legs, in order to send the stick in the intended direction. The more controlled the *otkaz*, the more controlled the throw and the easier the stick was to catch.

This exercise with sticks progressed into partner work which is where I began to understand *otkaz* on a new level: as a signal to partners. The pulling back of my arm and the bending of my legs is now a signal to my partner that I am about to throw the stick. From reading my *otkaz* my partner can also see in what direction I will be throwing the stick and with how much force. This is an interesting exercise to teach to students. Throwing and catching a stick is not that difficult and it is the tendency of the students to lose focus on the *otkaz* and rely on the rhythm of the backward and forward motion to successfully sustain the task. This lack of concentration is revealed when the pairs move into a bigger group of five or six. Now with no pattern and as many sticks as there are members of the group, the students only have the *otkaz* to know when the stick is coming. Another common mistake at this stage is to give a clear *otkaz* but the person receiving the stick has not read it. The communication must be two-way, one partner to give a signal and the other to receive. The partners cannot work in isolation. In this situation, despite the clarity of *otkaz*, the stick will fall. Your partner must understand your signal.

In Cardiff in 1995 I began to understand the *otkaz* as pre-movement which gives the action its direction and power. I understood how *otkaz* could be used to signal and read signals of your partner to understand their actions and intentions. I understood that *otkaz*, as with everything in Biomechanics, needed to take place with the whole body. Despite my level of understanding and the physical training of tasks to help me embody *otkaz*, I still found with movements where the refusal was not so 'organic', such as walking, difficult. My *otkaz* still felt clunky and disconnected to the action. At this stage Bogdanov moved to teach us about the 'central point' or 'command point'.

It is not unusual for a technique to have a central point, a point from which all moves

are organized. In Capoeira it is located in the pelvis giving a low centre of gravity, and the same with Judo, Kung Fu and some other Oriental martial arts.

Biomechanics calls its central point the 'commanding point' and it is located in the solar plexus, in the centre of the body, where the rib cage joins the sternum. This high central point lifts the actor giving a stature similar to a ballet dancer rather than a martial artist. Bogdanov taught me to be able to isolate this commanding point and at the same time to understand how it connected all the other parts of my body. By moving the commanding point back, as if pulling out through my back I noticed how my shoulders and arms were now in front of me and my head started to look down. My legs also bent, creating a concaved effect to my whole body. In the reverse, when I moved my commanding point forward my arms and shoulders moved back, my head looked up, my hips moved back. This exercise helped me to locate my commanding point and to understand how it connects all parts of my body. 'It's all in relation to the commanding point which is the point of orientation which makes all your moves precise' (Bogdanov workshop, Clip 6, Appendix One). Bogdanov gives a fuller explanation of the commanding point in Clip 7, Appendix One.

Once this learning had been established, Bogdanov now told me to use my commanding point as the start of each *otkaz*. It was this understanding of my commanding point and how that connected my body that allowed me to connect the *otkaz* of a movement that appeared to have no organic *otkaz*. This is my internal spring which must be pulled back in order to release the movement. By following these physical tasks, it is possible to understand how my *otkaz* connected to each action.

I now move forward in time to the performances of *Fewer Emergencies* and to answer my previously posed question: How does *otkaz* contribute to the final performance? It was commented on several times in the audience feedback about the strength of the ensemble and 'rhythmical element'. To give a flavour:

1. Great juxtaposition of humour and horror within the play itself and brought home by great ensemble physical theatre. (Audience member, LBT, Huddersfield, 23/5/16)

2. All the actors in command of the nuances of their individual and collective expression – lovely synchronicity between them. (Audience member, Square Chapel, Halifax, 26/5/16)

3. Fluidly moving as one unit whilst conveying meaning. Making us think. (Audience member, Square Chapel, Halifax, 26/5/16)

It is *otkaz* which is the basis of this ensemble movement. The actors learn to constantly read where the actions of their partners will be taking them next, they are able to predict each movement. This creates the foundation to build a shared rhythm between the actors. Pitches explains it well when he says:

‘And’ [or *otkaz*] is the upbeat before any phrase of music. It’s the sign a conductor gives you to get ready for the beginning of the music. In biomechanics this upbeat is visible in the physical frame of the actor as he prepares for the action itself. (2003, p.123)

It is this upbeat which allows a continual physical communication between the actors, building their individual scores with each other, creating one score which is like a piece of music:

Like the instruments of the orchestra, Meyerhold’s performers function not as isolated individuals, but as part of a larger artistic enterprise; the production. It also, however, shows an appreciation of the role of the individual within the performance process: it is the unique sounds of the individual instruments which work together to create the orchestral voice. (Skinner, 2013, p.57)

The smallness of the *otkaz* allows the actors their clear individual scores, allows these to read and be read by their partners, which builds to the larger artistic enterprise of the orchestral voice. It is this first idea of the refusal of a movement that builds to form that is recognized as ensemble.

The concept of *otkaz* can also be used in a broader sense than the physical action. One might think in terms of the *otkaz* of the play, or the *otkaz* of a character. Within the frame of this research I played with this idea in the production of *Fewer Emergencies*, using *otkaz* as a directorial approach to the whole piece, something I might not have chosen to do outside of the research. Once the audience was seated the actors entered to a white back drop, four metres square with an equal sized white floor. The actors, as themselves, set their props at the side of the floor, where

the audience could see them. Once all the props were set and the actors were ready they took up the 'neutral position' at the edges of the white floor. (*Whole Blue Sky*, Clip 8, Appendix One). The neutral position in biomechanics is: *feet in parallel shoulder width apart, weight ever so slightly forward, so that you could fit one piece of paper under your heels. Hands held in parallel to the sides of your legs with your fingers pointing towards the floor, hands held, not left to hang. Pulled up through your central point. Shoulders back, chest open. Head placed on top of your spine. Eyes look calmly on a fixed point straight ahead. The face is calm.* Bogdanov offers a full description in clip 9, Appendix One. The neutral position is a position of readiness, an active position. From this position, it looks like something is going to happen. '...the position suggests that there is a perspective to action' (Bogdanov workshop, Clip 10, Appendix One). The actors held the neutral position before beginning the action to communicate this perspective to the audience.

By taking the audience through this beginning we were showing them the *otkaz* for the play. By showing them the setting of the props it was saying "Can you see, we are nearly ready to start?" We were inviting them to get ready with us, we were starting to engage them before the play started. By holding the neutral position, a position of potential, we were encouraging them to ask questions, "When are they going to start? Who starts? Has it gone wrong?". Before the play begins we have engaged a thinking audience through the technique of *otkaz*. This is an idea that can be often seen in productions today but rarely attributed to Meyerhold.

This is the cornerstone of Meyerhold's theatre. The ability of the theatre to 'start the spectator's brain working,' to 'stimulate' his 'feelings' and to 'steer him through a complex labyrinth of emotions' was important. (Leach, 1993, p.30)

The idea of the thinking audience is a concept Meyerhold continues to return to. Through an understanding of *otkaz* it is possible to see observe how Meyerhold stimulated this active connection with the audience. This first building block in the principles of Biomechanics is the refusal, the opposite of an action. My first understanding came in the workshop, developed through training, I then took the

principle into rehearsal and finally performance. By following this journey, it is possible to understand how this small, precise principle begins to build towards the bold theatre of Meyerhold. To continue on the same journey, moving from the preparation for the action to the action itself, the second principle in the tripartite is *pocil*.

Pocil

(also referred to as *Pacil* or *Posil*)

Pocil is the action itself. Even more, it is the way in which the action is carried out by the actor. Bogdanov talked at great length about *pocil*. Phases which he often repeated were 'sending the action', 'moving with intention' and 'giving an action purpose.' (workshops, 1995 – 2010). Baldwin gives us a simple but concise description of what she refers to as *pacil*: '(the sending) both the commitment to and the doing of the action.' (Baldwin, 1995, p.187). Pitches further adds to this definition:

Posil (the verb 'to send' in Russian) is the action itself. Sometimes known as the 'realisation', the *posil* is the actual expression of what was suggested in the prologue, the jump or the throw itself. (Pitches, 2003, p.55)

An understanding of the preparation for the movement through the bending of the legs or the drawing back of the arm with the *otkaz* now moves into the action itself, the *pocil*.

As is true of everything I understand about Biomechanics, my knowledge is rooted in the practice, of repeating physical exercises which result in an embodied knowledge. I began my understanding of *pocil* by moving from one point to another in the space. This exercise is so often the starting point for Bogdanov's teaching. All the principles of Biomechanics can be taught and understood in this way. To return to the Cardiff workshop of 1995, Bogdanov asked us to move from one point in the room to another but wanted us to 'fill' our movement. He told us to 'move with intention'. He wanted to see the difference between us moving with *pocil* and without. Bogdanov saw nothing, we had not understood, so he moved to the next exercise.

To better explain his point, Bogdanov asked us to move from one end of the room to the other, usually in pairs. He chose the furthest distance that could be achieved within the space whilst travelling in one straight line, in this case a diagonal. To help the actors understand that *pocil* is applied to all actions he asked us to move along this distance in a variety of ways, beginning with simple actions: running forwards, backwards and leading with each shoulder. We then progressed to ways of moving that felt less natural: on all fours with our stomachs facing the floor, on all fours with our stomachs facing the ceiling, rolling with our arms and legs out stretched keeping connection with the floor, cartwheeling and a variety of other extra- daily ways of crossing the floor. Each of the passages across the room at this early stage in our understanding was carried out with the maximum speed which the action allowed.

This exercise helped me to understand the first lesson in *pocil*; the conscious continuation of the action. With the physically more demanding methods of moving across the space the temptation of the actor was to stop and re start the action several times during the passage. For example, when I was told to cartwheel across the space I cartwheeled, stopped, readjusted my feet, looked around at the other participants and then re-started with the second cartwheel. What Bogdanov wanted from me was an initial *otkaz* in the opposite direction and then *continuous* cartwheels across the space, without any pauses or breaks, until I arrived at the furthest point.

Bogdanov was developing this same idea through all action, first the *otkaz* and then the smooth, flowing *pocil* across the room.

With these physically demanding actions it is easier to understand the continuation of the *pocil* because the natural urge is to stop. It is the *pocil* that gives the continuation. The conscious decision to continue the movement when naturally the body wants to stop provides the actor with a level of control. The same principle applies to the speed. When I am moving quickly in a straight line my *pocil* is clearer, easier to see. The pushing forward of the action is more obvious. Consider a runner. We can see the direction and intention of a hundred-metre runner, there is a definition with which she moves. When an arrow flies through the sky, it is easy to see the direction in which the arrow will fly from the moment it sets off, even before, from the moment of the *otkaz*.

You have to show the trajectory of your movement, I have to be able to read your action. Don't wander around. It has to be clear that you are moving to a specific point. (Bogdanov workshop, Clip 11, Appendix One)

This clear direction of travel is *pocil*. A more detailed description given by Bogdanov can be found in Clip 12, Appendix One.

This first exercise was carried out at speed as a way of making the *pocil* more obvious to us and once we had understood *pocil* at this level Bogdanov introduced *pocil* at other speeds. *Pocil* applies to all action in Biomechanics. The speed was helping us at students begin to understand this complex idea. The same intention and direction of the action can be achieved at any speed. Imagine an arrow flying through the sky in slow motion. The *pocil*, the direction of travel, would still be clear.

Bogdanov then took us back to the exercise of moving from point to point in the space. This time he wanted us to engage mentally as well as physically with the exercise. Before beginning the action, that is before the *otkas*, we must decide where we are going to move, consciously see a point in the space and imagine the action we are about to take before taking it. Preconceiving the action gives it a clearer purpose. The actor has decided what to do and this decision can be seen in the action.

I found this easier to understand by analysing my mistakes. When I began my move across the space without choosing a point to which to move I found myself ambling. The end point was unclear, my passage across the space lacked definition. There was no connection between what I was thinking and the actions I was taking. This disconnect between the thought and the action can be seen by the spectator. It is something I often notice when teaching students. The teacher is also in the role of the spectator and I can easily point out the students who are engaged and thinking about their passage across the space compared with those who are physically completing the exercise without connecting their thoughts. Some teachers might refer to it as 'switching off'.

It is these two exercises which build a tangible understanding of *pocil*; continuing the movement, pushing it forward with direction and purpose and consciously connecting the movement with the thought process of the actor, pre-deciding the action and consciously continuing to engage cognitively with the action. By mastering these two tasks I was able to 'send my action', 'move with intention' and 'give my action purpose.' (workshops, 1995 – 2010). I had developed a way of moving that was more engaging for the spectator.

The idea of *pocil* is not exclusive to Biomechanics. There is much research on what draws the eye of the audience to one actor above another, what fills the actor's actions, what gives her *presence*. Barba refers to this as the actor 'functioning for the spectator' and sees this functionality across many art forms:

Every theatrical tradition has its own way of saying whether or not the performer functions as such for the spectator. This functioning has many names: in the Occident, the most common is *energy*, *life*, or more simply, the performer's *presence*. In Oriental traditions, other concepts are used ...and one finds expressions like *prana* or *shakti* in India; *koshi*, *ki-hai* and *yugen* in Japan; *chikara*, *taxu* and *bayu* in Bali; *kung-fu* in China.
(Barba, 1991, p.74)

Barba sees the similarity of the idea widely used across many art forms. Meyerhold gives us the practical tools with which to achieve the idea, which in other art forms can sometimes feel elusive. A similar concept can be found in Stanislavsky's 'system'. Ruffini uses Barba's term 'the pre-expressive level' to aid his description:

the pre-expressive level could be generally defined as the level at which the conditions for meaning are constructed. In Stanislavsky's 'system' the actor's work is work at the pre-expressive level, and is independent of the director's poetic and/or aesthetic choices. (Ruffini, 1991, p.153)

Although this description differs from Bogdanov's teachings of *pocil*, the similarity is in the work of the actor. The pre-expressive level, as with *pocil*, gives the actor a way in which to fulfil the tasks set by the director independent of the 'director's poetic and/or aesthetic choices'. *Pocil* (indeed the same applies to *otkaz* and *stoika*) work on the pre-expressive level. Ruffini speaks about 'conditions for meaning', a phrase which could be used to describe *pocil*. By training *pocil* the actor is preparing her actions to allow them to be filled with meaning. This becomes clearer once the actor moves into rehearsals.

Another way to describe the conscious link between the thoughts and the actions of the actor is *to be present* on stage, a phrase used in many different acting contexts,⁴ and referred to previously by Barba. Here I refer to what Ruffini is describing when he summarizes Stanislavsky's 'system':

This was the aim of the 'system' in its infinite variations: to create a way for the actor, *before* performing and in order to *give meaning* to his performing, to be really and truly seated or standing, organically present on the stage. (Ruffini, 1991, p.153)

By consciously connecting the action, such as standing or sitting, with the thought process of the actor she can achieve presence on the stage. Barba refers to both 'presence' and 'energy' when describing the work of the occidental actor, something we can again liken to our understanding of *pocil*. The way in which *pocil* is used to push an action forward and to move with intention can be likened to what Taviani refers to as energy:

Performer's energy is a readily identifiable quality: it is the performer's nervous and muscular power....What is interesting is the way this power is moulded in a very special context: the theatre. (Taviani, 1991, p.74)

As with *pocil*, Taviani refers to the energy of the performer as real and tangible, as something that exists that is used in a specific way by the performer. What

⁴ Chaikin, J. (1991) *The Presence of the Actor*, Goodall, J. (2008) *Stage Presence: The Actor as Mesmerist*, States, B. (2002), *The Actor's Presence: Three Phenomenal Modes*.

Meyerhold has given us, through the teachings of Bogdanov, is a concrete, achievable way of moulding this power.

As a result of practicing these exercises with Bogdanov in a number of Biomechanic workshops between 1995 and 1998 I developed an embodied understanding of what Barba refers to as 'presence' or 'energy'. I understood it as *pocil*. However, this understanding was to develop further when I stepped into the rehearsal space with Bogdanov. In rehearsals, we began to work with a script which contained the intentions of the writer. These intentions could be discussed, interpreted but also agreed upon between the director and the actor. This is an approach I would have taken outside the frame of this research, however, within this context I applied a disciplined search for the *pocil* of each of the writer's intentions to start the directorial construction. This gave each *pocil* a context in which to be played, a character on which to hang, a range of other intentions before, after and from other characters to give the *pocil* richness. It is down to the individual actor within a training scenario to find an individual *pocil*. Once she has been handed a script the responsibility is now shared. The writer offers the actor more material to work with, to give intention to her *pocil*.

There are certain performers who attract the spectator with an elementary energy which 'seduces' without mediation. This occurs before the spectator has either deciphered individual actions or understood their meanings.....But neither seduction nor comprehension can last very long without one another: the seduction would be brief, the comprehension would lack interest. (Barba, 1991, p.54)

Pocil within a workshop situation can 'seduce' the actor, the writer can offer the 'comprehension'. Once working with a text the meaning is given through the lines, from the writer and the writer offers the actor *pocil*. It is far easier in this context to bring together, through *pocil*, the seduction and the comprehension talked about by Barba.

Once in rehearsals, layers of meaning begin to emerge as the director and the actors interpret the initial intentions presented by the writer. I came across many examples of this during our rehearsals for *Fewer Emergencies*. To expand on one: in the first

play in the trilogy, *Whole Blue Sky*, the character 1,⁵ had a baby, I chose to have a plastic toy to represent this. Character 1 was central to the piece and claimed the highest status, the other characters, 2 and 3, vied with each other for the attention and recognition of character 1. Towards the end of the play character 1 begins to lose interest in the baby and is about to drop it. The direction I gave to character 3 was:

‘Move across the stage to catch the baby as character 1 drops it, you must arrive at the baby before it hits the floor but after it has left the hands of character 1’.

This is a very technical *pocil*. It has a close relationship with the action of the other actor. The speed of the action will also be defined by the dropping of the baby. Technically the actors must work as one, reading each other’s *otkaz* in order for their *pocil* to come together. They need to read when the baby will be dropped and once the baby is dropped gravity will dictate the speed of the fall. Once the physical action of the *pocil* had been achieved I enriched the *pocil* using the context of the play and background of the characters:

‘Repeat the *pocil* to catch the baby but now be aware of character 2. She also wants the baby, but you want to get to the baby before her, not because you want the baby but because you don’t want her to have it. You hope this will endear you to character 1’

Now the *pocil* has much more emotional content. Character 2 has been brought into the *pocil* and character 3 will alter the *pocil* to add the new level of meaning. In this case she looked only at character 2 as she moved to catch the baby and held the stare while she squeezed the baby rather too tightly, then gave a small show of the baby to character 2. The initial connection between 1 and 3 was still there through the *pocil* but more nuance was added by the director’s interpretation of the play.

Pocil allows the actor a clear method to play out these details through action, not relying on only a thought process but having the ability to connect the thought process directly with the physical action, through the whole body. The audience is better able to read the meaning as it is communicated through the *pocil* of the whole body rather than just the thoughts of the actor or perhaps a facial expression which

⁵ The characters in *Fewer Emergencies* are all referred to as numbers. On two occasions it is specified whether the character is male or female.

comes from an actor only *thinking* the direction. In Biomechanics, the meaning without the action is not enough. *Pocil* provides a way for the details of the play to be grown physically through the actor and for the intentions of the writer, the director and the actor to be layered on the action and for the audience to be able to read these intentions through what the actor is doing rather than what she is thinking.

Providing each action of the play with its own individual *pocil* helps to develop an extraordinary level of detail, greater than is found in the script alone. It is up to the director and the actor to define an action, and with that, the *pocil* of the action. Usually a script offers one line at a time. In *Fewer Emergencies* there were five actors on stage throughout who each needed to know their *pocil* at every moment, whichever character was speaking the line. Biomechanics offers a clean way of giving each character purpose at all times because each of their *pocils* has a relation to the *pocils* of the other characters. It becomes like a musical score. Each character has their own actions to be played out but they are in relation to and in harmony with the other actors. This level of detail gives the actors security and confidence; at any moment, they know what they are doing. Perhaps, ironically, this is strangely freeing. Once the actor knows the score well she is free to play within it. Is there another way to play out the direction given whilst still catching the baby? Perhaps by turning away from character 2 rather than showing her the baby, perhaps a look to the audience, perhaps a smile to character 1? The actor can play the *pocil* within the score. It can be likened to when a musician learns a piece and is able to play it without the music. The musician, whilst playing the exact notes, is able to interpret the piece. The physical exactness of the score is likened to the notes and the *pocil* allows for the interpretation within that score. This is when the creativity of the actor or musician comes through.

To look more closely at the role of *pocil* with the director:

'Before the director can start work' Meyerhold told Boris Zakhava in 1924 'he must first comprehend the play's key idea. It is the thought contained in the play which must hold first place in our plan' (Leach, 1989, p.126)

There are many different ways for a director to approach a script. Mine is influenced by Biomechanics. Before learning Biomechanics my directing experience had largely been as a student. Since working with Bogdanov I have directed a number of

street theatre, theatre in Education and touring performances. The process I now follow is to take the principles of Biomechanics and apply them to the play, long before I enter the rehearsal space. The first question I need to answer is: 'What is the *pocil* of this play?' This is an important starting point and, as a director, I need an answer which has clarity and strength of conviction. It may be an interpretation of the writer's intention, as long as it can be justified and made sense of through the script. This initial question is so important because every other *pocil* must then feed into this overarching *pocil* of the play. This can be likened to Stanislavsky's 'super objective' of the play.

There then begins the process of breaking down the play into smaller sections or *pocils*. With *Fewer Emergencies* what is the *pocil* of each part of the trilogy? What is the *pocil* of the act or, in this case, section? What is the *pocil* of each scene, each line? What is the *pocil* of each character, throughout the whole play and then within each section, scene and line? Each decision made must feedback to the overarching *pocil* of the whole play. Securely defining the *pocil* of the play and then allowing this to feed into every smaller *pocil* means there won't be any superfluous moves and every action, however small, will be contributing to the overall meaning.

Just as it supports the actor, this level of detail imbues confidence in the director. The director's assertions are always being questioned, firstly by herself, then by the actors and finally by the spectator. Personally, I find it helpful to be able to answer with conviction the justification for each decision whether it is why an actor would move away from the table at that precise moment or why this new interpretation of the text is relevant in contemporary society. By approaching the text with *pocil* the director has searched for meaning at every level and can be confident in the *raison d'être* of the production.

I approached *Fewer Emergencies* in the manner described above. One week before the first night I watched the performance and saw a dance piece, perfectly choreographed with very precise movements and good rhythm between the actors. The movements were exaggerated, some acrobatic but I did not choose to praise the actors' dexterity. This is only a by-product of a well-trained actor. The piece lacked meaning and I was reminded of Bogdanov's frequent question: 'What is this?' The

actors had mastered the actions but they were empty of meaning, they had no *pocil*. In Biomechanics, the action without the meaning is not enough. The lack of meaning and the consideration of the research sent me back to the start of the beginning.

We went back to the start and began breaking the piece down again into its now very precise actions and we discussed why each particular action happened, how did it lead to the next, how did it relate to the other characters, how did it fit with the bigger *pocil* of the play? I used metaphor, real life examples, previous experiences, anything that could help the actor comprehend the precision of the meaning. I tried to communicate this to the actor in a number of different ways so that they might place it within the action. (Rehearsals, Clip 13, Appendix One). It is at this point the director is relying on the intelligence and creativity of the actor and their ability to take on complex ideas and translate them into a single action.

All Meyerhold's work was based on the primary necessity that every action and every speech had to be 'justified' in the Stanislavsky sense. Nothing, no matter how fantastic or grotesque, could proceed without that. (Leach, 1989, p.74)

We worked to combine the action and meaning to create the *pocil*. After a week of re focusing on each *pocil* of the play, discussing, re trying, re thinking, we filled the shell of choreographed movements. Each action now had a purpose which built towards the purpose of the whole and results in a production which, I hope, encouraged the audience to think.

The next step was to place our work before an audience:

For Meyerhold, the audience was the vital fourth dimension without which there was no theatre. The other three 'dimensions'- the playwright, the director and the actor – worked to no avail if they had no audience, for it was somewhere between them and their audience that theatre 'happened'. (Leach, 1989, p.30)

By applying *pocil*, the actors are communicating to the audience the key idea of the play through meaningful action. Each intention is presented to the audience through speech and physical action, which are precise and clear. The actions of the actor's weave together to create more complex meanings and subtle underplays. The communication of ideas with the audience is sophisticated and nuanced with a richness and depth found in the attention to detail. By offering the spectator such a

wealth of ideas the hope is to inspire a thinking audience. This was borne out in the audience response to *Fewer Emergencies*:

1. Thought provoking and a rollercoaster of what I describe as a 'pleasant discomfort' (Audience member, The Met, Bury, 17/5/16)
2. Very absorbing and engaging. Visually stunning and left me feeling confused and partly wanting more. Food for thought. (Audience member, LBT, Huddersfield, 23/5/16)
3. This was a very interesting sociological perspective on the middle-class family, brought out particularly by the style of theatre used. (Audience member, Square Chapel, Halifax, 26/5/16)

The first two audience comments demonstrate that the piece provoked an uncomfortable engagement with the play. They don't mention the individual building blocks, which is what I intended. The audience shouldn't be aware of the component parts but they should be able to understand the *pocil* of the play. The key ideas are being picked up and thought through as they watch in their 'pleasant discomfort'.

Pocil and *otkas* are the first two parts in the tripartite structure which together form the fundamental principles of Meyerhold's actor training technique. They create precision and clarity of movement and build a meaningful engagement with an audience. However, the first two cannot successfully exist without the third part: *stoika*.

Stoika

(also referred to as *Tochka*)

In its simplest form *stoika* is the full stop at the end of the phase of movement, where *otkaz* is the preparation and *pocil* the action. As with *otkaz* and *pocil*, *stoika* is carried out with the whole body, a complete stop. *Stoika* is sometimes referred to as *tochka*. In Bogdanov's workshops these two terms were interchangeable. Here I will be using *stoika*. Baldwin gives us an explanation of both:

Tochka: (a point in space, a period at the end of the sentence) or
Stoika: (a stance) These two terms are often used interchangeably. Both refer to the completion of the action at a specific point in space and time. (1995, p.188)

Pitches also offers a description but here he suggests a stop with continuation:

Tochka marks the end point of a cycle of action. It is as a kind of frozen epilogue, but an epilogue which always suggests a new start. (Pitches, 2003, p.55)

The *stoika* (or *tochka*) is the end of the phase of movement, the end of the *pocil*, but each *stoika* comes before the following *otkaz*, or the preparation for the next *pocil*. Therefore, the stop is not a complete end. The next action is about to happen. It is important to keep this theme of continuation whilst acknowledging the end of the phase.

The phase is part of a continuous movement, we have to keep the dynamic at the end of the *tochka*, we have to see that there is a possibility for a new action, a new *pocil*...an intention, to see an intention in the still pose. (Bogdanov workshop, Clip 14, Appendix One)

Each phase of action needs a *stoika* to give it clarity of meaning and form. However, without the possibility to continue the *pocil*, a performance would quickly become a jarring, incoherent set of individual movements. The *stoika* should not break up the action. The *pocil* must flow but the *stoika* and *otkaz* offer an outline to the *pocil* so it can be easily read by the audience.

A moment of stillness, an elegant counterpoint to the physical activity. However, the body, even in stillness, is never in repose. It continues to radiate the dynamic energy of readiness for the next action'. (Baldwin, 1995, p.188).

My understanding of *stoika* began in Cardiff. Bogdanov began by asking us to walk from point to point in the room. He told the group to have a clear stop, with the whole body, once we reach our chosen point in space. He asked us to notice everything about our bodies. What I remember from this time and what I see when I teach my students is that a complete stop is actually quite hard to achieve. I found my arms had a small swing, particularly my fingers, they wanted to fidget, whilst I was in what I thought was my moment of stillness. For instance, I adjusted my top and moved my hair out of my face. What I noticed was a lot of movement while I was trying to be still. A examples can be found in Clip 15, Appendix One, where Bogdanov is beginning his teaching of *stoika* through a different exercise but the outcome is the same.

Bogdanov asked us to extend the moment of stillness to our faces, including the eyes. The eyes are a prime way for the actor to communicate with the audience. She must therefore have full control, as with every other part of the body. When I teach this exercise I see the eyes of my students' flit around many parts of the room, anxious to find the next point in the space to which they will move. A total level of control is difficult to achieve.

The *stoika* must come after every *pocil* and before each *otkaz* in order to complete the phase and prepare for the next. To further our understanding Bogdanov asks us to take up the neutral position and hold the *stoika*.

the knees must be soft (that is unlocked), the legs shoulder-width apart and the body erect. Arms are left relaxed by the sides of the body but under control, not swinging... the stance is further activated by the actor leaning forward slightly, bringing the weight off the heels. All additional movements beyond those demanded by the exercise must be eradicated (Pitches, 2006, p.75).

Although it shouldn't be visible to the spectator, to hold this position for a length of time can be uncomfortable, primarily because the weight of the body is very slightly forward and the imbalance forces the muscles in the calves and thighs to work harder to hold the body. I often ask my students to hold this position of neutral. It is interesting to watch as a spectator. I observe a series of micro movements, each individually very small but when a group of twenty students are all making one small

movement every few seconds the audience sees an array of unintended, superfluous movements; unintended, distracting communication with the audience.

Once I began to 'notice' as Bogdanov asked, I realized there are very few moments in life when we achieve complete control over every part of our body. When an actor is able to consciously achieve *stoika* then she has greater control and awareness of her physicality, which is fundamental to Biomechanics. Once this is mastered, the performer must then achieve the same quality of stillness with a fast *pocil*, moving from point to point. Bogdanov trained this by simply telling us to increase the rhythm as we moved around the space, until we were running at full capacity. The action, or the *pocil*, was easy enough to complete at speed but both the *otkaz* and the *stoika* began to get lost. The *stoika* became untidy again; arms swayed, heads turned. The actor must work to obtain complete control over her body and hold it in stillness for this small moment at the end of the phrase of movement. It is this working at speed which allows us to understand how the *stoika* leads to the next *otkaz*. The *stoika* still exists but it is momentary, like the spaces between words on a page. The pause is not on its own noticeable but without it the sense of the words would be lost.

As *otkaz* gives a clear start to the phrase, *stoika* gives a clear end. It is like drawing a line around the action, ensuring each movement is distinct and therefore each action can have a distinct meaning. The director, with the actor, can create clear actions with which to build a scene. The same is true for the audience. Each action has a clear beginning and end which frame the *pocil*, offering a clear communication with the audience. The transaction between the actor and audience is without superfluity. The spectator is receiving the intended predetermined *pocil*.

It is, however, important that the *stoika* is not a dead stop. As Pitches and Baldwin suggested, the end point must have the potential for continuation.

During the action of a piece of theatre there must not be dead stops just pauses at the end of phases.... And these *tochka*'s occur when we move onto the *otkaz* of the following movement. (Bogdanov workshop, Clip 16, Appendix One)

Bogdanov also gives a physical demonstration of what he means by this in Clip 17, Appendix One. It feeds into the preparation for the next phase of movement. It is a dynamic pause.

As with so much of Biomechanics, the idea of *stoika* can be found in other techniques.

Peking Opera performers suddenly stop in certain positions, interrupting an action at the height of tension and retaining this tension in an immobility which is neither static or inert but dynamic. As a Chinese actor expressed it in his broken English: 'movement stop, inside no stop' (Barba, 1991, p.88)

The *stoika* is not used, as described here, to interrupt an action. On the contrary, the actor, through training, must find a way to have these moments of stillness whilst continuing the *pocil* of the play, to *continue* the action through the stillness. The actor must keep the larger *pocil* of the line, the act, the play. For example, character 3 in the moment of *stoika* when she has caught the baby is continuing to develop the *pocil* of trying to achieve higher status than character 2, whilst continuing to be afraid of character 1. These emotions, or larger *pocils*, must continue to run through the *stoika*. In this way the way the stop, which the Peking Opera performer describes as 'dynamic' can also be attributed to *stoika*.

As is true of *otkaz* and *pocil*, *stoika* can also operate at the large scale in terms of the whole play, as well as maintaining its essential role in the detail of each action. In *Fewer Emergencies* I used *stoika* as a means of communicating with the audience. It was my intention to clearly finish each short play before beginning the next part in the trilogy. I didn't want them to run together and confuse the stories. To do this at the end of each piece the actors slowly constructed an ensemble *stoika*. Perhaps the best example of this was at the end of *Whole Blue Sky* when character 1 slowly took each of the other characters and arranged them into a 'picture of happiness' on the table. One by one they were placed on the table and in turn they each took up a position of *stoika*. We rehearsed the control of the finding of the *stoika*, taking particular care to strike the same rhythm between all the actors, meaning that the moment of *stoika*, although a stop, felt part of the musical continuation. The slowness with which the picture was constructed signaled to the audience that the play was coming to an end. Although each of the characters remained still, they

were scared and the audience could read their fear. The *pocil* of fear was continuing through the stillness. One more layer; the *pocil* of fear was in counterpoint to the 'picture of happiness' they had created. (*Whole Blue Sky*, Clip 18, Appendix One).

Meyerhold created a similar, but far more effective *stoika* at the end of *The Government Inspector* (1926). Whilst the mayor is taken off in a straitjacket, the town's officials dance through the audience to the police whistles and a Jewish band. A screen across the stage states; 'The Government Inspector from Saint Petersburg has arrived with instructions from the Tsar. He demands your immediate attendance at the Inn'. The screen rises to display the town's bureaucrats in grotesque positions. They are all waxworks. 'This might be seen as the final *tochka* of the production, which in its grotesque and static theatricality nonetheless invited the audience to anticipate further action' (Pitches, 2006, p.78). Did the audience know they were looking at waxworks? Were they waiting for someone to move? There was stillness, but the uncertainty of what was on stage combined with the statement on the screen made it a particular kind of stillness, filled with the question, what happens next? These examples show how *stoika* offers the potential for continuation, how it can be employed on the macro level and how it can be used to tidy up the details of smaller sections of a play.

Stoika was the tool I used in rehearsals when working with one of the actors in *Fewer Emergencies* on a short dance. I had initially asked the actor, who had a trained in contemporary dance for seven years, to choreograph the dance. What she presented appeared untidy and without focus, a stark contrast to the precise movement surrounding the dance. Rather than starting from scratch I asked the actor to place a *stoika* at the end of each dance step. The dance immediately had more structure. It continued to flow as a whole piece but the audience could now identify the individual steps because they were prevented from blurring into each other. Within the context of the research this is a clear example of how a Biomechanical principle can be used to improve the clarity of meaning to a non-Biomechanical technique.

The use of *stoika* to improve the dance also demonstrates its effect on rhythm. It is easy for rhythms to speed up, slow down or merge together. For actors to hold the

rhythm between them, each beat must be clear. I am not referring to an actual audible beat, rather the physical score of the actor creating a rhythm. The harmonized rhythms of the actors are the basis of the ensemble, something we paid particular attention to during rehearsals. The clarity of the *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika* lays down the foundation for the rhythm but it is the *stoika* which offers the essential clarity, the end to each beat, as when each individual note must be played in order to create the whole piece of music.

Stoika is the final part of the tripartite. It gives a clear end to each action whilst allowing for a new beginning. *Stoika* applies to each small gesture and to the whole play. It is a stillness but it is dynamic, allowing for the continuation of *pocil* and the development of rhythm. *Stoika* is the vital final part to the three-part structure. 'These three parts are the very building blocks of biomechanical theatre Otkaz, pocil and tochka determine everything.' (Pitches, 2003, p.115). Meyerhold broke everything down (from the tiniest gesture to the overall structure of the play) into a tripartite rhythm. He then gave each part a name. These three parts are the foundation on which biomechanical theatre is built, from the work of an individual actor to the orchestration of large ensembles, from a line in a small scene to the formal analysis of the whole play.

Tormos

The principles of *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika* are understandably talked about as three parts of a whole. A principle which stands apart from these three and yet affects them all is *tormos*. It is more difficult to find a description of *tormos*. Baldwin from her work leading up to *The Bathhouse* offers this: 'Tormos: (the brake) the restraint which must be applied simultaneously with the forward momentum of the pacil to

maintain control' (1995, p.187). A good, basic description to begin with. Pitches extends this:

In mechanical terms *tormos* is the brake (its literal meaning in Russian), slowing the action of the machine by offering a resisting counter force.... As the action itself is carried out, so the restraining force of *tormos* holds it back. Thus, *tormos* provides a controlling influence over the action that can be measured and adjusted by the performer during the very act of performance (2006, p.79)

Pitches suggests a counter-force to the action, a way of controlling the *pocil*.

Tormos is applied to the action.

At the CPR in 1995 Bogdanov told the group to run as fast as possible towards the wall of the studio then abruptly stop as close to the wall as possible. An example of a slightly different version of this exercise can be found in Clip 19, Appendix One. The task was to keep the speed of the action all the way up to the wall and to stop without touching it. The 'stop' or *stoika* needed to be with the whole body, that is to say the entire body needs to abruptly change from extreme speed to complete stillness within one moment. When I attempted this, initially I was able to stop my feet with the rest of my body catching up in canon, creating a ripple effect with my head finally coming to a stop a fraction of a second after my feet had started the process. Sometimes my hands would be the last to find the stillness. We were asked to repeat the exercise many times, each time stopping closer to the wall whilst avoiding contact with it, all the time developing our understanding of completing the task with our 'entire body'. Here the exercise is used to impart the first and perhaps the most basic level of understanding of the complex idea of *tormos*. This first definition of *tormos* was translated in the 1995 workshop as 'using our brakes', developing the skill of total physical control using *stoika* as a tool for training.

Through this initial exercise we were training our own personal *tormos*. The first few times we carried out the task there were accidents and failures: the workshop participants slowed down as they approached the wall, stopped at a distance from the wall or sometimes hit the wall, demonstrating that the exercise was hard to achieve and there was risk involved. Through repetition the actors gain physical

control, becoming less likely to hit the wall and less likely to stumble; the actors are developing their *stoika* and *tormos*.

Bogdanov used every opportunity within the workshop to emphasize the actor's awareness of the spectator's position, this first exercise in *tormos* being one such opportunity. Within the workshop situation there is no audience unless we count the other participants. However, the actor is thinking and practicing through physical exercises how to engage the possible audience. She is developing her control of moving at speed towards a wall; an audience is likely to engage with this element of risk. The audience's attention is engaged by their perception of the risk in a manner similar to that of a circus audience observing the feats of an aerialist. Through *tormos* we were able to control our movements to keep the appearance of this risk whilst simultaneously reducing it.

When teaching my students this first idea of *tormos* I try and remain faithful to the way I was taught by Bogdanov. The first instinct is to slow down as they approach the wall, the sudden and immediate stop being difficult to achieve. It is the repetition which embeds the practical understanding. The exercise, which develops the students' embodiment of *tormos*, helps them become aware of their physical control. For the students to place themselves in the position of the spectator whilst doing this first exercise adds a new perspective for them to consider, and another level of complexity to the exercise.

My initial understanding of *tormos* arose from working with fast movement. As with *pocil*, the difference between moving quickly and abrupt stillness is easy to comprehend. Once I had an embedded understanding of this first idea of *tormos* - using our brakes to stop us from hitting the wall - Bogdanov moved the learning forward. He introduced subtlety to my comprehension as I began to apply *tormos* to other actions.

Tormos can be applied as equally to a slow movement to allow the actor to maintain a consistent tempo as it can to fast actions in order to create a sudden and complete stop. The same control used to stop a fast action can be applied to a slow phrase of

movement. 'We use *tormos* every second, it means braking or the moment of restraint....*Tormos* is very important, it helps you execute any action precisely' (Bogdanov workshop, Clip 20, Appendix One)

Bogdanov used this idea in training by telling us to walk consistently and steadily from one end of the room to a chair in the centre. Our task was to arrive at the chair after precisely one minute whilst walking continuously and keeping a steady rhythm. With my initial attempt I tried walking in a straight line which resulted in what Bogdanov remarked was a tedious 37 seconds. Bogdanov pointed out that if the actor is always keeping the perspective of the spectator at the forefront of her mind then she should try and create something of more interest. Also 37 seconds or even 59 seconds was not 60 seconds. As Bogdanov often said, an actor must be precise. Once I began to move more creatively across the space I lost the consistency of rhythm, speeding up, slowing down and still arriving at the chair after 47 seconds. It was through the application of *tormos*, which I had begun to understand when moving at speed, that I began to maintain a consistency of rhythm, consciously arriving at the chosen point within a precise timeframe.

This consistency and control is not to be confused with the separate skill of rhythm. *Tormos* is applied to rhythm in order to achieve the control. For example, when working with theatre students I often teach them the rhythmical exercise of placing their toe followed by their heel, moving from the left foot to the right. This is a common exercise in Biomechanics and is the starting point for the development of rhythm. An easy physical action to learn, the students quickly pick it up and immediately start to increase the rhythm, repeating the action faster with each step. The group find a collective rhythm but they don't have control of the rhythm. The rhythm is running away with the group. This is when the students must apply *tormos* to control the rhythm, keep the consistency and not allow the rhythm to dictate the speed. It is the understanding and application of *tormos* which allows the group to hold the rhythm and remain steady.

I now had an understanding of how I could use *tormos* as brakes, bringing myself to a stop using my whole body. I also had an understanding of how to use *tormos* in

relation to the consistency, rhythm and control of my actions. I now moved to apply this learning to my actions in relation to other objects, such as props or set.

In the same way we trained to stop ourselves as close to the wall as possible we now transferred this training to choose a precise position in relation to other objects. This does not necessarily need to happen from a fast action. It is the choice of how we place our bodies and the control we use to do this which is important. *Tormos* helps an actor to move with control through the space, towards, around and away from objects. The mastering of an actor's physical control results in clear and conscious actions which exclude superfluous movements with the intention of clearly communicating with the audience.

Pitches notes that post-revolutionary Meyerholdian productions, such as *Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922), were influenced by the Constructivist movement⁶ (2007 p.98). This can be seen more directly in the sets he used at this time, most strikingly in those of Lyubov Popova. Nick Worrall's description of *The Government Inspector* (1926) talks of the director's use of stage objects 'rebellious against their environment and their own fixed meaning' (Worrall, 2002, p.62). He also speaks of the actors "conjuring' the objects' (Worrall, 2002, p.62). Pitches goes on to ask how the actors achieved this and offers examples of the biomechanical training with sticks referring back to the fundamental formula of *otkaz*, *pocil*, and *stoika*.

When I was working with Bogdanov on the stick exercises detailed by Pitches (2007, pp. 99-101) Bogdanov said that an actor should be able to use a prop as if it was an extension of her own body, to have the same control as one would have over one's own hand (personal communication, Berlin, 1997). While it is *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika* that gives the basis of achieving this objective, it is *tormos* which gives an overarching control of these three fundamentals and therefore of the object or prop. Pitches notes that Meyerhold enlarged objects in order to 'defamiliarize them from their immediate context.' (2007, p.98). And in agreement with Bogdanov, goes on to say:

⁶ 'Constructivism brought industrial materials and sensibilities into the cultural sphere, and as such it was absolutely in tune with Meyerhold's post-revolutionary philosophy of theatre' (2007, p.98)

Whilst this enlargement of the stage properties added to a sense of grotesque exaggeration and enhanced the childlike aesthetic, it did not, of itself, constitute a liberating of the objects' potential meanings. Instead, it was the manner in which these objects were manipulated that constituted the real magic – and that, it shall be argued, related to the way the performers had been trained. (Pitches, 2007, p.98)

Bogdanov adopted the enlargement of props in our production *7 Assilon Place* (2003). This piece, written by Nathan Osgood, explored the difficulties of the process that asylum seekers are put through when entering this country. The choice here was to enlarge the character's pen to fifty centimetres long and to have the paper attached together to create a continuous sheet of over thirty metres. This choice was taken to emphasize the amount of paper work and the difficulty with writing, following Worrall's assertion of the theatre props being 'half way between function and symbol' (2002 [1973] p.62).

As actors working with these oversized objects we still needed to use them as 'extensions of our own bodies'. The studio training with sticks and balls gave us this basis. We needed the extra control we learnt through *tormos* to be able to control these objects and prevent them from appearing unwieldy and clown like. *Tormos* gives the extra control, an ease in the relationship between the actor and the object, something above the rhythmical precision found through *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika*. The accentuation of the props in *7 Assilon Place* made a point, they did not distract or appear comic.

Through *tormos* the actor is choosing how and what to communicate to the audience, for example to give the impression that a fifty centimetre pen is usual rather than amusing. Developing the principle of *tormos* gives the actor choice, choice in *how* to perform the action.

Tormos is of specific use when an actor works with partners. The wider value of Biomechanics' contribution to partner work has been noted. Amy Skinner refers to Biomechanics and working with partners, or perhaps more appropriately put, theatrical ensemble, in *Encountering Ensemble* (Britton, 2013). Skinner concurs with Britton that ensemble is difficult to define referring to 'it-ness'.

[C]learly there is such a thing as “ensemble” performance which those who participate in it and those who observe it recognise as qualitatively different from non-ensemble performance. The problem is knowing what “it” is. (2013, p.57)

Through *tormos* the actor is given a definable tool with which to bring her closer to understanding this “it-ness”.

Skinner uses Meyerhold as an example of a director/auteur who took total control of his productions ‘from the composition of the stage set, through the delivery of lines, to the intricate detail of actor’s work’ (Skinner, 2013, p 58). She then goes on to discuss how Meyerhold, whilst taking this control was able to place importance on both the individual actor and the ensemble:

Meyerhold reconciles the potential paradox of a central individual within an ensemble framework by using his position to develop a unified approach to performance, creating a theatrical model where the auteur /director and the practice of ensemble function side by side. (Skinner, 2013, p.58)

Braun (1998), Pitches (2003) and Worrall (2002) also refer to the ensemble playing of Meyerhold’s actors in the analysis of *The Government Inspector* (1926), one of the most influential productions in terms of ensemble working according to Braun (1998, p.236). Meyerhold had the ability to keep the discipline of the overall artistic composition above the individual status of the actor. The company would prioritize the ensemble for the greater good of the production.

How is this ensemble created by Meyerhold? Of course, there is not a one-word answer to this question. Skinner makes the connection between Meyerhold’s musicality and his work with ensemble:

Like the instruments of the orchestra, Meyerhold’s performers function not as isolated individuals, but as part of the larger artistic enterprise, the production.....an appreciation of the role of the individual within the performance process...the unique sounds of the individual instruments which work together to create the orchestral voice.....the integration of many individual parts into a complex theatrical whole. (Skinner, 2013 p.57)

This gives us a clear and, in my opinion, apposite metaphor of how Biomechanics brings together the individual actors to create a piece (to quote Skinner’s title) ‘more than the sum of its parts’. However, for an actor in a rehearsal space there is still a gap between the concept and how it is to be achieved. Both Pitches and Skinner

refer to the etudes and the tripartite rhythmic structure of *otkaz*, *pocil* and *tochka* (*stoika*) as training for an actor to bring them closer to achieving ensemble, I would argue that *tormos* should be added to this list of basic biomechanical skills.

To return to the CPR workshop in Cardiff with Bogdanov, one particular exercise involved moving from one point to another point within the space, continuously increasing our speed. We did not need to stop at the same time but we did have to find a shared rhythm and increase this simultaneously so the speed of each individual was always the same. Each individual could stop at any point in the space and the distance between points was chosen by the individual and did not need to be the same as the distance chosen by her partners. Maintaining the rhythm with all the partners even during the *stoika* or moment of stillness, was the primary learning of the task. When the group was moving in this shared rhythm, continually increasing the pace, Bogdanov reduced the amount of space the group had to move within. He did this by holding out his arms to create a horizontal line and slowly moving towards the group. His arms created a line which the actors did not cross. It was as if he had created a moving wall. The actors had to maintain the speed of movement within a confined space without touching each other. I applied the learning of the first exercise, running towards a wall, although now, rather than a fixed, visible wall, the limits were set by the members of the group and we were all continually moving, changing direction, stopping and starting, creating a staccato rhythm. Now the concept had developed from a start/ stop exercise to something that occurred whilst in movement. Through repetition of this exercise I developed a more complex embodied understanding of *tormos* within an ensemble setting. Through learning to read the movements of my partners I became able to use my *tormos* to control my physicality in relation to my partners. I could speed up, slow down and move any part of my body to allow for a partner to move past me. The eventual result was a group moving at speed within a confined space without any collisions. Again, the movement is precise and conscious. I learnt how to control every part of my body in relation to my partners; I consciously moved my body in space.

Similarly, as with individual *tormos*, this group control at speed can be translated to other group actions. For example, it can be used to enable an ensemble to move

together as one, allowing the group to arrive at a certain point at the same time and to avoid untidiness. An example of this occurred in the rehearsals for *Fewer Emergencies*. There was a group of four actors standing on a table at the back of the stage. One actor stood downstage, close to the audience and spoke the text. The space between the table and the front of the stage was approximately three metres and the lines delivered by the actor at the front took thirty-five seconds. The task was for the group of actors to maintain a connection between each other. They must maintain and continue their *poçil* as one unit across this short distance through their application of *tormos*, moving together continually towards the down stage actor to arrive behind him precisely as the lines end: thirty-five seconds. This must include a soft and continuous descent from the table. (*Face to the Wall*, Clip 21, Appendix One). To hold this connection between the partners within a specific timeframe whilst moving across the set requires *tormos*. An actor's ability to read her partners physicality and control her own actions in relation to the group demonstrates her understanding of *tormos* within an ensemble. *Tormos* is a definable tool for both the director and actor to create ensemble, the research element of the project gave space for this development.

After this sequence of exercises, the members of the Cardiff workshop shared a common definition of *tormos*. Bogdanov was able to use the term in a number of different training situations. Most Biomechanic workshops with Bogdanov began with the same exercise; walking from one point to another. During this exercise he would often say '*tormos*' and we would become more conscious of the control we had over our bodies and of any superfluous movements. We would think about our pace: were we rushing in comparison to our partners? Where were our partners and how should we move in relation to them? In another exercise of jumping onto and from a table the word *tormos* would apply to how we used the control of our bodies to land softly, through our feet. Moving across the floor the word *tormos* could apply to the way in which we connect our feet with the floor, controlling the roll of the foot from the heel to the toe, creating a softness and soundlessness whilst choosing the tempo. Extending this control, we could now use *tormos* consciously to position each part of our bodies in relation to other objects (chairs, tables, etc.) and then progress towards working with a set within a rehearsal context. Following

Meyerhold's dictum that the training of actors should be for performance this would be the next necessary step.

During Bogdanov's annual visits to the U.K. our ensemble of actors was small and this required us to play multiple roles. Our production of Chekhov's *Vaudevilles* (produced by Talia Theatre, 2004) saw me cast as the male, comic character of Lucca. Bogdanov was not happy with this casting but with only three actors in the company there were few alternatives. In an attempt to prove to Bogdanov that I could play this role I learnt the lines, worked out a dynamic physical score using the principles of *otkas*, *pocil* and *stoika* and awaited the opportunity to demonstrate my skill. Bogdanov would often complain of actors not 'proposing' ideas during the rehearsal process so surely he would be impressed with my preparation. My cue came and I sprang through a window in the set whilst saying my first lines and began darting around the stage in a display of physical comedy. From Bogdanov just one word: *tormos*. In this situation the character of Lucca had been thrown into the faces of the audience. Everything about the character was given in the first few moments, there was no opportunity to develop subtly and the intrigue for the audience was lost.

By the time of this rehearsal I had been working with Bogdanov for nine years. My understanding of *tormos* had developed from the initial 'using the brakes'. In this situation that same principle needed to be applied to the whole character of Lucca and the manner in which he was presented to the audience. By applying *tormos* to the way in which the character is revealed the actor has the opportunity to create intrigue for the spectator. Here *tormos* applied both to the physical action of the character as I had learnt in the aforementioned exercises, and to the script. This is not to say that lines cannot be delivered quickly, but *tormos*, again, allows the actor a conscious choice of which speed to use and when to contrast this with pauses in order to create interest and variety in the rhythm. The similarity can be seen with the previously described exercise where the actors moved from one point to another within a confined space, learning to speed up, slow down and ultimately control their movements. The same control applies to the delivery of the lines. With Lucca, although not playing at this point within an ensemble, Bogdanov wanted me to find variety in the delivery, to allow the spectator time to understand the character and for

the character to be revealed through a series of conscious decisions on the part of the actor rather than thrusting the character at the audience.

We re-worked the entrance of Lucca. First the audience heard him from a long way off, as far away in the theatre as was possible, an orchestra of nonsensical sounds that built the imagination of the audience; what was coming? As this cacophony of sound grew so did the expectation until finally – counterpoint - a head popped into the window diagonally from the top. Then began a play of climbing through the window, engaging the spectator through physical comedy. The audience could understand Lucca's intention to climb through the window, and humour came from the roundabout way of achieving this end. Once Lucca finally arrived on the stage the audience had become curious to learn more, first through sound, then through the physical comedy. Now they wanted to hear what he would say. In this example Bogdanov used *tormos* to reveal a character and build engagement with the audience, to allow the character the possibility of development. The actor needs to create a desire in the audience to want to know more in order to hold their interest. In allowing this pause or by slowly revealing a character the audience is given space to develop their own interpretation. Their part in the unfolding of the production becomes more active, they themselves have more of a role, a role in making decisions about this character. The actor does not feed them the information they need. They are actively encouraged to engage and to think. Such engagement lays the foundation for a more sophisticated, two-way relationship with the audience, a philosophy in which Meyerhold believed. 'We intend the audience not merely to observe' he wrote in 1907, 'but to participate in a *corporate* creative act' (Leach, 1989, p45).

By applying *tormos* the actors, and indeed the director, can choose how the characters, the plot or any other aspect of the play are revealed. This includes choosing the timing of a revelation. Holding back certain aspects as others are revealed, hooking the audience in, feeding their desire to want to learn what will happen next. Information is given to the audience in a controlled flow allowing the spectators space to think for themselves, inviting intrigue, encouraging participation in the creative process. Meyerhold argues for this intellectual engagement of the audience (Leach, 1989, p.46).

Whilst Bogdanov's instructions to the actors were made in a Biomechanical context it can be argued that there is a blurred line here between a principle of Biomechanics and a wider theatrical concept found in other approaches to theatre. My entrance was out of control and rushed. However, the word *tormos* gives the Biomechanically trained actor a very precise understanding of what the director wants, a definition which has come from a layering of knowledge, an embodied knowledge, building from a basic to an intricate understanding. Now within this rehearsal situation the one word of direction refers holistically and yet precisely to how the director wants the actor to change. What we are given in the one word, *tormos*, is clarity of definition developed through training, applied and tested to ensure a specific understanding within a company. James Beale, who followed the same training with Bogdanov since 1995 and is now artistic director of Proper Job Theatre Company, explains:

Biomechanics gives us a language through which we can talk about the principles of acting. It allows us to refer to ideas which can otherwise be impenetrable or misunderstood. (pers. comm. April 2014)

The layering process through which an actor develops an understanding of the term *tormos* gives it definition, precision and accuracy minimizing the possibility for misinterpretation. One word communicates a complex and intricate idea.

What we find in Biomechanics is Meyerhold bringing together, in one system, what he perceived to be the essence of good theatre practice. He brought together what he thought 'worked' in theatre through both studying the work of others and creating his own vast body of work. He divided this approach to theatre into small and precise teachable principles. If we take this as the premise for Biomechanics it is therefore unsurprising that we can find Biomechanical principles in other art forms. For example, it is possible to identify *tormos* within a musical frame.

It is instructive to compare two interpretations of J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, one interpretation by Andras Schiff and another by Glenn Gould. Both are accomplished pianists, both are admired and respected in their field, both play Bach's composition, yet each interprets the music differently. It is not hard to hear

the difference in their choices. Gould's playing of the piece is intentionally controlled. He 'holds' the music, and this engages the listener, building anticipation about what is to come next. This is not to be confused with simply playing the piece more slowly. In the Gould version we do not have the impression that he could not play the piece at a quicker tempo. He is not playing slowly because he is unsure of what comes next, he has chosen to control the rhythm, and with this the music. It is not only the rhythm of the piece but also the emotion, as when a child is holding back tears. We can see the emotion even though the fullness of the emotion is not being shown. In some ways, we can feel the emotion more strongly because it is being held back. Gould plays the piece with greater *tormos*.

Tormos is the actor's control over her physical actions, allowing for the precise placing of all or any part of the body in space giving the individual precision of movement and a choice of how actions can be played. *Tormos* also gives the possibility for lightness and softness in an actor's movement. This precise and conscious control of the body is then extended to build the shared control of an ensemble. Within a group, *tormos* develops awareness of partners' contribution to ensemble playing. Through training, actors can come to share a multi-layered understanding of control both from an individual perspective and as an ensemble. This shared understanding can be captured in one word: *tormos*. The company can then move forward into rehearsal with this shared definition of a complex principle. Once working on a production the layering of understanding continues. It is now possible to speak about playing a scene, a character, an entire play through *tormos*. The word gives clarity of definition. In a production *tormos* can refer to the overall pace or the way the actors carry the play. It is possible to see *tormos* being played by actors today, actors who have never come across the term. It is an existing acting concept. What Meyerhold did (as with *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika*), was recognise the concept, understand the effect on the audience, develop a physical understanding through actor training, define it, name it and make it possible to teach to actors.

The Études

The études are a precise group of actions which bring together all the principles of Biomechanics. In training the actor will have spent time learning, through physical training, the principles of Biomechanics. The études require an actor to understand the principles and be able to execute them in one continuous form. It is through the études that the actor begins to be able to layer the principles within a group of actions, rather than thinking about each principle individually. For example, each gesture of the étude requires *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika* and each gesture precedes and follows another gesture. The actor must be able to demonstrate the *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika* of each gesture whilst holding the rhythm which links all the gestures together with a control offered by the actor's understanding of *tormos*. It is a lot for the actor to internalise, both physically and cognitively. By being able to present an étude correctly an actor must, therefore, have a certain depth of understanding of Biomechanics, an idea confirmed by Bogdanov when asked when he discovered that Biomechanics was more than a system for training actors:

I can tell you that exactly now. I have thought about it a lot, when, finally, I really internalised the principles of Biomechanics, and I can now say that this happened when I truly came to a deep understanding of the essence of the Biomechanical études.' (Bogdanov in interview, 1995, Clip 22, Appendix One)

The études are very definitely part of the actor's training but through pulling all the principles together in the continuous movements of the études the actor comes closer to using biomechanics in performance.

Meyerhold, assisted by his instructors Valery Inkizhinov, Mikhail Korenev and later Nikolai Kustov and Meyerhold's daughter Irina, (Law and Gordon, 1996, p.99) developed twenty-two études (Law and Gordon, 1996, p.105) of which five were passed down to Bogdanov by Kustov: *The Throwing of the Stone*, *The Slap*, *The Stab to the Chest*, *The Shooting of the Bow* and *The Jump to the Chest*. Whilst

some written descriptions exist of the fragments of other études, these five are now the only complete forms left.

As the names suggest, each étude tells a short story. For example, in the *Throwing of the Stone* the story is simply that someone sees a stone, picks it up and throws it at a target. The story of *The Throwing of the Stone* is told by Bogdanov in Clip 23, Appendix One. Through the études the actor is starting to tell a story through physical action, with each action broken down into *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika*. It is the placing of these actions within the sequence of the étude which tells the story.

The first etude I learnt was *The Throwing of the Stone*. This is an individual étude, although once learnt it is carried out as a group. Other than *The Shooting of the Bow* all the other etudes are partner etudes. The études are learnt action by action, ensuring that the actor understands the *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika* of each move. Each action is learnt in the correct sequence to slowly build the étude. It is this placing in sequence which sparked my awareness of how each *stoika* leads into the following *otkaz*. The *stoika* is not a complete stop. Pitches describes it as 'a kind of frozen epilogue, but an epilogue which suggests a new start' (Pitches, 2003, p.55). The stop is the link between the individual parts bringing them into a continuous flow. The idea of linking all the principles into a continuous form was an essential lesson I took from the études, the bringing together of the individual points of learning to create a seamless form. This continuity also informed my understanding of rhythm. Once I had mastered the ability to present the étude in a continuous form I could feel the rhythm beginning to be expressed physically.

Each étude begins and ends with a *dactyl*. This rather strange construction signals the precise beginning of the étude and also signifies when the play has finished (Bogdanov demonstration, Clip 24, Appendix One). The *dactyl*, which is carried out by all the partners taking part in the étude simultaneously, is made up of two hand-claps in quick repetition. These claps serve to set the rhythm of the étude, like a metronome setting the beat of the piece for all the musicians, or in this case the actors. I have performed the *dactyl* in a group when the actors have not hit the two claps precisely together and Bogdanov has told us to repeat the *dactyl* until we are able to hear the two claps as if carried out by one person. This clarity in the very first

action of the *étude*, the setting of the precise rhythm determines the shape of the then whole *étude*. 'The *dactyl* is there to show you what the rhythm is of the action you are about to perform' (Bogdanov workshop, Clip 25, Appendix One)

The *dactyl* also has other purposes. Law and Gordon list two main objectives of the *dactyl*:

First, concentration – to focus the attention of the performer; and second, balance – to establish coordination of the body in space and in relation to the other participants before the execution of the exercise. (1996, p.103)

They also proceed to describe the physical action of the *dactyl*. The concentration described here serves as a group concentration, which becomes a signal to the whole group of when to begin, in much the same way as the *otkaz* can be used. The whole group, perhaps as many as twenty actors, heighten their concentration to become aware of all their partners in an attempt to execute the *dactyl* together, clapping twice at precisely the same moment. This group concentration, awareness of all the partners, is a useful skill for the actor and can be taken into rehearsal and performance to help establish an ensemble, developing the actor's ability to play for her partners. Bogdanov gives a full explanation of the *dactyl* including how he teaches the phase in a workshop in Clip 26, Appendix One.

I will now describe one action from the *étude*, *Throwing of the Stone*, in the hope that the description will help to illustrate how all the principles of Biomechanics are contained within each individual gesture.

The 'Jump to the Left' is the first action of the *étude* once the first *dactyl* has been completed. The purpose of the action is for the actor to face to the left so that she can prepare for and then run around in a circle. Of course, the action must begin with an *otkaz* and the legs play a significant part in this. The legs bend at the knee lowering the whole body whilst the heels remain on the floor. Simultaneously the central point or command point, located at the point of the solar plexus, is pulled back. In pulling this point back a grouping of all the connecting parts of the body occurs. During the grouping of the body and bending of the knees the torso begins to bend over the knees, taking the forehead closer to the knees. At the same time the arms are bent and move in a small circular motion first away from the body and

then in towards the head, with the palms completing the circle near the side of the face. This is the *otkaz* for the action of the *pocil*, which in this case is the jump to the left.

The *pocil* begins in the opposite direction from the *otkaz*. The *otkaz* is down and curled over, the *pocil* is a jump up, straightening out the body. The legs and arms straighten quickly to lift the body from the floor. Once in the air the arms must be held in parallel to the sides of the legs with a small gap between the palms and the legs. The toes must point straight to the floor. The whole body is held straight in the air. While in this position in the air the body moves 45° to the left.

The landing must see the feet placed in parallel with the left foot in front of the right and the two feet hip-width apart. *Tormos* must be applied to the landing to ensure a softness and preventing the actor from thudding to the floor. By applying *tormos* the actor should land lightly and with grace. The weight of the body is placed on the left foot with the right foot stabilising the weight on the ball. On landing the grouping which took place during the *otkaz* is re-established with the pulling back of the central point and the bending of the legs. The difference now is the position of the feet and the body facing the left. From this position, a slow uncurl begins through each part of the body at the same time; the legs, arms, back, neck. As this uncurling takes place the weight is transferred to be evenly placed between each foot ending with both feet being flat on the floor. The uncurling must take place using *tormos*, controlling each part of the body to move with the same rhythm, finding the final point of *stoika* in the same moment. This moment of *stoika* is when the body reaches a position of neutral (as described earlier) but facing the left. The parallel nature of the arms, hands, feet and legs contributes to the *racurs* of the position, the way the action is viewed by the audience, giving a clarity to the form of the actor's body, meaning the spectator can see the position of each part clearly. I will later describe *racurs* in more detail.

This description illustrates how the principles of *otkaz*, *pocil*, *stoika*, *tormos* and *racurs* all play a part within this one action. At the same time the actor must be thinking about his partners to move with the same rhythm, as established in the previous *dactyl*. There will also be attention to balance as the actor leaves the floor

and then re-connects without the natural use of the arms to stabilise, because the movement of the arms is fixed within the form. Once this has all been achieved the actor must begin the next action from the *stoika* of this action, and the whole process begins again with the next move; the preparation for the run. There are eighteen actions in the étude of the *Throwing of the Stone*, each with a similar cognitive and physical intensity. All the actions move continuously from one to the next with each *otkaz* linking to the previous *stoika*. (Bogdanov demonstration, Clip 27, Appendix One)

The building of the principles within each action, held together by a continuous form, begins to allow for the telling of a story: how someone is running, sees a stone, picks it up, throws it at a target and hits. This very simple scenario is told purely through action, without words and yet it is not mime. The flow of action the actor is trying to achieve within the étude allows the spectator to follow this simple story. Through the continuity of the actions the spectator begins to shift their focus from the individual action and understand the story created by the sum of the individual gestures, the overarching *pocil*.

While the études are a training method for the actor they provide an important step between training and rehearsal. In rehearsal, the actor will become concerned with communicating the *pocil* of the writer and director through her actions whilst these actions must remain firmly rooted in the underlying principles. The actor's ability to maintain this as part of her approach to acting will be the difference between an actor and a Biomechanical actor.

The études also give an actor access to emotion from the outside in. All études are performed with a neutral face. That is to say, the face is held in a calm position without any gesture attached, for example raising the eyebrows, smiling or biting of the lip. The actor must be in control of holding the neutrality of her face throughout the physical difficulty of the étude. By taking the emotion away from the face the spectator must now 'read' the body. The face naturally gives a lot away, particularly the eyes, but without this easy reference point focus is directed to the body and the actor communicates through this tool.

The Stab to the Chest is an example of this. The story of this étude is one partner stabbing and killing the other. There is a tension as the partner displays the dagger clearly, held high above her head. She moves, through *tormos*, slowly towards her partner, rolling through each foot. The spectator knows the stab will happen because the partner is carefully presenting her chest. The actors are not feeling emotion; they are presenting an emotion through a series of actions. The spectator is then able to attach an emotion to this action if they choose to do so. The spectator has an active, conscious role.

Similarly, the actor can access emotion through the physical form rather than through the feelings which originate within her and are allowed to influence her physicality. By starting with the form there is a certainty of what will be presented to the audience, a continuity of performance. It is not that the actor does not access emotion, rather that the emotion is placed within the same physical action, as with the notes on the musical score remaining the same whilst the musician provides the emotional content.

The études are sometimes presented to music. Bogdanov would often use Chopin's revolutionary étude, no.12. However, different pieces of music can be used to connect different emotions through the étude. As well as offering emotional content, presenting an étude to music provides another method for training the actor. The actor is not required to 'hit the beat' as a dancer might do, 'You don't have to demonstrate it' (Bogdanov workshop, Clip 28, Appendix One), and the actions of the études are not required to be synchronised with the music. Rather the actor must feel the music and allow the music to inform *the way* the étude is presented.

Try switching the music on inside you, any music you like, music that will help you fulfil the movement....music is rhythm, rhythm is music....Any action the actor does in the space of the stage has to be a musical movement.
(Bogdanov workshop, Clip 29, Appendix One)

Through this understanding the actor develops rhythm and tempo, particularly when maintaining an awareness of the synchronicity between partners which the *dactyl* sets at the start of the étude. The actor can use the tempo offered by the music to enhance the connection between her partners, which is again a useful tool when beginning to work as an ensemble. Another task set by Bogdanov was to take the

music away but ask the actors to hold the presence the music gave to the étude, to feel the étude in the same way without the music as with the music. This exercise nurtured a musicality within the actions of the actor and allowed the actions to flow more gently from one to another. Law and Gordon describe this when referring to the études to music: 'The objective is to develop in the actor the ability to translate rhythm and tempo into the language of movement' (1996, p.102).

The études, which encompass all the Biomechanical principles, offer the actor the step between training and rehearsal and so to performance. The sum of all these parts - the internalising of the principles within each action, the ability to move between actions quickly and with flow, the use of actions to tell a story - is greater than the individual parts. The études work on the building of the ensemble by setting a rhythm between the actors and using music to inform the shared movements and develop tempo throughout the étude. Once the actor is able to focus her attention on these fundamental principles and move away from concentrating on what action happens next, as when a musician is able to take away the sheet music, then she will be starting to understand Biomechanics and ready to take these principles into rehearsals.

Other Principles

There is now an explanation of *otkaz*, *pocil*, *stoika* and *tormos*, the building blocks of Biomechanics but this does not explain Biomechanics in its entirety. There are other principles developed by Meyerhold which are important to the understanding of his system. I will not discuss them all at such length but provide just a flavour of a few.

Counterpoint

I have found counterpoint extremely useful in a creative sense. On a very literal level it is to "play the opposite". Often the first idea that arrives in an actor's mind is

the most obvious, so play the opposite, play the counterpoint. Hoover describes it as 'contrary to nature or to tradition of a classic scene' and she goes on to give an example of 'madness always delivered in full heat, so deliver it motionless, seated at a table' (1974, pp175-8).

Within the context of this research I used this idea of counterpoint in *Fewer Emergencies*. *Whole Blue Sky* told the story of character 1's descent into madness. She gradually became more frantic, erratic and unpredictable as the play developed. Towards the end of the play she reached the peak of her madness and at this point I chose to turn everything on its head. The actor slowed her pace and started a steady rhythm. Her moves became slow and controlled, her voice became monotone. Everything about her was slow, rhythmical and controlled. (*Whole Blue Sky*, Clip 30, Appendix One). A member of the audience commented on this: 'Very controlled, in fact the control for me was the scariest aspect of the piece' (LBT, 23/5/16).

Counterpoint provides the possibility of seeing a known subject or attitude in a starkly different light, surprising us to consciously know something afresh, observing it from a new perspective. Meyerhold used counterpoint in the *Cherry Orchard* as early as 1904 in a scene which contained 'merry making in which were heard the sounds of death' (Leach, 1989, p.120). Again, I used this same idea of counterpoint in *Fewer Emergencies*. *Face to the Wall* is the story of a man who enters a school and starts shooting the children. Already shocking but how to play this on stage? I chose to play it as a game show with smiling children stepping forward to be shot, walking towards what appeared to be a game show host, with cheesy American game show background music. (*Face to the Wall*, Clip 31, Appendix One). The children were still being shot but the audience didn't know whether to laugh. They were not allowed to compartmentalize this story in their usual way and they were not experiencing the right emotions to go with the subject. 'Great juxtaposition of humour and horror within the play. Food for thought' (audience member, Square Chapel, Halifax 26/5/16). This audience member was experiencing both horror and humour, two contrasting feelings, and as a result of this a thought process was set in motion.

Rakurs

Rakurs is another important principle of Biomechanics rarely written about. Not all students of Biomechanics will be familiar with it as it is generally taught after the foundation of *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika*. Katie Normington offers a concise description: '*Rakurs* is concerned with placing the body on a plane or angle, making it appear three dimensional rather than two dimensional'. (2005, p.120). The Russian term is taken from the French word 'raccourci', a term used in painting to mean foreshortening. However, *racurs*, as with most terms in Biomechanics, has its own precise meaning which I will try to explain here. It does not mean the same as the French word 'raccourci'.

Bogdanov first spoke to our group about *rakurs* in the 1995 workshop. He stood an actor in the centre of the room and asked her to take up a position of *stoika*. He then moved around the actor, himself taking moments of *stoika*. He explained that from each position he observed the actor from a different *rakurs*. The same is true of a statue in a museum. We see it from one angle and it is different from any other. The actor has to picture what their body looks like from the perspective of the spectator: 'All the time we must imagine what our body looks like as if we were watching from the outside. All the time we have to think of every part of our body' (Bogdanov workshop, Clip 32, Appendix One).

This is, again, not unique to Biomechanics. Barba talks about 'the shadow test'. An animator will fill her drawing in black, as if a shadow or silhouette, 'a rule with which cartoon and comic strip artists are very familiar. They use it to verify that their drawings are comprehensible and effective' (1991, p.184). The animator is checking the *rakurs* of the drawing. In the same way an actor must be aware of the *rakurs* she is showing to the audience. Small changes in *rakurs* can change the relationship with the audience.

An example of this occurred in *Face to the Wall*. The central character chased one of the children across the stage and she fell diagonally to the floor, upstage right. Character 1 held the gun to her head and delivered the line. The action had found a *stoika* at the furthest point from the audience. The image was hard to comprehend for a large section of the audience and so the power of the situation was lost. An adjustment of the *rakurs* was required to open out character 1's arm, (which included

the right-handed actor holding the gun in his left hand) and to lift his shoulder and create an oblique line with his body rather than (what might be a more natural position) covering the girl. (*Face to the Wall*, Clip 33, Appendix One). This allowed for the full horror of the situation to be seen by all the audience.

As well as *rakurs* and counterpoint Bogdanov would often speak about rhythm. The idea of rhythm would permeate most exercises and became essential to the ensemble play of the actors. Balance too featured heavily as a way of drawing the eye of the spectator, creating interest and curiosity. However, these terms can be found in many acting forms where their meaning may alter slightly for different practitioners. The theatrical concept held within the word changes from technique to technique. For this reason, I will not explore these terms here. Instead, I will concentrate on the solidity of the terminology of Biomechanics.

Language

On perhaps an obvious level, the language of Biomechanics is useful within the rehearsal space. It is a very specific terminology which uses singular words to communicate complex and often intangible theatrical ideas. Other artistic techniques have developed a similar use of a shared language: 'The terminology of Theatrical Biomechanics offers actors a universal language of the body, functioning in much the same way as Italian for musicians or French for Ballet dancers'. (Baldwin, 1995, p.187). It is possible to challenge Baldwin: Italian is not a universal language for all music and ballet is only one form of dance. However, it is possible to accept the essence of her argument. A language created within a common group allows for efficient communication of complex ideas. Perhaps this shared language and shared knowledge creates something deeper between Biomechanic actors. When Levinsky was asked if it was easier to work with actors trained in Biomechanics he said: 'It is not possible to say that it is easier to work with actors who have experience of Biomechanics. But, for those who have, there is an open language, more trust, less trickery' (Levinsky, 1997). Again this cannot be unique to Biomechanics.

Staging (set, costume, props etc)

The staging of *Fewer Emergencies*, whilst not directly contributing to our understanding of *otkaz*, *pocil*, *stoika* or *tormos*, is worth mentioning, as the concepts were attributed to Meyerhold. To go back to Leach's earlier observation:

By the early 1920's M had utilized virtually every device in the theatre. The half curtain, the use of projections, the refusal to hide the artefacts of the theatre – brick walls, electric lights and so on- the snapping on and off of the house lights, the bright stage lighting, the use of music and song, the striving for few but telling properties, the refusal to 'identify' the actor with the part, the formal grouping of actors on the stage, the breaking down of the drama into episodes, the willingness to adapt a given text, 'montage' not 'growth', each scene for itself in a narrative, not one scene making another in a plot..(1989, p.170).

This could be a description of *Fewer Emergencies*, excluding the half curtain (there was no curtain). In the same way counterpoint can offer the unexpected, some audiences might find it similarly unexpected when the lights do not slowly fade out at the end of the piece and instead we see the actors, in full light, prepare for the next scene. The set was stark and minimal offering the actors only that which they needed for the piece. The bright whiteness offered a way of outlining the actors, as if their actions were being drawn on a blank piece of paper, uncluttered by a complicated background or superfluous dressing to give an impression of a situation or period. The actors were what the audience engaged with, making their performance paramount, which takes us back to the training of the actor and Biomechanics.

Structure

These principles offer a structure from which an actor can build, a way for the actor to organize her material, a solid basis on which to develop an approach to acting. 'The art of the actor consists of him organizing his material; that is, in his capacity to utilize correctly his body's means of expression' (Pitches, 2006, p.53). These concepts give the actor the means to create her art. The building blocks for each movement divide into three distinct parts, each part learnt separately and physically, then placed together to create the tripartite of *otkaz*, *pocil* and *stoika*. They provide a solid foundation upon which to build performance.

It has been argued that this rigidity of form can stifle the emotion and creativity of the actor. David Allen held such a view after seeing Meyerhold's production of *The Proposal*:

The style of the performance was created by the director, and imposed on the actors...the production in some ways demonstrated the limitations of Meyerhold's approach to acting...In his enthusiasm for theatrical truth, Meyerhold did away with emotional truth. (2000, p.83)

I also created an extremely tight physical score which I expected my actors to fulfil exactly, but it is at the moment when the actors know the score that the director absolutely relies on the creativity and emotional depth of the actor to bring that score alive, to fill the *pocil* of each and every action with meaning, to combine their intellect and their feeling to create meaning for the whole piece and have the strength and stamina to continue this throughout the play: '[the actor has] to be able to hold the *pocil* for two and a half hours... not to switch off'. (Bogdanov workshop, clip 34, appendix 1). Pitches offers us an understanding of how a certain predetermined form can facilitate creativity: 'It is not that a clear and predetermined formal vision of a scene eliminates its emotional truth, but that 'theatrical' form precedes emotional content in Meyerhold's thinking' (2006, p.69). Pitches is echoing Meyerhold's sentiments that first the external structure must be built before the emotional content can flourish.

Micro and Macro

The tripartite structure offers more than the function of building the external score. The learning of the principles begins in the workshop, with the actor concentrating on the smallest gesture; a simple walk from one point to another, sitting on a chair, the placing of the hand on the floor.

What is this structure for? It's there so it's easier for you to *build* your movements. Like in music, we count the notes. And it's the same for an actor's movements. (Bogdanov, 1999)

Bogdanov is suggesting the path towards the macro, the idea of building to something greater than the sum of its parts. From these small beginnings and by remaining true to the same structure, an actor can build an entire score, knowing that each move has purpose, that nothing is superfluous, that each action moves the performance towards the predetermined overarching *pocil* of the play in its entirety.

At the same time the director can use these concepts to approach the play, from the very first reading, to help answer the key questions: What is this play about? What does the writer mean? What are we telling the audience? By searching for the *pocil* of the play a director finds a strong through-line which will serve to carry a strength of purpose that can filter into each character, each scene, each line. By considering the *otkaz* for the play the director can find a clear beginning to the play. In a fairly naturalistic sense questions can be addressed, such as: What is the background to the characters? What has happened to them before the start of the play? What brings about the situation which starts the play? In a broader sense of understanding the motivation of the writer similar questions could be asked, such as: What has been written previously? What brought the writer to this subject matter? How relevant is it to a contemporary audience? Perhaps these appear to be ordinary questions for a director to be asking but there is clarity in the structure. It is not the asking of the questions or indeed the answers which is relevant here, rather that there is a clear framework within which the director or actor asks these questions. I understand the *otkaz* for the play. I am searching for the *pocil* of the play. I am now finding a *stoika* for the play.

Finding the *stoika* is important. Before embarking on the performance, it is helpful for the director to know how it will end. The whole *pocil* of the play can be lost if it is left to fade out, to continue vaguely to an unprecise point. The final *stoika* is the image the audience is left with. Like the final word, it is held in the mind for longer and gives a finality to the whole piece. Just as the *stoika* provides the end of the single action it also provides the end of the total action of the play. Micro to macro. 'What is true at the microcosmic scale is also true at the macrocosmic scale – *otkaz*, *pocil* and *tochka* still prevail' (Pitches, 2006, p.77). The knowledge an actor or director gains within the workshop when her focus is on one particular gesture can be transposed to the macro level.

Separate from and yet relevant to each principle is *tormos*. It determines the quality of movement formed by the tripartite. *Tormos* is like the baton of the conductor, providing the ability to speed up, slow down, keep the harmony of the ensemble and react to the live situation presented by the audience. Equally, the use of *tormos* at

both the micro level and the macro level is consistent. An actor can use *tormos* in one step to cause a foot to fall precisely with her partners, arriving at a certain point in beautiful synchronicity, or a director can ask for *tormos* to be applied to the whole ensemble as they nervously rush through the first night.

The clear structure, understood by actors and director, allows for a disciplined approach to a performance which ultimately leads to a clarity of communication with the audience. Yet the audience does not see each individual action in three parts, they do not understand how all five actors have arrived at the same point on the same beat, the micro is not obvious to the spectator. It is this attention to the micro that enables the actors to present the macro as intended.

Conclusion

How can Meyerhold's Biomechanics be used in contemporary British theatre? To answer this, I have subdivided this into two further questions: 1. What are the fundamental principles of Biomechanics? 2. How can these principles be used to create contemporary British theatre?

The purpose here has been to set Biomechanics within a contemporary British theatre context, to pull the training process out of the workshop and onto the stage (but not the Russian stage of the 1920's) and to question whether Biomechanics can be used by today's actors, directors and be appreciated by a contemporary audience.

The fundamental principles of Biomechanics are *otkaz*, *pocil*, *stoika* and *tormos*. These are not the only principles of Biomechanics, there are others; *counterpoint*, *rakurs*, and the *etudes*, all of which build towards a Meyerholdian theatre. Biomechanics also influences the staging, set, costumes, indeed the overall design by placing the actor at the centre of the theatre making process. Therefore, the set must be designed to serve the needs of the actor, not as decoration. The lights must light the movements of the actor, the creation of atmosphere is secondary to this

primary purpose. The costumes must be comfortable and easy to move in rather than telling the audience the history of the character.

These principles allow the director and the actor to break down the process of creating theatre into definable pieces. By precisely forming each movement the actor can build to a more clearly constructed physical whole. Applying the principles to each aspect of the process, lighting, set etc., gives consistency, building to a production with a clarity of form and meaning.

Using measures of appraisal applied to contemporary theatre the project has been a success. The performances sold to an overall 83% capacity (despite very minimal marketing), the audience feedback demonstrated a level of intellectual engagement; 1. 'An enjoyable way to challenge thought', 2. 'An excellent way to provoke thought' (audience members, Square Chapel, Halifax, 26/5/16) which was also echoed in the after-show discussions: 'I saw a really beautiful clarity in space, an embodied awareness in everyone, a directionality in space' (Hilary Elliott, Clip 35, Appendix One). The actors stayed with the project for two and a half years without any pay which perhaps demonstrates they felt they were benefiting from the process. As their director, I have seen a marked improvement in their ability over the period. Do these measures demonstrate success?

As a director, and perhaps this is the only stance I can take with real authority, I have found that by applying the four principles to each part of the theatre making process, I have been able to strip back the production to its essence. The process began in training, with the actors understanding how to break each action into a precise tripartite of *otkaz*, *pocil*, *stoika* and then apply *tormos* to control each action. I then moved to apply these same principles to the text, asking the question; 'What is it about? What is the *pocil*? If that is what the play is for, then what needs to happen in the first part, the first scene, the first line, the first action?' These principles offer a method by which to locate the central meaning within a play which can then be broken down to the individual actions of the actor. The goal has been to find the core meaning within the play and then actively build each moment towards this end, something Rudnitsky echoes:

[Meyerhold] creates his means of expression on the basis of the inner meaning of the work; he removes the skin from the fruit, eliminates everything that is extra, goes straight to the core (1981, p.541).

Of course, all plays offer different challenges. Each play will be different. Biomechanics give an actor and a director a set of tools with which she can approach any of these challenges, whether it be a Russian play from 1920 or a British trilogy from 2016. Biomechanics gives us a system through which to construct the actors score and an actors quality of movement. It also offers a way to find the meaning in a play. Once purpose has been found it can be clearly communicated to the spectator.

The spectator was of paramount importance to Meyerhold. Without the audience, the theatre would not exist. (Leach, 1989, p.30) However, he did not want an audience sitting passively, he wished to affect an audience:

The production does not show characters or a conventional story line in which we can and should believe, it presents us with an essential theatricality which grabs us by the lapels, teases us to know more, allures us, startles us, but above all shares with us a delight in the theatricality of theatre (Leach, 1989, p.174).

Biomechanics gives us the building blocks with which to attempt to create such theatre. Ultimately each piece of theatre is a live form existing only in the moment in which it is played. The audience is made up of each spectator's subjective view, although there might well be a majority opinion. Meyerhold's view was that his theatre had, at its heart, the purpose of disrupting the status quo, the received way of thinking:

If everyone praises your production, almost certainly it is rubbish. If everyone abuses it, then perhaps there is something in it. But if some praise and others abuse, if you can split the audience in half, then for sure it is a good production (Gladkov, 1974, p.108).

In which case, we are looking for a variety of responses, or responses that we cannot guess: 'Your play nearly gave me a panic attack. Well Done', 'Well that was totally unexpected,' 'Made me uncomfortable.' (audience members, Square Chapel, Halifax, 26/5/16). I do not profess to have achieved theatre of the standard of Meyerhold, I am in many ways repeating what he innovated, but in doing this I have discovered, or rather re- discovered, an approach to theatre which engages the audience and grabs them by the lapels.

By placing this technique on the contemporary stage, it has necessarily become contemporary British theatre, but is this useful or needed by today's theatre makers? The 'In-Yer-Face' genre of writers are asking for something that will shock the audience, that will force them to take notice. Crimp is doing this through simplicity of character and taboo subjects. Biomechanics offers an approach which doesn't let these numbered characters become two dimensional and merely narrators. The physicality of Biomechanics adds layers to Crimp's characters whilst not cluttering them with internal psychology. The taboo subjects of mental illness and child killing are given a stark outline by the clarity of movement, the bright lights and the plain set. The spectator is unlikely to misunderstand what is being said, the horror of the truth Crimp is telling us about contemporary society cannot be covered up. It is in this respect that Biomechanics can be of use to the British contemporary Theatre, to those theatre makers who wish to awaken the audience to a new angle of what they see within our society.

Contemporary theatre is always keen to move forward, to find the next 'new thing', to innovate. Ironically, Biomechanics was precisely this 'new thing' for some years after 1995 when it first arrived in the U.K. I believe theatre *should* do this; push forward, break boundaries, take risks. Was this not exactly what Meyerhold was trying to do, fight against safe theatre where the audience sat comfortably in the dark with their minds wandering? Like Meyerhold, I believe that theatre should present challenges. I want the theatre to surprise the audience, to make them sit up, to stimulate them into talking about the production days later. Often the way to achieve this is through trying something that no one else has ever tried before, but the artist should not forget the craft underlying any great innovation. Biomechanics offers the actor and the director the structure through which to innovate, a solid base on which to build new ideas. Biomechanics clearly defines aspects of theatre art which almost defy definition; ideas about energy and meaning can be communicated precisely by the word *pocil*, trying to describe a certain quality of movement can be summed up with the word *tormos*. This system, with all its precision and rigour, with the actors' and director's ability to apply the principles to each stage of the process, ultimately gives the company a quality to their work which is more than the physical components of lighting, set and costumes. Biomechanics gives the actor and the

director a craft which can be used to create theatre. And this is why it is relevant to contemporary British theatre.

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Appendix 1

You can view these clips online at:

<http://www.properjob.org.uk/appendix1>

Clip 1 - Whole Blue Sky, *Fewer Emergencies*. (Crimp, 2005).

Clip 2 – Face to the Wall, *Fewer Emergencies*. (Crimp, 2005).

Clip 3 – Fewer Emergencies, *Fewer Emergencies*. (Crimp, 2005).

Clip 4 - Work in Progress, Scene from *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (Neilson, 2007).

Clip 5 - Bogdanov workshop, Full description of *otkaz*.

Clip 6 - Bogdanov workshop, Bogdanov quote on the commanding point.

Clip 7 - Bogdanov workshop, Bogdanov's full description of the commanding point.

Clip 8 – *Whole Blue Sky*, *Otkaz* in performance.

Clip 9 - Bogdanov workshop, Bogdanov's description of the neutral position.

Clip 10 - Bogdanov workshop, Quote from Bogdanov on the neutral position.

Clip 11 - Bogdanov workshop, Quote from Bogdanov on *pocil*.

Clip 12 - Bogdanov workshop, Description of *pocil* from Bogdanov.

Clip 13 – *Fewer Emergencies* rehearsals, Filling the *pocil*.

Clip 14 - Bogdanov workshop, Quote from Bogdanov on *stoika*.

Clip 15 - Bogdanov workshop, Students beginning to learn *stoika*.

Clip 16 - Bogdanov workshop, Quote from Bogdanov on the continuation of *stoika*.

Clip 17 - Bogdanov workshop, Demonstration of how *stoika* continues into *otkaz*.

Clip 18 – *Whole Blue Sky*, *Stoika* in performance.

Clip 19 - Bogdanov workshop, Example of the running at the wall exercise.

Clip 20 - Bogdanov workshop, Explanation of *tormos*.

Clip 21 – *Face to the Wall*, Example of *tormos* in performance.

Clip 22 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7eE0EaOrlo&list=PL990518B9B1FFCD1B>
Interview with Bogdanov, Understanding of études.

Clip 23 - Bogdanov workshop, Description from Bogdanov of the *Throwing of the Stone*.

Clip 24 -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrkB_rcQNzM&index=14&list=PL59BEB9FB40A55F2C
Bogdanov demonstrates the *dactyl*.

Clip 25 - Bogdanov workshop, Quote from Bogdanov relating to the *dactyl*.

Clip 26 - Bogdanov workshop, Teaching the *dactyl*.

Clip 27 -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrkB_rcQNzM&index=14&list=PL59BEB9FB40A55F2C
Bogdanov, *Throwing the Stone*.

Clip 28 - Bogdanov workshop, Quote from Bogdanov on music in the étude.

Clip 29 - Bogdanov workshop, Music within movement.

Clip 30 - *Whole Blue Sky*, Counterpoint within performance.

Clip 31 - *Face to the Wall*, Counterpoint in performance.

Clip 32 - Bogdanov workshop, Explanation of *racurs*.

Clip 33 – *Face to the Wall*, *Racurs* in performance.

Clip 34 - Bogdanov workshop, Staying inside the process.

Clip 35 - Work in progress, After show discussion.

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