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Re-Discovering Meyerhold's Biomechanics: A Principle- Based Approach in Contemporary Britain

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the benefits and limitations of Russian theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold's actor training system biomechanics in contemporary Britain. Through a series of Practice Research Workshops and Case Studies I present a new model of biomechanical training which centralises the principles of the system. It has been specifically designed to be implemented into a contemporary actor training context in Britain, and can be used in workshops or integrated into a production's rehearsal schedule.

The model encourages participants to redesign the étude *Throwing the Stone,* embedding the principles of biomechanics through the process. The research highlights the importance of three embodied insights that enable biomechanics to be accessible to contemporary actors. The first embodied insight maintains focus on the principles of biomechanics within the training, offering a dual understanding of purpose; Narrative Purpose and Mechanical Purpose. The two uses of Purpose within the model allow a consistent consideration of the principles. The second is to utilise the actor's imagination to give abstract objects and ideas qualities they can use to benefit their engagement with the Purposes. Thirdly, this research suggests that the collaboration engendered from the conversations between the participants working in a group enabled them to work as an ensemble which proved to be an essential part of the process. Through the application of each of these ideas, actors can use the model to engage with biomechanics.

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CONTENTS

RESEARCH AIMS & OBJECTIVES

This thesis aims to discuss the issues with the accessibility of biomechanics to contemporary British actors. It investigates what is at the core of the training system that can be utilised in a contemporary actor training setting. This is explored through a discussion which highlights the limitations of the system, presenting the key concerns with accessibility, which were investigated through Practice Research workshops. These workshops uncovered three embodied insights which allowed participants to engage in biomechanical training whilst still retaining the principles of Meyerhold's system. This is a new method of biomechanical training which can be implemented into practical workshops for contemporary actors in Britain.

As a Practice Research submission there are two components to this thesis which need to be accessed. The written component is on the pages that follow. In addition, you will need to access to the following website which contains all of the practice material collated:

https://lmfielding.wixsite.com/lucyfielding

To enter the website please use the password: FieldingHull21

Raw footage and Video extracts of the Case Studies can be found via the following box link:

https://universityofhull.box.com/s/bingv9syyoue38d7ojq20lm749cq6agp

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

This thesis presents a new model of actor training that is derived from Russian theatre director Vsevolod Emilievich Meyerhold's own actor training programme, biomechanics.

The project's initial aim was to find new methodologies that allowed biomechanics to be utilised in the UK. This idea was born from my own training in biomechanics which simultaneously highlighted the capabilities of the system as a method of training actors (in aspects such as focus, rhythm, and ensemble) but equally how ill equipped it was to be used in its original format. Essentially, biomechanics has currency for a contemporary actor but needed to be redeveloped to suit the demands of its new context (21 Century Britain).

The outcome of the research was the creation of a successful new approach to biomechanical actor training. The new model, as presented in this thesis, can be used as part of a rehearsal process and/ or a workshop(s). It uses one of the études, *Throwing the Stone,* but reimagines the pedagogical approach. Actors are asked collectively to create a movement sequence which adheres to the narrative of throwing a stone and then to add principles to the sequence in layers. This crucially allows for a more accessible approach as it does not require the actors to create a pre-defined movement sequence. The importance of this is that actors are no longer reliant on expensive biomechanical training, or trying to access material which explains how to engage with biomechanics. Furthermore, the accessibility of the new model allows biomechanics to be used by disabled as well as able bodied actors.

Format and Presentation of Research

This research is presented in three categories that best demonstrate the new biomechanical pedagogical approach; 1) The context that informed the decision to develop a new model, 2) The Model as it developed, 3) The archive of research which informed the entire process. The success of the workshops, in developing a new model, occurred early in the process and therefore the focus of the research became centered on exploring this work as opposed to continuing new or alternative models of training. This is important to note as it gives a clearer understanding of why certain aspects of Meyerhold's training and methods were used in place of others.

Aims and Outcomes of Research

The overall goal of this research, as noted above, was to explore and hopefully establish a new model of biomechanical training that took into consideration the time limitations of contemporary actors in the UK. These explorations needed to be based in Practice Research to explore the physical and theoretical implications of altering the format of biomechanics. Therefore, different approaches would be taken until a method that met these requirements was developed.

It was part of the first workshop that a successful new model of biomechanical training was created and as a result of this, the remaining workshops focused on exploring this to ensure that it could answer meet the demands of my research questions:

- What are the limitations and benefits of current biomechanical training practices in the UK? Could alternative models address the limitations outlined in order to make it more accessible?
- How would a new model of biomechanics training situate itself within clearly established pedagogical frameworks and what are the implications of diversification?
- How could a new model of training contribute to the sustainability of biomechanics in the UK?

- What would a new biomechanical training model entail and how would it be deployed?

The workshops were therefore an exploration of what elements were being used to make it successful and how that could be used by participants in the future. It needed to address how accessible the new model is and ultimately whether the model would contribute to the sustainability of biomechanics in the UK.

Workshop Format & Materials

The focus of the initial workshop was Meyerhold's étude, *Throwing the Stone.* The études are a series of movement sequences that form part of the biomechanical training programme and are designed to train the actor in a number of skills. Each étude comprises a series of pre-prescribed movements that, collectively, train the actor in Meyerholdian principles. In order to explore this movement sequence there were a number of things to be taken into consideration; 1) specifically which materials would be used, 2) the approach taken and 3) what constituted the principles.

Materials

As noted above, I had training in this specific étude and therefore had an embodied understanding of how the movements felt from the perspective of the actor. However, I was conscious that my experience was not representative of all actors and that the way I was taught may differ from other teachings of biomechanics. As such, it was important to include materials that offered a different approach or perspective to see the possibilities of the movement and not limit it to one interpretation. There are videos of two renowned biomechanical practitioners, Alexei Levinski and Gennady Bogdanov, available to watch which were used as source material. The videos gave a clear sense of physicality and rhythm adopted throughout the movement. Importantly, despite receiving the same training the two interpretations of the étude are not the same. Both Bogdanov and Levinski demonstrate their own physicality and rhythms as a result – with neither perceived

as wrong, just different. This supports the idea that there are a range of possibilities embedded within the movement sequence.

In addition to the video footage I wanted to include written material that offered a description of the movements. The reason three different accounts are included is due to the varying perspectives they offer. Similarly, the parallels in both the written and video footage highlight the overlaps and contrasts within each interpretation of the étude. The three chosen are below – a full description of why these are included is offered in the main body of the thesis.

Andre Van Gyseghem's description of throwing the stone has been chosen because it is told from the perspective of the audience. Van Gyseghem was a spectator watching Meyerhold's actor's training and therefore gives a sense of what the audience interpreted the movements to be, as is evident from the description below:

(1) *To concentrate the attention of the pupil* -- the hands are clapped twice together in a downward movement, the arms hanging loosely.

(2) *Preparing to run*- with a jump, turn and face the right, landing with the left foot in front.

(3) *Preparing to run*- knees bent, right hand in front, left hand behind.

(4) *Running.*

(5) *To arrive where the stone lies*- stop running with a jump, landing on the left foot and with the left shoulder in front.

(6) *Return to normal position.*

(7) *Prepare to get the stone- rise on the toes and drop on to the right knee. Lean the body backward and then forward.*

(8) *Lifting the stone*- picking up the imaginary stone with the right hand, rise, swing the right arm round in a wide circle-swing it round to the left-front and back again to behind the body, where it hangs. The left shoulder is high, the right low, the right hand at about knee level. The knees are bent slightly.

(9) *Preparing to run with the stone*- move backwards a few steps.

(10) *Running with the stone*- the stone still in the right hand held behind the body, left shoulder being raised.

(11) *Arriving at the place from which to throw*- stop running, always with a slight jump, landing with the left foot in front.

(12) *Preparing to throw the stone*- swing the stone over to the left front and grip the right wrist with the left hand.

(13) *Swinging the stone*- swing the body weight on to the right foot- sweep the right arm back and swing it in a circular motion, still clasped by the left hand. Release the hand and the circle widens until the whole right arm is swinging in a huge circle from the shoulder.

(14) *Looking for the object to be hit*- the circular movement stops, the right arm (and stone) held out in front while the student looks.

(15) *Re-judging the distance*- run a few steps forward, jump and stop.

(16) *Preparing to throw*- swing the stone back, and the right leg.

(17) *Throwing*- swing the right arm forward and the left back.

(18) *What is the result? Preparation*- kneel on the right knee, clap the hands and listen with the right hand cupping the ear.

(19) *The mark is hit*- point forward with the left arm, lean back with the right arm on the right hip.

(20) *Finish*- rise, facing inward and clap twice as at the beginning (Van Gyseghem, 1943: 29-30)

By contrast Mel Gordon's 1995 description offers less precise detail but captures a clearer sense of how the actor might embody the movements. This again offered the practice research more scope to determine possibilities of the étude and how actors might benefit from the principles the movement sequence has the capacity to instil. Mel Gordon states:

(a) Actor executes a dactyl

(b) Leaps, turns to the right, and land with his left foot forward. His knees are bent with his right hand in front, the left behind

(c) The actor runs

(d) He jumps again, landing on his left foot with his left shoulder forward

(e) He straightens his body. Both arms hang loose and are perfectly symmetrical to one another

(f) He rises on his toes, then drops to his right knee. His body is swayed backward and forward

(g) Picking up an imaginary stone in his right hand, the actor rises, swings his right arm around in a wide arc to the left, across to the front and back…

(h) He steps backwards…

(i) The actor begins to run

(j) He stops with a slight jump, landing with left foot in front …

(k) The left hand grips the wrist…

(l) The actor releases his left hand, permitting the right arm to form a wide complete circle

(m) Arresting the circular movement, the right arm is held out in front…

(n) He runs a few steps forward and jumps

(o) Preparing to throw, he swings his right arm and leg back

(p) He throws the imaginary stone

(q) Kneeling on his right knee, the actor claps his hands, then cups his right ear as if listening to the result

(r) (The imaginary mark is hit) He points with his left arm and leans back with the right arm on the right hip

(s) Rising, he executes a dactyl (Gordon, in Zarrilli 1995: 115-116)

A year later, alongside Alma Law, Gordon published the étude again but with additional comments which gave further insight into how the movements might be executed by the actor. Law and Gordon state:

1. Walk in a circle.
2. Slow movement.
3. *Run*. [in a circle].
4. Accelerated run.
5. Lift the stone.
6. Run with stone in the right hand. [The stone, actually more like a heavy rock, is an imaginary object.]
7. Accelerated run with the weight in the right hand (during accelerated running, the leaps are stronger, more elevated), count one, two.
8. Stop.
9. The throw: (a) quick steps backwards; (b) choice of leap; (c) swinging of the arm; (d) final swing; (e) body is motionless and concentrated; (f) pause; (g) the hit and the shout of "*Popal!* [Bull's-eye]"
10. Run.
11. Note: This exercise may begin directly with Number 6 and proceed as follows:
12. Walk in a circle.
13. *Run.*

14. Bend down.
15. Rise, lifting stone.
16. Run with stone.
17. Stop.
18. Quick steps backwards.
19. Choice of target.
20. Recoil for throw.
21. Throw.
22. Run. (Law & Gordon, 1996: 106)

Each of these descriptions were studied before the workshop to determine where the overlaps and contrasts were and ultimately how the principles might be elicited through the use of the étude. As a result of this, the first workshop focused specifically on the narrative of throwing a stone as this was a consistent element in each of the materials used. The aim of the first workshop was to see which principles, if any, the narrative of the étude would be able to allow actors to engage with. The question that then needed to be addressed was which principles were being explored and how would that be approached within the workshops.

Principles & Approach Taken

The Meyerholdian principles that were intended to be explored through the workshops were:

1. The Acting Cycle: A tripartite system that breaks movements down into their preparation (the *otkaz),* the movement itself (the *pocil*), and the end point (the *tochka)*
2. Tormos (restraint and control of actor's movements)
3. Rakurs/ Risunok (outline of body from perspective of audience)
4. Reflex Sensibility (ability to respond to instruction immediately)

Each of these terms are directly related to biomechanical training and importantly represent either the method of obtaining a skill for actors or are a skill in themselves. They either appeared as part of my own biomechanical training, or are discussed in literature relating to the training. Collectively they instill skills within the actor and therefore this was the point of focus within the workshop. The skills that were focused on are listed below:

1. Balance
2. Rhythm
3. Precision of movement
4. A physical and cognitive awareness of audience
5. Unity

It was with these biomechanical principles/ skills in mind that the workshops were devised. Ultimately the goal was to develop a workshop that allowed access to these principles. As is explored later in the research additional principles were developed as a result of the new approach; Mechanical Purpose and Narrative Purpose.

The final structure, that is discussed in the conclusion was developed from actors physically exploring the narrative throwing a stone. The first workshop attempted to use the materials gathered, as presented above, to guide a recreation of the étude. What became apparent was that recreating the movements as predefined sequences encouraged a mimicking of movement as opposed to embedding principles within the actors. I decided to focus on the principles above all else as a starting point to avoid a continuation of mimicry, and took the narrative as the foundation of the étude. The actors were first and foremost exploring ways they would execute throwing the stone as individuals and then asked to unify their movements. This became a crucial aspect of the model as it was through the conversations cultivated as part of this method that allowed them to negotiate their movements – they were in essence behaving as each other's' spectator and providing the outside eye (risunok/ rakurs). The decision to layer the étude with the principle of awareness of audience, was due to the natural link between risunok/ rakurs and the spectator. As is explored in the body of the research each of the layers were added in response to the participants movements and decision making. All of the principles mentioned above were added in layers, allowing time for the participants to discuss each element and negotiate how they believed the movements best achieved the principles. This bypassed their earlier attempts to mimic the movements, instead allowing them to focus solely on how their movements embodied the principles encouraging a shared development on the étude. What is crucial to note is that this model is flexible and therefore each étude will differ slightly – based on the abilities

of the actors taking part. However, within this research each of the workshops saw a distinct similarity between the newly developed étude and the original biomechanics developed by Meyerhold. This suggests that the new model not only engages with Meyerholdian principles but that it additionally allows for the aesthetic of Meyerhold's biomechanics to be achieved.

Layering the Principles in a Workshop

It became apparent that there were more effective ways to structure layering each of the principles into the étude that was being developed. This required giving the actors additional information in a specific order. Future uses of this model should take the following suggestions as a guide as opposed to a strict set of rules, particularly taking into account the need for accessibility within the model. However, for the participants who took part in each of my workshops the following order of layering allowed for a successful engagement with each of the principles.

The following list of principles and order explores how they were implemented into the workshop, not the outcomes as that is explored in the workshops. Instead this gives insight as to the intention for the layered approach and how it relates to Meyerhold's principles.

1: Observe

In each of the workshops I begin by asking the participants to perform picking up and throwing an imaginary stone in any manner they wish – consistently encouraging experimentation with their movements. In the solo workshops this allowed the participants to explore which movements they were happiest with, and then they began developing the movement until they were satisfied. In the ensemble workshops this was an opportunity for each of the participants to do as the solo performers did, but they were able to witness the variety of movements from the group. This encouraged a broader range of movement among the group.

2: Audience

Participants are asked whether they have considered an audience. As is explored in more detail in the body of the thesis, the reason this is addressed is to stop them

from limiting their movements to whichever space they happen to be working in and envisaging the possibilities of a much larger space – the large theatre space that Meyerhold designed where performers are almost in the round.

3: Rhythm and Unity

Participants are encouraged to consider the rhythm of their movements first and when they each start developing independent rhythmical movements I ask them to unify them. This presents the performers with a number of challenges, but crucially it asks them to behave as each other's spectators - Rakurs/ Risunok (outline of body from perspective of audience)

4: Weight of the Stone

Though not specifically a principle it was this instruction that was a pivotal moment in the initial workshops. I asked the participants to consider the weight of the stone and how that would affect their movements. Again, facilitating discussions between the group as they begin to navigate how the weight would be physicalised – ensuring they continue to consider how that translates to the audience that they are now actively aware of.

5: Balance - Tormos (restraint and control of actor's movements)
As a direct result of the previous layer, balance becomes a crucial principle for the participants to include into the étude. Any work they have done so far needs to be balanced. Importantly, it needs to both feel balanced and look balanced – ensuring the audience can see that their body is actively supporting the weight of the stone.

6: The Acting Cycle: A tripartite system that breaks movements down into their preparation (the *otkaz),* the movement itself (the *pocil*), and the end point (the *tochka)*

Once the participants start establishing how they want to balance the weight of the stone, transferring it across their bodies, it became a good moment in some instances (but not all) to note the importance of the springiness of the legs. This is to reduce the movements becoming static and therefore losing rhythm. The étude is now beginning to add many layers and the participants in each of the workshops looked

fairly overwhelmed at the amount that needed to be considered. This is where I introduce the Acting Cycle. By doing this, it gave the participants the methods to break each of the movements down into the tripartite system and carefully consider how each of the aforementioned principles would be added in layers into the movement sequences.

Once the Acting Cycle was added it was a case of facilitating conversations and reminding the participants of principles we'd discussed that perhaps they were no longer consider. This is something I would ultimately encourage ensembles to be able to navigate without someone facilitating on the outside – as I did. Though in this instance it provided an opportunity to explore Reflex Sensibility (ability to respond to instruction immediately) as I was asking them at the end of the workshop to respond to tasks and movement requests to re-engage them.

The above list also may see new groups adding layers, and possibly in different orders depending on the needs of the group – but it serves as a guide to execute the model laid out in this thesis.

For a clearer depiction of how this was executed, see the Appendix of the thesis which includes a breakdown of the exchanges between myself and the participants – including how each of the layers were added.

Accessibility

The aim of the first workshop was to explore one of the études to understand how it could elicit these skills in a new format; i.e. in a vastly reduced time frame from how it was used originally by Meyerhold and his team. This would deal with the inaccessibility of the system from a time and financial standpoint. Subsequent workshops would work with new material to establish how those études could be altered to achieve this goal. *Throwing the Stone,* the étude used in the first workshop, was specifically chosen for two reasons; 1) I had received biomechanical training in this étude and was therefore familiar with its nuances, physical demands and the overall goals of the movement as asserted by the workshop leader, 2) access to additional descriptions are available (Van Gyseghem, 1943, Gordon, in Zarrilli, 1995,

Law & Gordon, 1996), and therefore each of those materials provide further guidance as to how the étude can be interpreted and thus offer further perspectives on how the movement could be redeveloped as part of the new approach, 3) Video footage of renowned biomechanical practitioners Alexei Levinski and Gennady Bogdanov is available – with both men offering slightly different interpretations of the movement sequence. Again, this provides a valuable source of understanding of the étude as well as its possibilities for a performer. It was this method that was chosen as a point of access to the materials.

Access to material is of particular importance as what manifested as a result of this research was the role of accessibility not just in terms of material, but actor training in general. The new biomechanical model was able to develop a training system that accounts for physical disabilities and capabilities. This is an invaluable contribution to actor training as the limitations faced by actors with disabilities have continued into 21st Century Britain. In 'The Tyranny of Neutral: Disability and Actor Training' Carrie Sandahl discusses the ingrained issues that deter disabled people from actor training, she states:

> [..] the trained disabled actor is rarely given the opportunity to play nondisabled characters. Disabled actors are told that their impairments would detract from the playwright's or director's intent for a nondisabled character. Disabled people who want to be actors learn this tenet early on and are dissuaded from pursuing training. (Sandahl, 2005: 255)

Being deterred from actor training due to the non-inclusive cultures that exist within this field, will continue to push the able body agenda without encouraging change at grass roots level. Sandahl goes on to say that, '[u]ltimately, unless training programs' very foundations are rehabilitated, current curriculum will dissuade disabled actors from pursuing training.' (p. 256) This exclusion and inaccessible training starts, in part, to an inherent notion of neutrality that exists within Western Training Cultures. At the beginning of the 20th Century Jacques Copeau introduced the concept of neutral in relation to mask work in actor training. This idea has since been used by other practitioners, including Stanislavski and Meyerhold. It perpetuates the idea

that bodies are not only capable of stripping away individualism but that it is a desired requirement of actors.

The new model developed as part of this research goes some way to addressing this issue as it encourages a shared understanding of the individual body. There is no pre-determined physical model, devised by able-bodied people, that the actors are expected to achieve. Instead the actors use the model to devise their own étude collaboratively, acknowledging and responding to what they can achieve as a group. The principles act as a fulcrum point that guide the actors in encouraging Meyerholdian practice – that is, to achieve skills that Meyerhold believed were necessary for the actor of the future.

INTRODUCTION

> Vsevolod Meyerhold's contribution to modern theatre is difficult to calculate. Judged as a director of theatre, he produced some of the enduring theatrical masterpieces of the modernist era – *Sister Beatrice, The Fairground Booth, Masquerade* and *The Government Inspector.* As an actor trainer he devised a revolutionary approach to physical theatre preparation, *biomechanics,* which is taught and practiced all over the world today. (Pitches in Braun, 2016:1)

Vsevolod Emilevich Meyerhold is considered one of the most influential Western theatre directors of the twentieth-century, with his actor training system, biomechanics, arguably his greatest contribution. Biomechanics was part of Meyerhold's vision for the actor of the future, consistently developing and intrinsically embedded within its unique social, political and economic context. Meyerhold's career spanned nearly four decades and coincided with a politically turbulent period in Russia which included the end of the Tsarist regime, communist uprisings and Stalin's reign of terror – the latter of which saw him unjustly arrested and subsequently shot in 1940 for anti-Soviet activities. At that moment Meyerhold became *persona non grata* in the USSR and his life's work was suppressed in Russia for the next 15 years. The importance of acknowledging the inextricable connection biomechanics has with its original context is due to the impact its origin had on its design and use. This is apparent when using the system outside of this original context.

Biomechanics is an actor training system created by Meyerhold which is rooted in technical discipline and physical control. Actors are taught clear physical frameworks, the études, which elicit specific responses that maintain the theatricality of performance. It is this heightened style of non-naturalistic performance that serves

as the hallmark of his theatre. Reflecting on Meyerhold's production of *The Fairground Booth* Robert Leach suggests that:

> 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: 174)

The theatricality of the system highlights Meyerhold's desire to ensure that what is felt by the actor is shared by the audience (Braun, 2016: 246). In order to create this, Meyerhold uses the following formula, which he suggests frames the actor's relationship with themselves, the director and the audience. Meyerhold states:

> N= A1 + A2 (where N= the actor; A1 = the artist who conceives the idea and issues the instructions necessary for its execution; A2 = the executant who executes the conception of A1.) (Meyerhold cited in Braun, 2016: 244)

Biomechanics is training the actor to harness the relationship between instructions which are given (A1), and how they manifest through the body (A2), through which the actor should experience '*points of excitation*' which Meyerhold describes as 'being informed with some particular emotion' – all of which is then communicated to the audience (Braun, 2016: 246). The system therefore aims to train the actor to fuse the physical body with specific emotional responses, which are then communicated to the spectator. As noted above, the system is centrally made up of physical movement sequences called études- though the training went far beyond these sequences. The programme of study for a biomechanical actor also included classes such as, 'fencing, boxing, Dalcroze Eurhythmics, classical ballet, floor gymnastics, modern dance, "tripod positioning," cabaret dance, juggling, diction, speech, and music' (Law and Gordon, 1996: 42). Each element of the extensive training programme encouraged a development of skills which were part of creating

Meyerhold's 'actor of the future' (Meyerhold cited in Braun, 2016: 245). The skills embedded within each aspect of Meyerhold's work are commonly referred to as principles, which will be discussed below.

The use of biomechanics in the United Kingdom falls outside of this origin of practice and as such implementing the system into a contemporary actor training context will inevitably alter the way a practitioner or actor engages with it as it is no longer biomechanics in its original, unmediated format. This alteration occurs through its journey from its original context to a new setting. In Amy Skinner's 'Riding the Waves: Uncovering Biomechanics in Britain', she describes this process as 'transmission rather than transplantation' (2012: 87). She suggests that 'the latter implies the lifting of something intact from one context to another; the former is an organic process taking into account origins, journey, and the intervention of individual human beings' (2012: 87). The transmission of biomechanics from one context to another and the inevitable alterations it will undergo as a result of that journey is one of the reasons why this research project will be focusing solely on biomechanics in the UK, as it allows me to offer a clearer depiction of that transmission and subsequent use in a specific context.

The use of biomechanics in the UK has raised questions pertaining to how actors, directors and practitioners engage with the system and whether that engagement still constitutes biomechanics. There are a multitude of ways to engage with Meyerhold's system and that has been a core aspect to this research. As a result of the research undertaken throughout this project this thesis defines engagement with biomechanics as the embodiment of biomechanical principles.

The principles encapsulate what first sparked my interest in biomechanics and its use within the UK. They are both the skills elicited from the actor training system and anything which could be classified as the goal or a purpose of the training. This thesis presents each of the principles as biomechanical layers, which deliberately classifies them as something that can be built upon as opposed to listing them in a specific order. This directly address the accessibility issues of the training in the UK as it allows the principles to be learnt in no particular order and that can be achieved in single sessions as well as developed through extended periods of training or multiple training sessions.

The issue with accessibility of training in the UK is centred on the two opposing ways in which the system can be used - the point at which they meet is where this research project began. The first way is concerned with the integrity of biomechanics and how it can be preserved in its 'original' format. The notion that there is an 'original' format of biomechanics which can be taught today undermines the vastly altered state the system has been in since Meyerhold's death. The second is biomechanics' ability to be used in a contemporary theatrical setting, inevitably altered. The two parts to this debate clearly stand in contention with one another as one seeks to preserve biomechanics in a format which claims to be 'original' whilst the other is seeking new ways to use the system in a contemporary setting without necessarily being concerned with preservation.

The reason this is contentious and limits accessibility in the UK is due to the way that leading practitioners in biomechanics in Britain consistently frame their work in relation to the living link from Meyerhold to themselves. The fascination with the

connection to Meyerhold allows practitioners to capitalise on the advantages encapsulated within embodied knowledge taken from practical sessions as well as situating them within one of the problematic binary training models which are explored below; the Vertical model and the Horizontal model. Embedded within the models are ideas which perpetuate perceptions over correct and incorrect uses of biomechanics and subsequently affect contemporary actors, directors and practitioners' access to the system.[1]

What I aim to argue is that the Vertical model, allegedly handing down the learning in a patrilineal fashion, doesn't exist in biomechanics in the way Verticality is understood in training cultures. As such, the hierarchy which has formed as a result of the perceived Vertical training model needs to be readdressed in order to allow a consideration of a blended approach to biomechanics, which accounts for both models of training. The Horizontal model is accessed through a proliferation of sources and does not retain specific methods or pedagogical approaches. It therefore produces a range of outcomes as the level of engagement is entirely dependent on the learner's ability to understand and to research thoroughly enough to embed ideas held within training models. This is particularly important when trying to implement biomechanics into a contemporary actor training setting as it allows focus to be placed on what benefits can be drawn from all aspects of the system as opposed to being concerned with trying to transplant biomechanics when it has already altered through transmission.

[1] To clarify, the use of the term accessibility in this context refers specifically to the way someone within the UK would be able to engage with biomechanics through any means.

This thesis addresses the following research questions:

- What are the limitations and benefits of current biomechanical training practices in the UK? Could alternative models address the limitations outlined in order to make it more accessible?
- How would a new model of biomechanics training situate itself within clearly established pedagogical frameworks and what are the implications of diversification?
- How could a new model of training contribute to the sustainability of biomechanics in the UK?
- What would a new biomechanical training model entail and how would it be deployed?

In order to address each of the research questions above this research is presented as a critical commentary to documented Practice Research workshops. The introduction explores the Vertical model and the Horizontal model, discussing how the training cultures significantly contribute to the inaccessibility of body-based practical biomechanical training in the UK. In response to this I propose a new model, which utilises a Blended approach, centralizing the principles of biomechanics within the practice. Through a series of workshops, I explored the biomechanical étude *Throwing the Stone* and developed a new model which allows biomechanics to be used as a body-based practice in a contemporary actor training setting. The model directly combats issues of accessibility and presents a method which allows an ensemble to train in time limited situations – such as a one-day workshop or integrated into a rehearsal process.

Additionally, each chapter presents new ways to consider key embodied insights which were redefined through this research process.

Chapter 1 explores the purpose of biomechanics offering a nuanced understanding of the term, in relation to the new model and biomechanics. This specifically addresses the value of purpose, presenting a new way to consider purpose in this context – which has a dual meaning, encompassing both narrative and Mechanical Purpose. By centralizing the purpose of biomechanics as opposed to precision of movement, it allowed the participants to embody the numerous biomechanical layers.

Chapter 2 presents imagination as a vital tool within the Workshops, Case Studies and the new model. It became imperative to utilise the participant's imagination in the space which gave previously abstract spaces and objects qualities to which the actors were able to respond. It was additionally used to project the actors into an imagined history giving everyone in the space access to the specific historical context within which biomechanics was intended to be practiced. By doing this the participants could consider the purpose of the movements *and* the potential of them which allowed them to use a historical model in a contemporary context.

Chapter 3 offers a new way to understand ensemble in relation to biomechanics and actor training practices outside of this system which was discovered as part of this research. The first aspect of this relates to the value of communication between the participants who developed the ideas they were presented with and embedded them into the design of the étude creating a shared experience. Re-creating an étude as an ensemble encouraged them to embed the biomechanical layers into the étude –

eliciting an embodied and shared understanding of the purpose of the biomechanical training. The second aspect of this is that this method of ensemble work removes the authority from the training space which is inherent in biomechanics (as will be explored in the exploration of the Vertical model).

The Vertical Model

In the 2016 republication of *Meyerhold on Theatre* (1969) editor Jonathan Pitches offers a new introduction in which he discusses the journey of Meyerhold's work since Edward Braun's initial publication of the book. He posits the question, 'How might the levelling technologies of the digital world affect the sharply vertical cultures of practical biomechanics?' (2016: 17). Pitches' question frames the central concern of this thesis by highlighting the Vertical training culture and its altered state in a contemporary setting. This thesis goes to on to argue that Vertical training cultures in biomechanics are problematic, due to the connotations associated with the terminology and the way that ultimately limits accessibility. By addressing the Vertical training model there is a need to additionally examine the Horizontal training model and its relationship to biomechanics in Britain.

The historical context of Verticality gives a sense of how the context of its birth has similar nuances evident in current Vertical training paradigms and demonstrates similar accessibility limitations. In *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures* (2001), Ian Watson, details that Vertical training, originally called the family apprenticeship model, began in the Dark and Early Middle Ages. He suggests that 'skills were passed from one generation of actors to the next' (2001: 3). This model

of training where older generations passed their skills down to the next generation survived through the High and Late Middle Ages, with examples such as the Burbages 'who headed Shakespeare's troupe' passing their skills on in this way (Watson, 2001: 3). In *Theatre Dance and Performance Training* (2012), Pitches expands on Watson's concept of the Vertical Model. He states:

> Verticality is the embodied transmission of training knowledge and skill from one generation to the next, which allows for a deep and long-lived relationship between trainer and trainee. Because of its association with generational transmission, verticality is often referred to as occurring within the training 'family' – from surrogate to father to son but much less often from mother to daughter. Verticality is therefore double-edged – a guarantor of the integrity of highly specialised training regimes and a mechanism for retaining the status quo. (Pitches, 2012: 398)

As noted above, Pitches highlights that through a Vertical Model there is a retention of integrity in specialised training. What this suggests is that those who are within the Vertical training model are repeating patterns of practice in order to maintain *practice structures*. In his article 'Embodied Research: A Methodology Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies' (2017) Ben Spatz uses the term 'practice structure' to define repeatable structures of practice, particularly where patterns of practice occur. He suggests that there are likely to be specific requirements embedded within each type of practice structure which need to be replicated in order for it to be considered as a certain practice structure. In addition, Spatz states that 'a practice structure is concretely enacted by specific individuals in a specific location and historical moment' (2017: 19). The connection that Spatz doesn't go on to make but I will discuss here is that a practice structure is inherently part of a Vertical Training model, as a practice structure is a method through which embodied repeatable

patterns of practice are taught by specific people in specific locations – rendering them part of the Vertical training model.

Location in this context isn't necessarily geographical, though arguably practice structures are tied to their specific socio-political, historical, and cultural location – as is the case in biomechanics. Location in this discussion also encapsulates the origin of engagement with the practice structure; where an individual accesses information which allows them to engage with a particular practice structure. Pitches' question, cited above, which takes into consideration the implications of the digital world on Vertical cultures brings into sharp focus the location of access. It is the way in which one engages with the practice structure which determines whether they fall into one of the problematic binary training paradigms; the Vertical and Horizontal model. The Vertical training model is where you engage with prescriptive training and it is taught by specific people in specific locations – hence the direct connection to Spatz's definition of practice structure. For clarity, from this point forward Practice Structure will be capitalized to separate the term from Spatz as I will be specifically discussing Practice Structure in relation to the repeatable patterns of practice that are evident within a Vertical training culture.

The Vertical family retains a monopoly over the skills they embody as it will require the actor or practitioner to either be part of the family to access it, or be one of 'the odd outsider[s]' that are allowed access (Watson, 2001: 3). The pre-prescribed training paradigms that are encapsulated within the model are continued through a Vertical model or they are challenged (and necessarily altered). Once the altered version of the Practice Structure has been accessed by someone else, it is this step

aside or away from the Vertical that constitutes the Horizontal training model because it has not met the criteria of the Vertical training Practice Structure. This is why it is important to utilise the term Practice Structure within the definition of Vertical training models, as anything that sits outside of the repeatable pattern of practical pedagogy is therefore no longer part of the Vertical model.

Another problematic aspect of this is that where a practitioner may have previously been part of the Vertical family, and therefore retains the embodied knowledge of the Practice Structure, deviation from that places them within the Horizontal model. What this presents is opposing binary training models which are intended to encompass all training. The issue with this is, firstly, that it undermines more complex lines of transmission – which are evident in biomechanics and will be discussed below. The second issue is that when one model is considered superior to the other it diminishes the possibilities contained within the 'inferior' model. The lineage evident in the Vertical model creates a very clear power dynamic, where the power is held by those with the knowledge until it is bestowed on another. It also creates a very clear sense of exclusive ownership of a training system if no one can access the Practice Structure unless they are directly given access to the embodied knowledge. Essentially this allows those with the embodied knowledge to retain control over the Practice Structure.

This power and control is reflected in the terminology used within the Vertical cultures. In the case of biomechanics Meyerhold was referred to as Master by his students, which has specific connotations (Braun, 2013: 170). Specifically considering the use of Biomechanics in the UK, when current practitioners such as Gennady

Bogdanov insist on being referred to as Master, there are cultural connotations to the terminology which feed the power structure. Christopher Hancock reflects on this in his article 'A British Actor's View of Theatre Training in Russia' (2012):

> A number of the teaching practitioners attain the status of "Master" through a lifetime of experience in their chosen field. Each group of students proceeds through their years of training with a "Master" at the helm and he or she is afforded total respect and, as I witnessed in some classes, something akin to awe. Quite a difference from experiences I had during training where some teachers were openly criticised and elements of the training, such as dance, were not viewed as integral by some students. In Russia respect is assumed and demanded from students. In the UK it is hard-earned. (Hancock, 2012)

Hancock presents a Russian Master as someone who, through experience, demands an unquestionable respect. This suggests that a Russian Master through their experience gains intellectual immunity from being challenged by anyone, particularly their students. The impact this has on the accessibility of any training offered by a Master is evident in the belief that a Master cannot be questioned or corrected, which therefore means that the training cannot be developed unless the Master deviates from the orthodox Practice Structure. There is an undeniable wealth of embodied knowledge locked up within those practitioners who have had the experience of training in the room with one another, exchanging this body-based practice. However, the inevitable change that occurs as training methodologies are passed through generations results in altered models through 'the intervention of individual human beings' (Skinner, 2012: 87).

After Meyerhold's death evidence of his existence was forcibly removed from history:

> Meyerhold's name was immediately removed from his theatre and opera productions, and all traces of his four decades of work in the Russian theatre was effaced. Until his rehabilitation in 1955, it was as though Meyerhold, in Lee

> Strasberg's words, "the greatest director in the history of the theatre", had never existed. (Gladkov & Law, 1997: 49)

After fifteen years Meyerhold's name was rehabilitated and the original charges against him were quashed. The impact of this tragic event has complicated the relationship we have with Meyerhold and the wealth of material he left behind. It was as though an explosion had taken place in the nucleus of his work scattering everything in a multitude of directions, some of which was damaged irreparably and other pieces lost forever. What did remain though were papers, articles, lectures, interviews, and publications which detailed his work from people who were invited to take notes (such as Alexander Gladkov) and the embodied knowledge his colleagues and students retained. By accessing an amalgamation of that information, rather than the Practice Structure of a Vertical model, you would be learning biomechanics through a Horizontal model – which will be discussed fully below.

What cannot be accessed from the moment Meyerhold died is a recreation of his biomechanical training programme in its original format. The programme, which is cited below, explored a wealth of material that encompassed theory and body-based learning. The authority Meyerhold had on the output of the company was lost and with no specific heir, a line of transmission has been established that allows practitioners to claim an authority on the practice. Marjorie J. Hoover has published documents for the first time in English translation which outline the programme of biomechanics; 'Curricula of the Meyerhold Workshop', which gives a sense of the scale of the programme and how vast and complex a Vertical line of practical pedagogy would be (1974: 317). I will quote this at length because it's necessary to understand the difference between the original biomechanical training programme

and what is now offered and advertised as that same retained pedagogy. This documentation is from the 1922-1923 'Program of Studies for [State Graduate Institute of Theatre]', which at this time was the Meyerhold theatre (Hoover, 1974: 317). For first year students there were seven areas of study, each of which had up to five additional subcategories of study.

1. *Course in Movement*
    1. Anatomy and the fundamentals of biology
    2. Dance
    3. Training in movement through physical culture
    4. Biomechanics
    5. Word movement
2. *Course in the Word*
    1. Placing of the voice and breathing
    2. Diction and correction of defects
    3. Poetics
    4. System of prose
3. *Course in Dramatic Literature*
    1. Introduction to poetics
    2. Analysis of dramatic literature
    3. Logic. Biomechanism [sic]
4. *Course in Elementary Technology*
    1. Elementary mathematics, descriptive geometry, and projectional drawing
    2. Technology of materials
    3. Plastic anatomy
    4. Analysis of the material elements of staging
5. *Course in Music*
    1. Rhythmic gymnastics
    2. Elementary theory of music
6. *Technical Course*
    Fundamentals of staging
7. *Course in Social Sciences*
    Required subjects (Hoover, 1974: 317)

What is evident from the 'Program of Studies' is how much of the programme is dedicated to work which is not necessarily specifically connected to biomechanics. The reason this is important is because it gives an understanding of how vast the

training was and how retaining Meyerhold's vision for the actor of the future would mean retaining all of the programme rather than just specific pieces, cutting it would be altering his system and no longer retaining the original pedagogy. Within the training are the biomechanical études, some sources cite these as biomechanical exercises but for clarity this research project identifies each of the following as études not exercises:

1. Shooting with the Bow and Arrow
2. Leap on Partner's Back and Transfer Weight
3. Falling and Catching and Lifting One's Weight
4. Blow on the Nose
5. Slap on the Face
6. Pushing Down a Kneeling Figure with the Foot
7. Play with a Stick and Juggling
8. Bouncing a Ball in the Air
9. Throwing a Stone
10. Leap on the Chest of the Opponent
11. Play with a Dagger
12. Quadrille
13. Rope
14. Horse
15. Four Skaters
16. Stumbling
17. Bridge
18. Sawing
19. Scythe
20. Funeral
21. Fool
22. Leapfrog (Law & Gordon, 1996: 105)

Listed above are the twenty-two études which were part of the biomechanical training programme. Therefore, the lineage of training practices in which "biomechanics" is handed from one generation to the next, should contain all twenty-two études and at a minimum the two aspects of training which are specifically identified as being biomechanical from Meyerhold's Program of study.

Figure 1.1 (below) illustrates the perceived direct line of transmission of biomechanics from Meyerhold to his colleague, Nikolai Kustov; from Kustov to his students Gennady Bogdanov and Alexei Levinski; from Bogdanov to his students James Beale, Terence Mann and Chloe Whitehead. The blue circles denote the person who embodies the training and the grey arrows denote the direction of transmission and who that person was trained by:

Figure 1

These names have been specifically chosen as they are each key in explaining the journey of transmission from Meyerhold to the UK, in addition to making my own biomechanical journey evident. In 1995 Nikolai Kustov's students Bogdanov and Levinski brought their embodied knowledge of biomechanics to Cardiff, UK, as part of the 1995 Centre for Performance Research Past masters conference dedicated to Meyerhold in which they gave 'introductory workshops' (Braun, 2016: 16). They have been instrumental in bringing biomechanics to the UK and '[they] are responsible for the dissemination of Meyerhold's system outside of Russia, and whose influence can be felt through British biomechanics' (Skinner, 2012: 87). Chloe Whitehead and James Beale created Proper Job Theatre, based in the UK, which has integrated biomechanics as part of the work they produce. Terence Mann is the Course Leader for BA (Hons) Acting programme at the University of Lancashire, where he teaches biomechanics as part of the programme. Finally, I have included myself on the

diagram to give a sense of where my own training has come from – though, to be clear, this was not through the Practice Structure training. I attended two separate and unrelated one-day workshops at The University of Hull, with Mann and James Beale, where students participated in biomechanics training. Additionally, I was part of the cast for *Cycle Song* (2012), a large-scale opera which was co-directed by Whitehead and Beale, which integrated biomechanics into the rehearsals. Each of these training opportunities gave me invaluable first-hand experience of the benefits and limitations of trying to implement biomechanics as a preserved Practice Structure into a contemporary setting.

What is not acknowledged within the perceived transplantation is the fragmented transmission of biomechanics which has been, and continues to be significantly altered on its journey. After Meyerhold's death it was thirty years before biomechanics resurfaced. Jonathan Pitches details how biomechanics returned to an actor training setting in Russia in 1972. He states:

> [A]s the director of the Theatre of Satire and in a climate of secrecy, he [Valentin Pluchek] persuaded his associate Kustov to teach biomechanics on a part-time basis, alongside the theatre's other activities. Kustov, then in his sixties, had originally been one of Meyerhold's teachers, instructing students in biomechanics […] Kustov taught his class at Pluchek's theatre for three and a half years, right up until his death in 1975. (Pitches, 2006: 58)

This account of how Kustov began teaching clearly demonstrates that whilst biomechanics was being taught, it certainly wasn't a reincarnation of the entire programme – particularly as the system was being taught part-time. The difference between the original biomechanics and what Kustov was teaching was also described by his student, Bogdanov:

> Bogdanov recalls Kustov – then in his sixties, ailing and aged beyond his years – as a brilliant teacher. No longer able to sustain the pace of the physical work, Kustov sat most of the time, chain smoking, observing the students closely, only getting up to show the form of the exercises, the nuances and subtleties. (Baldwin, 1995: 182)

This is crucial in understanding the vastly altered state of biomechanics and how, as Skinner highlights in her description of transmission rather than transplantation, that biomechanics becomes altered through the intervention of individual human beings. The practical embodied knowledge that was passed from Kustov to his students included just five études (Braun, 2016: 16). The five that were passed from Kustov to his students were, *Throwing the Stone, Shooting the Bow, the Slap, the Stab with the Dagger, and the Leap to the Chest* (Pitches, 2005 :59). The reduction to five is a drastic alteration to the training, and the decision to reduce them has been made by Kustov, not Meyerhold. Meyerhold's reduction of the system is noted in *Meyerhold Speak, Meyerhold Rehearses* (1997), he states 'In my Biomechanics, I was able to define in all 12-13 rules for the training of an actor. But in polishing it up, I'll leave perhaps not more than eight' (Gladkov & Law, 1997: 94). Meyerhold talks of reducing the system, but to eight rules of training as opposed to five études. The value of the embodied knowledge embedded within the other 17 études is unknown as it is now lost.

Figure 1.1 depicts the romanticised version of this line of transmission which allows contemporary users of biomechanics to believe that they are engaging with the original practice – this is being perpetuated by those who are within that model. Gennady Bogdanov's website offers information on his biomechanics training course in Perugia, Italy, in addition to explaining the pedagogical connection between himself and Meyerhold. It states:

> At the end of his live [sic] Meyerhold leaved [sic] his huge pedagogical inheritance to the unique person that was near him for 20 years, his collaborator and intelligent teacher Nikolai Kustov. […] The heir of Master Kustov [is] Master Bogdanov […]. (Mircotearto, 2012)

What this suggests is that biomechanics in its entirety was deliberately given to Kustov, and that same 'pedagogical inheritance' was then passed on from Kustov to Bogdanov. What this does not account for is the immensely altered state biomechanics was in when it was passed from Kustov to Bogdanov and the implications of that on how contemporary users of biomechanics perceive their engagement with biomechanical training. Proper Job state on their website that:

> Bogdanov is the last living link to this theatre tradition, being a former student of Nikolai Kustov, an actor and teacher in Meyerhold's company […] [the] [d]irect heir of Meyerhold pedagogy, Bogdanov is the only person in the world who is able to teach the Classic Etudes of Theatrical Biomechanics.' (ProperJob, 2019)

This again perpetuates the sense of ownership over the system by suggesting that Bogdanov is the 'only person in the world' who can teach the études. This doesn't acknowledge that Levinski and Bogdanov experienced the same training from Nikolai Kustov and were both instrumental in bringing biomechanics to the UK. What is particularly interesting about this is that it suggests that if he is the only person who can teach the études then anyone else who is doing that is incorrect. This is further aggravated by the notion of endorsed and non-endorsed practitioners of biomechanics in the UK. Bogdanov selects certain students who he essentially gives his permission, endorsement, to teach biomechanics. Again, this substantiates the presence of power and ownership. There are currently three endorsed biomechanics practitioners operating in the UK who were all named within Figure 1.1: Terence Mann, Chloe Whitehead and James Beale. In 'Riding the Waves' (2012), Skinner cites

a letter written by Bogdanov to Terence Mann expressing his endorsement. He states*:*

> In your work I can see the connection with a theatre tradition that started with Vsevolod Meyerhold, continued through my teacher Nikolai Kustov, and which Kustov, in turn, passed onto me [...] Having worked with you before, as both your teacher and director, I can clearly see a consistency in your work. Your process of learning and using Meyerhold's Biomechanics is conscious, accurate and correct. (Skinner, 2012: 96-97)

The inference of this letter, which endorses Mann to teach biomechanics with Bogdanov's blessing, is that by stipulating his work is correct, there is the possibility to be using biomechanics incorrectly. As Skinner states:

> it is possible, and indeed undesirable, to deviate and therefore practise "incorrect" biomechanics. There emerges, then, a hierarchical approach to biomechanical training which privileges those uses of the system which might be described as "pure". (Skinner, 2012:97)

This suggests that the Vertical Pedagogy is the correct form of training. It is this perceived hierarchy within the transmission of biomechanics that disenfranchises other forms of training. It is evident from the way Bogdanov's website is worded that he believes he trains the 'correct' biomechanics, and other forms are wrong. He states:

> Because of its [biomechanics] charm it attracts the interest of some individuals, not correct, who without even knowing what it is, try to teach other people, basing on hypothesis, assonances [sic] and mistakes, risking at present, to deteriorate its fragile stability and at the end twist its contests [sic]. From those there were born terrible and gross misunderstandings […]. (Microteatro, 2012)

This substantiates that there is a concern with preserving biomechanics from being altered. However, it needs to be noted that what is being actually preserved is a version of biomechanics that has undergone significant changes since it was used by Meyerhold. Before moving on to explore the Horizontal model it is also worth

considering the accessibility issues that occur due to each of the concerns presented above.

In 2017 I applied to Micro Teatro in Perugia, Italy, to study with Gennady Bogdanov on his biomechanics programme. In order to access the course, I needed to complete an acting CV and write a letter to the 'Master' explaining why I wanted to participate. The course was divided into three weeks with each 'level' taking one week, meaning that at the end of three weeks you should have completed three levels. The prices increased each week with Level 1 costing 300Euros, Level 2 costing 340Euros and Level 3 costing 540Euros. After being accepted onto the course, and paying a substantial deposit, less than a week before I was due to fly to Perugia to begin the course Micro Teatro sent me a contract which was essentially a gagging order on being able to discuss, recreate, or teach anything learnt on the course after I left, at the peril of facing legal action from the company.

I was unable to sign the contract, as that would have resulted in being unable to finish writing this research project due to potentially breaching the terms of the contract. This also spoke volumes about the lack of accessibility to the embodied knowledge within the études if students of Bogdanov and his team are legally contracted not to repeat anything that happens on the course. It continues the perception of orthodoxy, correctness, power and ownership of a training model which isn't the original pedagogy of Meyerhold. The fascination with the 'living link' between Meyerhold and practitioners today maintains this hierarchical power structure, allowing those who are considered to be purist to market themselves as having access to the correct biomechanics.

The Horizontal Model

In contrast, the Horizontal model is underpinned by a proliferation of sources which can be accessed in a number of ways – essentially anything which sits outside of the Vertical model constitutes the Horizontal model. Vertical models are, as discussed, typically body-based practices which exchange embodied knowledge in physical spaces with participant(s) and teacher(s).

The Horizontal Model of training encourages a broad range of learning on a topic; where multiple methods and sources can be used to develop understanding. Horizontal training in biomechanics is not limited to one source or method as it encourages a proliferation of sources in a range of modes to increase the breadth and depth of knowledge. This may include practical sessions with renowned biomechanical practitioners and the use of written material that documents Meyerhold's views on theatre – allowing the participants to develop a critical perspective within their learning.

The key aspect of Horizontal models is that by encouraging learning through a wider range of sources, whoever undertakes this learning is developing their own critical perspective by challenging each aspect of their understanding with new material which may not agree or function in the way previous material has. Biomechanics is a prime example of this, as much of the material is contradictory to lesser and greater degrees. Ultimately this allows the person engaging in Horizontal models the opportunity to make independent choices using a broader range of learning than can be found in a single source.

The benefits of this are highlighted above, as those who utilise a Horizontal model are given an opportunity to reflect on a wider range of sources, opinions and ideas and therefore encouraged to make decisions about the material they access. The difficulty, and often problematic aspect of this, is that there is no way to mitigate which sources are used and which are filtered out. The legitimacy of sources varies enormously, as is discussed below, and therefore when someone claims to have learnt or engaged with biomechanics their understanding may be limited to unreliable and inaccurate sources. As a result, the Horizontal model has the opportunity to be hugely beneficial dependent on the sources used – but it is precisely this issue, surrounding sources, that is at the crux of this research.

Horizontal traditions can be found across numerous disciplines, each demonstrating the value of combining Horizontal and Vertical knowledge within a given context. Within the business world these two types of knowledge are known collectively as the T shaped profile of skills.[2] The T-model encourages 'a broad set of generally applicable skills, supplemented by a spike of specific expertise', this is evident in the diagram below (M, Hummer., M, Harris., K, Ramname., Erin Backwell, 2019).

[2] The T-Model was coined by Mckinley & Company, the largest management consultancy company in the world. https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/operations/our-insights/operations-blog/ops-40-the-human-factor-a-class-size-of-1 [last accessed 20/03/2022]

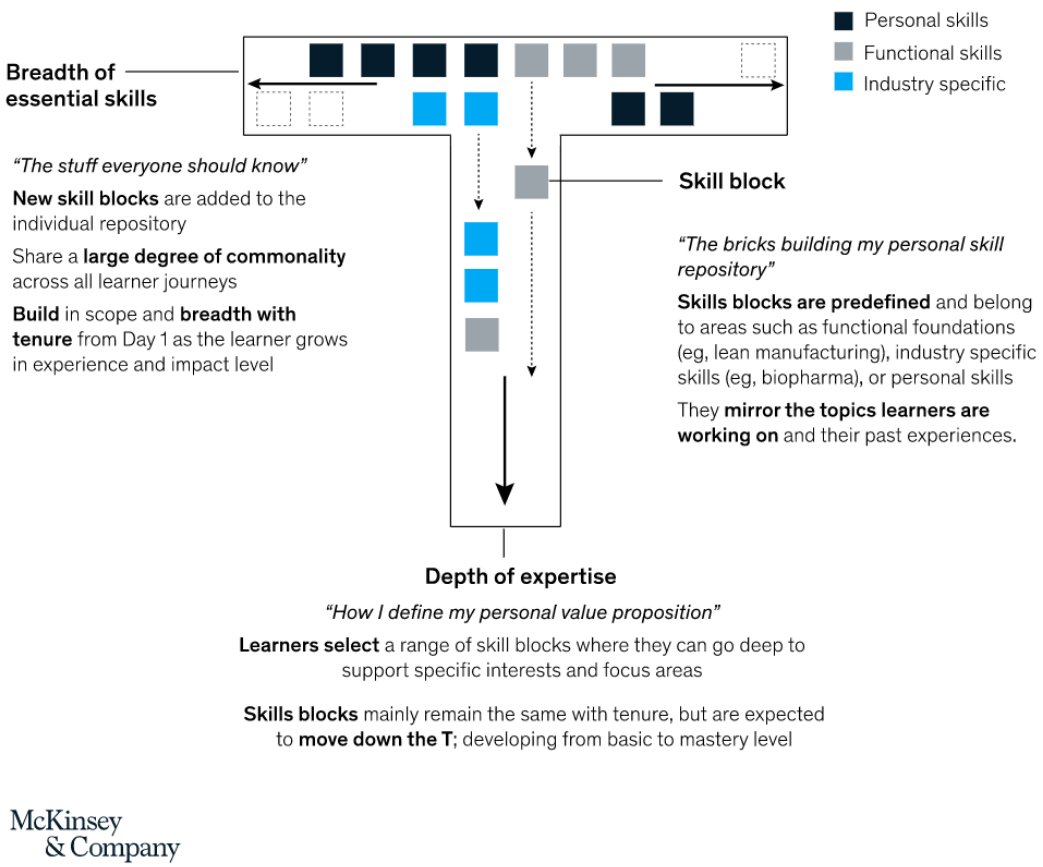

Figure 2

The above diagram illustrates how the T shaped profile of skills is utilised by Mckinsey & Company. Ultimately this desire for a combination of both a broad range of skills in addition to deep knowledge in one area benefits the companies utilising this model – by drawing on the individuals cross-discipline skill base, similar to the blended approach discussed within this research. However, looking specifically at the top of the T shape model it demonstrates that companies are harnessing cross-disciplinary knowledge akin to the Horizontal Model of training. The model gives insight into the value of utilising a broader range of knowledge which can then can be expanded in one specific area, as noted in the above diagram. This supports the notion that

Horizontal models of learning can be beneficial where drawing on a range of knowledge facilitates a wider range of expertise.

The T shaped profile of skills has evidently been developed with skills that are suited to business practice in mind rather than body-based practice. However, methods of utilising transferable skills across a broad range of areas to develop an individual's performance can also be seen in sport. To use the example of Martial Arts the sport has continued to benefit from international influences and developments from which individual sports such as wrestling, karate, boxing and jiujitsu have been amalgamated to create MMA (Mixed Martial Arts). MMA is centred on two main body-based disciplines, grappling and striking, which are composed of a multitude of skills embedded within each of the many martial arts which collectively make up MMA. The heritage of MMA is therefore scattered internationally and its origins can be traced back hundreds of years. For example, Italo Morello suggests that Greek Pankration can be traced back to 4th Century BC using a variety of movements seen in boxing and wrestling, striking and grappling, and this ancient form of fighting is still credited to influence techniques in contemporary MMA fights (Morello, 2011). This gives an insight into the magnitude of Horizontal training models in MMA, which intentionally draw on a wealth of skills and training techniques that have been developed across hundreds of years.

MMA not only utilises this broad range of skills within its practice, it also provides a distinctly interesting method of training as no two fighters will specialise in the same consolidation of practice – giving each fighter a unique skill set and an opportunity to draw on a different discipline which they best feel suit each opponent.

Within the Horizontal model the 'participants' engagement with the practice can be through publications which detail the practice and/or photographs and videos of the practice and/ or online tutorials, to name but a few. In terms of accessibility, it is distinctly easier to access biomechanics through the Horizontal model than through the Vertical model, particularly as our access to the digital world improves.

Engaging with biomechanics through a digital platform alone will offer a variety of opportunities to encounter the practice. The Arts Archive is available online and hosts a wealth of body-based practices, including examples of biomechanical training (ArtsArchive, 2021). Digital platforms such as YouTube are accessible to everyone for free and provide access to a variety of online content which includes: video footage of actors at Meyerhold's theatre, Bogdanov through the years training others and performing alone, and training with Proper Job theatre. This is in no way a comprehensive list, nor is it supposed to be. Instead it demonstrates that there are opportunities to engage with practitioners associated with the Vertical model through a Horizontal model. However, and this is the stark difference between the two models, there is no way to monitor which video on YouTube (for example) is chosen or how the viewer engages with it.

In 2014 Jonathan Pitches launched a University of Leeds Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), a clear example of the Horizontal model, which sought to introduce students to biomechanics through the digital platform FutureLearn. The course was designed to be an 'embodied history' in which students took on a 'conscious blending of theoretical and historical ideas' (Pitches, 2014: 12). Students were able to engage in a variety of learning modes such as practical video tutorials, lectures, and forums

where they could talk to tutors and to other participants (Pitches, 2014: 12). Pitches also notes that they had included 'published learning objectives to guide the process at a micro-level' (Pitches, 2014: 12). Pitches acknowledges that he employed methods to guide the process. Within a Horizontal model this is exceptionally difficult to do. In describing the MOOC Pitches states the following:

> The most fundamental elements of loss are, unsurprisingly, to do with the embodied experience of working in a studio: the absence of partners to watch and work opposite, the absence of a tutor in the room to guide bodily movements and to set the tempo of the work, the lack of differentiation and nuance and the impossibility of the tutor being able to 'read' students' needs in the space. Secondly, was the pace of the work itself – the too-fast-turnaround of embodied learning into documentation and the resultant quite modest number of documentation responses uploaded to the platform. (Pitches, 2014: 18)

What is evident from Pitches' reflections is that he felt there were compromises within the training due to not being in the space with the students. Indirectly, this also suggests that there is a perceived understanding of how the participants *should* be engaging with the work. Pitches' experience with biomechanics is extensive and as a result he will have his own ideas based on that experience as to what he thinks is beneficial for actors to understand. For example, cited above he notes that without a tutor there was no one to 'guide bodily movements', which suggests a concern with precision of movement.

Within a Horizontal model there is the opportunity to alter any aspect a practitioner wants without any guidance or authority to retain the original practice – as can be seen in the Vertical model. As an example, Billie Posters, a performance artist, has created what he calls a 'Meyerhold Biomechanical monologue', which is entitled 'Under Siege' (Billie Posters, YouTube 2019). He describes the performance as:

> a Meyerhold Biomechanical monologue titled “Under Siege” that transforms and re-performs Biomechanical Etudes from ’Meyerhold's practice, integrated with my own dramatic interpretation of the philosophies of his dramaturgy. It is a piece of performance that relies entirely on the actions of the body for the expression of signs and construction of dramatic dialogue and tension. This is a continuation on my exploration of Meyerhold’s Biomechanics. (Billie Posters, YouTube 2019)

The performance has stark similarities purely from a visual perspective to the stylized and exaggerated movements of Meyerhold’s études, as performed by Meyerhold’s actors. Poster’s clothing mimics minimal clothing worn by Kustov in the photographs of him performing.

Figure 3 (left) Billie Posters’ performing ‘Under Siege’ YouTube, 2019. Figure 3 (right) Nikolai Kustov, performing *Throwing the Stone* 1930(s)

There are fragments of the performance which share visual similarities to a number of the études, however what is apparent is that the principles of biomechanics have not been integrated into the performance. For example, Meyerhold notes the importance of balance for the actors; yet Posters visibly loses his balance numerous times throughout the performance. Posters' description clearly suggests this is an interpretation of the études, and it is loosely based on the 'classical études' as described by Wilson (Skype interview of 28 November 2019). However, there is clearly a desire to use biomechanics as a model of training in some way and the aspect of the system that Posters has capitalized on is the visual form of biomechanics at the expense of the principles. This example quite clearly highlights how the lack of moderation within the Horizontal model facilitates the concerns retained within the Vertical model over the preservation of Practice Structures.

Within a Practice Structure there is a strict form that can be replicated through generational teaching; passing the precise pedagogies down from teacher to student. Deviation from the Practice Structure, ultimately means the form has been altered and as a result the Practice Structure has been altered or lost. There is an understandable desire to retain the original form that the Practice Structure offers as there is a pedagogical approach encapsulated within it that can only be preserved through precision. However, it is this notion of preservation of a historical training practice which new approaches challenge in a bid to extract the elements of the system, and these offer contemporary actors, directors and theatre companies the benefits of biomechanics. Essentially, they extract the principles which still have currency in a contemporary setting.

The retention of Practice Structure occurs due to the method through which transactions of embodied knowledge are exchanged in a practical setting; learning through a Vertical training model. Within these settings teachers can ensure a level of precision of not only the movements that are produced but also the pedagogical approach which frames the way in which the participants learn. There is the opportunity to maintain the precision of the original pedagogy if the teacher decides to replicate the teaching that they were given and is able to control the way that the student learns. However, it is imperative to note that whilst pedagogical approaches may be retained there is no way to account for the way in which someone will engage with the approach or the material, which may result in students having different understandings of the content that has been taught. The benefit of Vertical Training is that with physical bodies in a space, teachers are able to communicate with the individual learners, offering guidance and support to ensure they are able to achieve what is being taught in a specific way. In Biomechanics a Vertical Training session would allow a teacher, for example Gennady Bogdanov, to control the way the actor received the training and the opportunity to discuss or physically alter the way the actor responds to the training. There is therefore opportunity with a Vertical Training paradigm for the alteration to original practice structures to be limited.

Bryan Brown, an American Practitioner of laboratory theatre, integrates biomechanics into his own training practices. His understanding of biomechanics has come from a proliferation of sources, and therefore a Horizontal model. Initially discovering Meyerhold through publications, Brown went on to undertake training with Bogdanov and Proper Job Theatre, and has observed Levinski teaching in Moscow (email communication of 10 May 2020). His use of biomechanics is, as he

states an adaptation, integrating specific elements into the work he produces. Brown states:

> I have significantly adapted biomechanics. If we consider biomechanics like a particular style of martial arts, then I am a white belt in practice but an avid scholar of the history and purpose of the art. But as I highlight above I have embedded and adapted the idea of compositional body, thinking actor, rhythm and stick work, strong physical regimen, lightness and joyful attitude into all of my training since 2002 which includes the creation and training of a company ARTEL in LA. My partner Olya Petrakova and I created numerous exercises we felt were inspired by Meyerhold to generate more listening and ensemble connections for the company as well as rhythm and plastic/physical exercises. (email communication of 10 May 2020)

The adaptation that Brown notes has allowed him to utilise aspects of biomechanics in a contemporary actor training system, though it is interesting to note his reluctance to be considered an expert or Master in biomechanics. In a personal correspondence with Skinner, Brown states, 'we do not know the études well enough to train in them', which returns the discussion to preservation (Skinner, 2012: 95). Similar sentiments are echoed by Thomas Wilson, programme director of Acting and Performance Undergraduate at Rose Bruford College, who has trained with Bogdanov four times over the past nine years and has completed all three levels mentioned above. He was first introduced to biomechanics whilst studying at Royal Holloway, University of London through Katie Normington. When Wilson does teach biomechanics he specifically frames his teaching 'within a wider context in relation to other training' whilst making it apparent to students that if they want to understand 'theatrical biomechanics they need to go and work with Gennady' (Skype interview of 28 November 2019). Wilson was keen to point out his ethical concern with teaching biomechanics when he did not know the system 'deeply enough' and he wasn't able to teach 'classical theatrical biomechanics' as Bogdanov does (Skype

interview of 28 November 2019). However, whilst there is clearly undeniable value contained within the embodied knowledge of the practitioners who have experienced practice-based Vertical training sessions, in a contemporary context in Britain there is a need to blend the models to make biomechanics accessible for actors.

To be clear, this isn't to suggest that the 'classical theatrical biomechanics' cannot be learnt in the specific pedagogy; that Bogdanov, or other practitioners in the vertical line, use, what it is stating is that the time and money needed to dedicate yourself to a system which requires a deep embodied understanding over many years is not an accessible model for training in the UK.

The Blended Approach

The concern with preservation of the 'original' pedagogy or the correct pedagogy is consistently perpetuated by terminology which divides the practices and training that are available today. The hierarchy that exists within the Vertical model suggests that anything which deviates from the original system, the Practice Structure, is incorrect but there is no original pedagogy available and there hasn't been since Meyerhold's death. What is left are fragments of the system which can be pieced together to be used in a contemporary setting, a blended approach to biomechanical training – which is what each and every practitioner of biomechanics is currently offering but not necessarily acknowledging. Variations between these are caused by the central concerns each practitioner applies to their understanding of the system and how they choose to communicate that with others. This leads me to the central

concern that this thesis addresses, devising an accessible model of training that utilises a blended approach.

The blended approach to biomechanical training, presented in this thesis, wants to centralize Meyerholdian principles in a format which can be utilised in a contemporary actor training setting – which will be conducive to a one-day workshop or production rehearsal process. This new contribution to blended biomechanical training has developed a method which retains key aspects of biomechanics' purpose. This section will outline how a blended approach was used as the methodology for this thesis and why it was necessary to complete a Practice Research thesis.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the Practice Research and its relationship to the written element of the thesis, in addition to exploring the methodological approach adopted in order to engage with my research questions.

Practice Research

The format a Practice Research project takes sets itself apart from that of well-established research paradigms, where the research is translated into words and numerical modes of documentation (Haseman, 2007: 148). In this project the written documentation serves as a critical commentary to the Practice enabling examiners to be guided through the research and its outcomes, ensuring that the work isn't disconnected – separating theory from practice. The method adopted for this research project is similar to the enquiry cycle developed by Stephen Kemmis and Robin Mctaggart. This involves:

> Planning a change
> Acting and observing the process and consequences of change
> Reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then
> Replanning
> Acting and observing
> Reflecting, and so on … (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003:381)

It was through an almost identical model to the enquiry cycle that my own Practice Research methods were designed. I planned a 'change' to biomechanical training practices and organised a series of research and development workshops which

would allow me to execute those changes with participants in a practical setting. I would observe the process and consequences of change, reflect and re-plan the next change. The cycle continued throughout the workshops with much of the re-planning and reflection happening within each workshop as opposed to between sessions. Before explaining this further, below is a table which outlines each of the workshops and the subsequent case studies which were used to test the theories that were developed in the research and development phase of the Practice Research.

This column contains the names and dates of the Workshops, with a short description. I have underlined the way the Workshops will be referred to throughout the thesis. All Workshops were held at The University of Hull.	This column names the participants within the Workshops
Research & Development Workshops 1,2 & 3 **Workshop 1** - December 1 2017 **Workshop 2** - December 8 2017 **Workshop 3** - December 15 2017 These Workshops were used to explore the theory and ideas I had developed since the outset of my research in 2012.	Frances Allison, Annie Baskeyfield-Bride, Emily Bridgett, Rachel Ellmer, Zeinah Gafaar, Amelia Grimes, Cassidi White, Bruce Wadsworth, Annabel Streeton, and Aaron Temperton
Research & Development Consolidation Workshop: **Workshop 4** - May 28 2018	Annie Baskeyfield-Bride, Amelia Grimes, and Cassidi White.

Case Study 1 - June 19 2018	Frances Allison, Zeinah Gafaar, Adam Hepworth, Lucy Peacock, Ellie Richards, Sanna Sadie, and Sadie Wild
Case Study 2 - August 9 2018	Sara Isbell
Case Study 3 - August 13 2018	Lizzy Steele
Case Study 4 - August 14 2018	Andrew Ross

It is important to note that in each of the workshops the participants were all graduates or current students at The University of Hull. The impact of this is that their training was largely very similar. As is discussed in more detail later, the participants in Case Study 1 were made up of professional actors and dancers. Therefore their training went beyond the programme offered at The University of Hull. However, ultimately the responses from everyone who took part in the workshops (solo and ensemble) can attribute a portion of their response to their prior education and theatrical values – all of which will have been impacted by the same institution; Hull.

The model that is developed as a result of this research would likely see some fascinating changes if it were to use participants from more diverse backgrounds. This is no way undermines the blended approach offered in this thesis, rather it

highlights how it is worth noting how a participants background will offer new insights and perspectives into the work which may not be captured here.

Workshops 1,2 and 3 were completed over a three-week period, with volunteer students from The University of Hull on the Drama and Theatre Practice BA. They had each responded to a call I sent out to all students in the third year of study, to participate in a series of Workshops which sought to find contemporary uses of Meyerhold's biomechanics. They had each been part of a session on biomechanics that I had led a few weeks earlier as part of Amy Skinner's Russian Theatre module, and had some understanding of both Meyerhold and biomechanics. The video footage across the three sessions corrupted, so I asked three participants who had each demonstrated a variety of interesting responses to the work (which will be explored in the chapter below) to another workshop so I could retrospectively capture their responses to the work. Despite the loss of the footage being incredibly frustrating, Workshop 4 allowed me to note a new aspect of the discoveries of the project which I would have otherwise have been unaware of – this will be explored in the discussion of the Workshops.

After repeating the enquiry cycle throughout the Research and Development stage of the work, I had created a model which was ready to be deployed to specific Case Studies. Case Study 1 was formulated from a group of professional performers, each of whom had graduated from The University of Hull with a BA in Drama and Theatre Practice. For clarity, two of the participants, Sanna Sadie and Sadie Wild, are professional dancers as opposed to working as actors.

Each of the Case Studies have raw footage which can be used via the following link:

https://universityofhull.app.box.com/folder/134948659530?s=bingv9syyoue38d7ojq20lm749cq6agp

Additionally, there are six videos which are referenced as extracts, these were either edited or recorded on a separate device. Every reference to the raw footage and extract will be hyperlinked in the footnote. The extracts do not include time stamps or descriptions as the link will take you directly to a short clip. The appendix includes a breakdown of annotations and time stamps for all of the raw footage. Any key information listed in this thesis will be noted in the annotations – this is also includes links to the video footage discussed.

What is particularly important to note is that each of the Workshops and Case Studies have been constructed to reflect the time-sensitive training this research seeks to adhere to in the UK. There is a need to dedicate a vast amount of time to biomechanical training when retaining methods from the Vertical model. For example, Whitehead investigated the use of biomechanics in a contemporary setting in Britain for her PhD thesis. Whitehead allotted twelve months of training to the actors who participated in her research, with the production falling at the end of that period (Beale, 2019: 12). Whitehead deliberately chose to explore what she called the 'traditional rehearsal process' which replicated her own training with Bogdanov and is therefore a Vertical model of training (Beale, 2019: 9). The need to spend twelve months training actors in order to accurately assess the embodiment of the principles gives an understanding to the time needed within a Vertical model to utilise the principles embedded within the system.

Rehearsal periods in the UK are typically 'four weeks, Monday to Friday, prior to technical rehearsals if it's a musical or a classical text', which Phil Wilmott of *The Stage* suggests is 'standard industry practice in regional theatre' (Phil Wilmott, 2015). Actor Simon Russell Beale offers a similar guideline on the timeframes for theatres production periods, he states:

> If you're at the National Theatre, you probably do six weeks, perhaps even seven. That's from 10:30 to 5:30. For the West End, it's a shorter period - four or five weeks. Then you have tech week, which is the nightmare week where you put the show into the theatre and get all the technical things done. Then you're doing 10 or 12-hour days. (Simon Russell Beale, 2013)

The time required to embed the principles using the Vertical model's 'traditional rehearsal process' does not correlate with the rehearsal periods actors are working with in the UK (Beale, 2019: 9). To be clear, this thesis is addressing the inaccessibility of the system in its current format as opposed to suggesting that it does not work. It is specifically focused on creating an accessible system of biomechanics training which meets the time needs of contemporary actors in the UK.

In order to understand how biomechanics was being used in the UK, and to clarify the benefits and limitations of the system, I carried out a series of interviews with key contemporary British biomechanics practitioners: Cariad Astles, Bryan Brown, Chloe Whitehead, James Beale, Thomas Wilson, David Roy, and Michelle Assay. Each of these practitioners have used biomechanics to facilitate their teaching/ and or research in the UK. The insights of the practitioners were invaluable, though it should be noted that each of the interviews occurred after the practice and therefore the inclusion of the work on the practice has been done so retrospectively.

Biomechanics' Currency in a Contemporary Setting

It is worth addressing why there is a need to continue to explore blended approaches to biomechanical training as opposed to developing entirely new training practices or focusing on other systems of training. This is due to the currency biomechanics maintains, offering actors a variety of theatrical skills that can be used in a contemporary setting. However, implementing biomechanics as a Practice Structure which attempts to retain the specific pedagogy that has been passed through the Vertical model is not accessible to a contemporary actor in the UK. One of the discoveries of this research that separates this practice model from others is a layered approach to biomechanical training. This acknowledges that when using this model different skills will be elicited through the Workshops and they each contribute a biomechanical layer which continues to grow through use. This deliberately moves away from notions of correct or incorrect, as the biomechanical layers can be used in a variety of ways as well as in a time limited setting. Ultimately the new model centers functionality over preservation of practice improving the accessibility of the system.

The term 'principle(s)' will occur throughout this research project and it is worth clarifying what the term means in relation to this thesis, though it will be explored in further detail in Chapter 1: Purpose. The use of term in biomechanics is addressing specific skills that are intended to be elicited through the training. Some of the skills that fall under the umbrella of 'principle' include terms such as rhythm and balance, which are not nuanced to suit Meyerhold's practice and therefore do not need further clarification. Other terms are specific to Meyerhold's theatre, and have been

nuanced in publications which detail what the term is. For example, *'tormos'* which directly translates as 'brake' Jane Baldwin defines as 'tormos: (the brake) the restraint which must be applied simultaneously with the forward momentum of the pacil [sic] to maintain control' with the *Posil* (another principle), here rendered 'pacil' being the 'Pacil: [sic] (the sending) both the commitment to and the doing of the action' (Baldwin, 1995: 188). Thomas Wilson considers *tormos* to be the most important principle, not just in relation to biomechanics but in any actor training owing to its aim to teach actors restraint (Skype communication 28 November 2019). Pitches suggests that '*tormos* provides a controlling influence over the action that can be measured and adjusted by the performer during the very act of performance' (Pitches, 2005: 71). Chloe Whitehead suggests that:

> 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. (Beale, 2019: 54)

It's evident that in each description of *tormos* there is a clear understanding from the individual about what they believe *tormos* means and how that would be used in a practical setting. This demonstrates both the interpretation of the individual but it also highlights the value of working with multiple sources when trying to access biomechanics.

Within my own Practice Research, I wanted to combine the theoretical research I had undertaken with the practical training I had received in order to develop a new training model. It was therefore important to utilise firstly those principles which I had understood as being important to biomechanics – specifically in relation to the

étude that would be used as part of the Practice Research Workshops and Case Studies.

Devising a new model which would adhere to the time limitations of contemporary actor trainers required streamlining the system. The issue with streamlining anything is knowing what is of value and should be kept and what is not of value and can therefore be discarded. My focus from the outset was to retain the principles of the system in the model I created, the question was therefore which principles related to the étude being used in the Workshops.

It was also important to consider the principles in terms of biomechanical layers. Firstly, this research project uses the term 'biomechanical layers' to encompass the principles which are specific to whichever movement sequence is being explored but in a broader sense it incorporates Meyerhold's intentions for the training system as a whole. The blended approach to biomechanical training used in my research utilises source material which discusses the training system, rather than solely relying on the embodied knowledge of the Vertical model, and this adds a variety of perspectives from which to construct a functional as opposed to preserved form of biomechanics. This informed my decision to focus on the étude *Throwing the Stone,* as I had embodied knowledge of training practically in this étude, in addition to studying articles which detail the étude slightly differently offering a variety of perspectives. Each of those perspectives contributed towards the design of the first Workshop as through comparing the way the sources were written, specifically things that were included as opposed to excluded, gave an insight into what the writer felt the functionality of the étude was.

Key Ideas Within the Workshops

In 2003 Pitches presented at the national PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) conference. His paper 'tracing the living link: documentary complexity in the archive of biomechanics', dealt with the complexities of utilising documentation of Meyerhold's theatre in a Practice Research setting – specifically focussing on the étude *Throwing the Stone.* Pitches examination of the data collected provided a useful point of reference for the material chosen for my own Practice Research Workshops. The documentation consulted and presented as part of this paper included prose, video and photographic footage as well as Pitches on live contribution.

The sources referenced were: 1) two descriptions of the étude, one by Mel Gordon (1995) and one by Andre Van Gyseghem (1943). 2) Photographs of *Throwing the Stone* by Law & Gordon from *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics* (1996). 3) Video footage of Levinski and Bogdanov performing (separately) the étude (1995/1996). Aside from Pitches live demonstration as part of the conference these are each sources I consulted in preparation for the Practice Research Workshops. They encapsulate a variety of ways to access the étude, providing visual and written interpretations of the étude. As has been noted it was important not to remain focused on repeating the visual aesthetic without firstly embedding the principles of the work. I therefore decided not to allow the participants to have access to anything which they could essentially copy, by mimicking the poses of the photographs or physicality of the video footage. Instead I utilised the sources which described the étude in a written format.

Before examining the written descriptions of the étude I consulted Meyerhold's intentions for the exercises and études, which is available through Hoover's translation from his 'Program of Biomechanics' (1922) it states:

> Biomechanical exercises have the purpose of teaching the actor how to have:
>
> a) A feeling of balance and a center of gravity within himself and within the frame of his surroundings;
> b) Coordination with the stage space, one's partner and the stage properties;
> c) A state of physical alertness or "reflex sensitivity," quick reaction to the task assigned by the director without loss of psychic balance and calm;
> d) A director's consciousness, an outside perspective on the material in its coordination with the stage space, partner, costume, and properties (Meyerhold in Hoover, 1974: 311).

Each of these ideas which centre on the purpose of the movements were incorporated into the research and development Workshops as a guide. It is clear from points a) and b) that the actor's awareness of themselves physically and in relation to everything and everyone around them is of vital importance, as such this is something that I wanted the actors to experience from the training. Secondly, point c) addresses the actor's ability to respond to tasks prescribed by the director quickly, which is something that I could encourage in the space during the Workshops. Finally point d) 'an outside perspective' is indicative of the importance of the audience's perspective on the movements. Each of these ideas were considered and brought to the first Workshop with a view to discover whether they could be elicited through the étude in some way. They were also directly considered in relation to the following sources in order to examine which elements would be of use within the Workshops.

Andre Van Gyseghem was invited to watch Meyerhold's rehearsals between1933-1938 and the following account is his description of the étude from watching the actors perform (Van Gyseghem, 1943: 6). This purely visual perspective served as a

guide to me, as the "outsider" in the rehearsal space to get an understanding of whether the movements the participants were creating looked as Van Gyseghem perceived them to be. He states:

(21) *To concentrate the attention of the pupil* -- the hands are clapped twice together in a downward movement, the arms hanging loosely.

(22) *Preparing to run*- with a jump, turn and face the right, landing with the left foot in front.

(23) *Preparing to run*- knees bent, right hand in front, left hand behind.

(24) *Running.*

(25) *To arrive where the stone lies*- stop running with a jump, landing on the left foot and with the left shoulder in front.

(26) *Return to normal position.*

(27) *Prepare to get the stone- rise on the toes and drop on to the right knee. Lean the body backward and then forward.*

(28) *Lifting the stone*- picking up the imaginary stone with the right hand, rise, swing the right arm round in a wide circle-swing it round to the left-front and back again to behind the body, where it hangs. The left shoulder is high, the right low, the right hand at about knee level. The knees are bent slightly.

(29) *Preparing to run with the stone*- move backwards a few steps.

(30) *Running with the stone*- the stone still in the right hand held behind the body, left shoulder being raised.

(31) *Arriving at the place from which to throw*- stop running, always with a slight jump, landing with the left foot in front.

(32) *Preparing to throw the stone*- swing the stone over to the left front and grip the right wrist with the left hand.

(33) *Swinging the stone*- swing the body weight on to the right foot- sweep the right arm back and swing it in a circular motion, still clasped by the left hand. Release the hand and the circle widens until the whole right arm is swinging in a huge circle from the shoulder.

(34) *Looking for the object to be hit*- the circular movement stops, the right arm (and stone) held out in front while the student looks.

(35) *Re-judging the distance*- run a few steps forward, jump and stop.

(36) *Preparing to throw*- swing the stone back, and the right leg.

(37) *Throwing*- swing the right arm forward and the left back.

(38) *What is the result? Preparation*- kneel on the right knee, clap the hands and listen with the right hand cupping the ear.

(39) *The mark is hit*- point forward with the left arm, lean back with the right arm on the right hip.

(40) *Finish*- rise, facing inward and clap twice as at the beginning (Van Gyseghem, 1943: 29-30)

The description offered above provides a good level of detail pertaining to the actor's physical form throughout the étude from the perspective of the audience. What is particularly important about this description is the theatricality of the movements. Each aspect of the description highlights the exaggerated and non-naturalistic visual perspective of the étude, which accounts for Meyerhold's love of *risunok* (the outline). In *The Art of the Conscious Theatre* (1974) Marjorie J Hoover details Meyerhold's work on developing the actor's pose. She states:

> Though his course was called "Movement on Stage" and exercises in pantomime were assigned, still Meyerhold also emphasised the seemingly motionless element of *risunok* (outline), that is, the actor's attitude or pose, and even his consciousness of his attitude or pose. In his first course announcement Meyerhold gave the topic, "The actor as artist and his concern to live in the form of his pose of attitude… Why the study of primitive painting leads to the only true understanding of what pose or attitude on stage means". (Hoover, 1974: 82)

Meyerhold's description of the importance of studying paintings suggests that within the stillness of the pose the actor must capture 'attitude' which therefore resonates with Van Gyseghem's descriptions of the movements which capture the theatricality embedded within each part of sequence; essentially each pose that makes up the movement is stylized and contains an attitude. This is another biomechanical layer that was taken into the Workshops in order to achieve the fusion between form and purpose.

Mel Gordon's description of *Throwing the Stone,* cited below, is said to be taken from Van Gyseghem's description (cited above). The descriptions are clearly very different with much of the detail removed. However, it is beneficial to consider what Gordon believed to be important enough to keep, and what he considered superfluous and was therefore removed. This is particularly interesting when used in direct comparison with a secondary description of *Throwing the Stone,* published in *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics* (1996). There is a clear progression of thought – which will be discussed below.

Firstly, Gordon's 1995 description of *Throwing the Stone*:

(a) Actor executes a dactyl

(b) Leaps, turns to the right, and land with his left foot forward. His knees are bent with his right hand in front, the left behind

(c) The actor runs

(d) He jumps again, landing on his left foot with his left shoulder forward

(e) He straightens his body. Both arms hang loose and are perfectly symmetrical to one another

(f) He rises on his toes, then drops to his right knee. His body is swayed backward and forward

(g) Picking up an imaginary stone in his right hand, the actor rises, swings his right arm around in a wide arc to the left, across to the front and back…

(h) He steps backwards…

(i) The actor begins to run

(j) He stops with a slight jump, landing with left foot in front …

(k) The left hand grips the wrist…

(l) The actor releases his left hand, permitting the right arm to form a wide complete circle

(m) Arresting the circular movement, the right arm is held out in front…

(n) He runs a few steps forward and jumps

(o) Preparing to throw, he swings his right arm and leg back

(p) He throws the imaginary stone

(q) Kneeling on his right knee, the actor claps his hands, then cups his right ear as if listening to the result

(r) (The imaginary mark is hit) He points with his left arm and leans back with the right arm on the right hip

(s) Rising, he executes a dactyl (Gordon, in Zarrilli 1995: 115-116)

In comparison with Van Gyseghem's description, Gordon has removed the details which allow ease of accessibility. For example, the first movement in Van Gyseghem's description makes it clear the purpose of the movement by stating that it will 'focus the attention of the pupil' (Van Gyseghem, 1943: 29). Gordon's description removes this and states 'Actor executes a dactyl', introducing the term *dactyl*[3]. The two sources offer value in terms of perspective, the same can be said with the secondary publication of *Throwing the Stone* from Gordon a year later as it arguably serves as a source in progression of thinking and understanding of the étude in a practical context. The description is annotated as it also includes notes that Law and Gordon have added as an 'aid' which they've based off their own teachings of the étude. Those annotations appear in brackets:

23. Walk in a circle.
24. Slow movement.
25. Run. [in a circle].
26. Accelerated run.
27. Lift the stone.
28. Run with stone in the right hand. [The stone, actually more like a heavy rock, is an imaginary object.]
29. Accelerated run with the weight in the right hand (during accelerated running, the leaps are stronger, more elevated), count one, two.
30. Stop.
31. The throw: (a) quick steps backwards; (b) choice of leap; (c) swinging of the arm; (d) final swing; (e) body is motionless and concentrated; (f) pause; (g) the hit and the shout of "*Popal!* [Bull's-eye]"
32. Run.

[3] See pp. 10 above

33. Note: This exercise may begin directly with Number 6 and proceed as follows:
34. Walk in a circle.
35. *Run.*
36. Bend down.
37. Rise, lifting stone.
38. Run with stone.
39. Stop.
40. Quick steps backwards.
41. Choice of target.
42. Recoil for throw.
43. Throw.
44. Run. (Law & Gordon, 1996: 106)

This description of the étude was used in the research and development Workshop as a starting point to create each of the steps listed. I read aloud each point to the participants so that we could slowly focus on creating the form of the étude. The intention was to understand whether the form of the étude would elicit the principles once the group became capable of performing the movement. This relied on both their embodied understanding of the movements but also, in reference to the purpose in point (d) above, 'an outside perspective on the material in its coordination with the stage space', which is why the third source was chosen from an outsider's perspective (Hoover, 1974: 311).

The final perspective that was brought into each of the Workshops that needs to be acknowledged is my own. Briefly mentioned above were my own three experiences training in biomechanics in the UK, two of which were one day workshops and the other was integrated into the rehearsal process for *Cycle Song.* The value that I had taken from these experiences was an understanding of how James Beale, Terence Mann and Chloe Whitehead each expected the études to manifest physically, which I was able to use as a guide in each of the Workshops. Importantly though, they each talked of the principles which should and could be elicited through extensive

biomechanical training. They each talked of the importance of balance, rhythm and noticing the shift in your centre of gravity as the movements progressed. James Beale would refer to the bend in your leg, which was additionally evident in Mann's movement. Both practitioners maintained a consistent springiness to their legs which helped them transition quickly and efficiently through the études and exercises.

It was the lack of time to embody the principles that led me to consider how to reconfigure biomechanical training in a way that is suitable for a contemporary context. In each of the three training experiences there was an acknowledgement, by the practitioners, that due to the lack of time available we would be unable to engage fully with biomechanics which would take years to understand – suggesting that if we wanted to pursue biomechanics we should train with their teacher, Bogdanov. The time available for rehearsals which led to production is common place in the UK and I was left questioning the purpose of biomechanics in a contemporary setting after being repeatedly told it wouldn't "fit" within a one-day workshop or as I experienced, did not "fit" within a rehearsal process. It is the lack of ability for biomechanics to fit which limits its accessibility to contemporary users in addition to the hierarchical approaches that favour the Vertical model.

This returns to the discussion presented above in which each of these practitioners (Whitehead, Beale and Mann) have an embodied knowledge of biomechanics and extensive training in the five remaining études. They have each taken their own wealth of experience and understanding and created a blended approach. This was apparent through my own training with them and therefore the need to adapt the biomechanical training in the UK is evident. This differs from instances where In the

UK actors rarely remain with one company for a number of years, as they would have done with Meyerhold, and there is therefore minimal opportunity to develop skills that are specific to the style of performance that company favours. I wanted to explore the possibility of developing a biomechanical training that did "fit" without compromising the integrity of the system. This begs the question, why retain biomechanics or try to adapt it, if it does not function in a contemporary British context. Each of the practitioners I interviewed strongly believe that there is currency to biomechanics in a contemporary setting – though each had a different take on why. Bryan Brown believes biomechanics is 'still an essential component' to actor training in the UK. For Brown, biomechanics is useful:

> [n]ot only as a foundational historical/theoretical practice for understanding why and how we train performers today, but because it did set down many principles and paths for creating a "holistic" performer. Generating an actor who can be aware of her body, rhythm, breath and 'state/attitude' from both the inside and outside is (or should be) the goal of performer training. Biomechanics absolutely does this (email communication of 10 May 2020).

As Brown notes there are a number of fundamental aspects of actor training which he believes biomechanics is able to produce within a contemporary actor training setting. He specifically highlights awareness of body, rhythm breath and state/ attitude of the performer as being a purpose of the system. Wilson additionally believes the system has currency both as a classical practice and as an adapted approach as he uses the principles as a 'useful conceptual framework' in all his work (Skype interview November 2019). He specifically utilises the principle '*Tormos*', as he believes that it is fundamental to being an actor in every sense (Skype interview November 2019). What became apparent through the interviews and when considering the uses of biomechanics in the UK which function outside of the Vertical

model, was its ability to be utilised in settings which are vastly altered from its original context. The instances where this was successful were where practitioners had extracted principles from the system and applied them to their own work. Ultimately, I thought my Workshops would produce a training model which elicited a number of biomechanical layers but that the specific stylized external form of the etudes would be lost. The outcome of the research and development Workshops was that by centralizing the actors and their ability to create the étude using key biomechanical layers as a guide, the form closely replicated the highly stylized outlines as depicted in the original photographs and video footage of Meyerhold's actors. This discovery led me to apply the technique to each of the Case Studies – with great success.

The model was developed after several sessions which, as discussed above focused on form - asking the participants to adopt the movements point by point. They were consistently asking questions about how the movements were connected to one another so they could prepare their body for the next aspect of the sequence. They were frustrated with their inability to understand how and why the movements pieced together. The clearest example of this was stone throw itself. They posed questions such as, "Where is the stone being thrown?", "How heavy is the stone?", "Why am I Throwing the Stone?", "Is there a target?" Each of the points within the étude posed questions, and required additional information in order for the actors to execute the movements. They each had wildly different interpretations of what each point meant, which resulted in minimal consistency despite repeating the movements. After attempting to learn the movements in a precise way, I offered a simplified version of the étude's narrative, which was broken down into the following points:

a) Walk around the space

b) You see the stone

c) You reach for the stone and pick it up

d) You throw the stone

e) You continue to walk around the space

The group began to work cohesively using the narrative of the points above to inform their movements. I introduced them to some of the key ideas which are cited above, in which I talked them through Meyerhold's purpose for the exercises and études. They began to discuss how each of those ideas altered their movements and it was evident their discussions facilitated their engagement with the principles. The difficulty at this stage in the R&D process was that the participants had now repeatedly performed the étude in a multitude of ways and whilst it was possible to alter the movements to mimic the original form, as I had learnt it and understood them to be, they would be focusing on form as opposed to the principles. This would undermine the intentions of this research which seeks to centralise principles in a new training model.

Instead, I went through the notes I had collated through the process and redesigned the way the material would be presented to the new participants for the following Case Studies. There were a number of key moments in the research and development Workshops that I was keen to utilise in the Case Studies. In no particular order they were:

- Acknowledging the audience: When asked to consider an audience in the space and how that altered the design of the movements the participants had

responded by recognising the need to communicate physically. This was particularly evident when working in the round and adapting to an imagined audience member who may have obscured views of their movements. The participants' focus of using their physicality was something that needed to be included in the Case Studies.

- Imagination: The response to an imagined audience was also evident when applied to the imagined stone. The participants responded to the imagined qualities of the stone and altered their physicality as well as their consideration of the narrative. This had occurred late in the last session and I wanted to explore the benefits of introducing imagination as a principle early on in the Case Studies Workshops.
- The *Acting Cycle*: In the latter part of the first R&D Workshop I introduced the principles of the *Acting Cycle*. This has been extremely beneficial in allowing the participants to focus on each component movement with a sequence. It also encouraged them to consider the relationship between the body and how that is communicated to the audience. For example, the first part of the *Acting Cycle* is the *otkaz* the participants understood how to physically prepare for a movement but they were also challenged by having to communicate an intention to move. This was something that warranted inclusion in the Case Studies to see if the participants would make the same connections.
- Balance and Centre of Gravity: Both of these principles became apparent the moment the imagined weight of the stone was embedded in their

movements. The participants were keen to explore how the weight affected their physicality and how that was communicated to the audience.

- Springiness of the legs: A principle which essentially resists the actor's temptations to lock their legs and in doing so be unprepared for the next movement. Crucially though, it served as a helpful way to prepare for next movement – though again, I was curious to see whether the participants in the Case Studies would adopt a similar movement.

It was this method that proved successful and is being presented as the new model with which to train contemporary biomechanics. There were three embodied insights which were vital in each of the Workshops and as such the following chapters are dedicated to each insight.

CHAPTER ONE

Narrative and Mechanical Purpose

This chapter will focus on the importance of Purpose within the Workshops, discussing the two new ways this project utilised a dual understanding of the term in order to facilitate the Workshops and Case Studies. Narrative Purpose and Mechanical Purpose encapsulated an approach which centralised the principles in the new model. I will discuss why both the Narrative Purpose and the Mechanical Purpose became a fundamental aspect of the Practice Research Workshops and how that contributes to future uses of biomechanics in contemporary actor training. The Practice Research Workshops discovered that by centralizing the dual understanding of Purpose in the exploration of biomechanics, the participants were able to navigate the movement sequences and embody the principles. This required a distinct shift away from a focus on precision of movement, which seeks to ensure that the physicality of the actors visually resembles the stylised shapes, patterns and angles that are synonymous with biomechanics. Reconsidering the value of purpose, both narrative and mechanical, enabled the participants to implement many biomechanical layers into the étude. Ultimately this method improved the ability to retain focus on the principles in a contemporary setting.

In order to discuss the above, this chapter will firstly address the key principles addressed in the research and in the Workshops. Ensuring that the principles were elicited through this training was of vital importance as they are the purpose of biomechanics. Secondly, I will address the concern with precision of movement in

comparison with this approach's focus on purpose. Thirdly will be an exploration of how purpose was used in the Workshops and Case studies examining how Narrative Purpose and Mechanical Purpose developed as key components.

Key Principles

Firstly, it is necessary to clarify the terms Mechanical Purpose and Narrative Purpose in relation to this project. As has been discussed, the biomechanical layers are made up of anything which constitutes a principle or a goal of the training, this also includes the Mechanical and Narrative Purpose. The function of the terms in a practical setting are to facilitate an actor's engagement with the principles. Narrative purpose encapsulates what is intended to be communicated through the action. For example, in *throwing the stone* it is important that the participants understand each aspect of the narrative that accompanies the movement. This includes the participants' intention to pick up the stone, the throw itself and the completed action. Importantly, Narrative Purpose needs to be communicated to the audience so the participant needs to consider the relationship between the audience, themselves and the narrative.

Mechanical Purpose is the physical actions needed to execute the Narrative. Again, this encompasses both the narrative as the participant understands it but also the narrative as the audience perceives it. It therefore requires the participant to utilise their physical body to demonstrate each aspect of the narrative. This will also include developing the use of additional principles as part of the communication between participant and audience. For example, in order to perform certain aspects of the

sequence they would need to be balanced – thus, eliciting the principle of balance through the movements. An exploration of how this developed within the Workshops and was utilised in the Case Studies is explored below.

As has been discussed in the introduction, the principles of biomechanics are a broad selection of theatrical devices and products which are born through the training. There are specific instances where the form of a biomechanical movement is directly tied to a principle(s) and in those instances there is a clearer sense of what constitutes a principle. There are five principles which directly relate to the physical form of the actor which are all embedded within *Acting Cycle.* There are three commonly referred to aspects of the cycle, the *otkaz,* the *posil* and the t*ochka*, and there are two lesser considered terms which are the *rakurs* and *tormos* (which was discussed in the introduction). The three parts to the *Acting Cycle* are described by Pitches, who states:

> 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. (Pitches, 2003: 55)

The *Acting Cycle* functions as a tripartite structure and allows actors to break movements down into the three stages described above. In doing this the actor can focus on precision of movement ensuring a consistent quality to each aspect of their physical form. In addition, both *tormos* and *rakurs* can be used within the *Acting Cycle.* Katie Normington suggests that *tormos* 'has the effect of putting a break on the movement of the *posil.* The actors found this helpful in defining stages of the

overall movement' (Normington, 2005: 120). Normington goes on to discuss the use of *rakurs* in the cycle, which she believed to be the most useful of the principles, describing the way it encourages the actor to consider the angle of their body. She explains that it 'is concerned with placing the body on a plane or angle, making it appear three dimensional rather than two dimensional' (Normington, 2005: 120). Chloe Whitehead offers a description of the way Bogdanov taught *rakurs,* stating:

> He stood an actor in the centre of the room and asked her to take up a position of stoika [tochka]. 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'. (Beale, 2019: 71)

Each of the five elements of the *Acting Cycle* directly address the purpose of exercises which Meyerhold described. By applying an *Acting Cycle* to a specific physical sequence of actions, the actor ensures a precision of movement and therefore can ensure that they achieve Meyerhold's desire for, '[a] feeling of balance and a center of gravity within himself and within the frame of his surroundings' (Hoover, 1974: 311). The *tormos* (restraint) can be used to encourage the awareness and control of the actor within a space, which relates to Meyerhold's point (b), 'coordination with the stage space, one's partner and the stage properties' (Hoover, 1974: 311). Finally, *rakurs* actively ensures the actor has considered a multitude of angles and how the audience's perspective alters their physical positioning which relates to point (d) 'a director's consciousness, an outside perspective on the material in its coordination with the stage space, partner, costume, and properties (Hoover, 1974: 311)'. This has evidently not included point (c) '[a] state physical alertness or "reflex sensitivity,"

quick reaction to the task assigned by the director without loss of psychic balance and calm' (Hoover, 1974: 311). Whilst many of the key aims of the exercises, as stipulated by Meyerhold, are addressed through the use of the *Acting Cycle* it does not account for them all. There are therefore, evidently other principles to consider within the training system.

The principles of biomechanics were always at the core of this thesis as I believed that the value of biomechanics, in a contemporary setting, would be accessed through the principles. This is in part due to the success other practitioners have had by focusing on specific principles in order to make biomechanics function for them. Cariad Astles, has adapted biomechanics for puppetry training which she teaches at Central School of Speech and Drama. She has developed the five-part *Acting Cycle* into a seven-part system which applies to puppetry (Email Communication 11 December 2019). Astles' development of the system to be used for puppetry demonstrates the principles' ability to be used without retaining the form of physicality commonly associated with biomechanics. The desire to retain form within contemporary uses is predominately used by those within the Vertical model. Practitioners within the Vertical model have a knowledge of biomechanics which enables them to execute and teach precision of movement if they wish – allowing a retention of classic training.

Research into Meyerhold's use of specific movement patterns, sequences and poses arguably give credence to precision of movement being at the forefront of contemporary uses of biomechanics. Meyerhold's fascination with efficiency of movement coupled with his interest in *risunok* perpetuates the idea of precision. The

importance of the individual moments which make up the movement sequences is evident in Meyerhold's earliest work with stylised theatre. In 1906, his production of *Sister Beatrice* notably emphasised the idea of fixed positions. Photographs of the performance depict each of the actors poised as though creating a tableau as seen in the figure below:

Figure 4 Sister Beatrice (1906)

This evidences Meyerhold's early experiments with stylization in the theatre. In his article 'O Teatre' (1913), Meyerhold discusses his intentions for the Sister Beatrice. He states:

> The rhythm of the production was achieved by precisely calculated, extended pauses and clearly articulated gestures. […] The melodious style of delivery and movements in slow motion were designed to preserve the implicitness of expression, and every phrase was barely more than a whisper, the manifestation of an inner tragic experience (Meyerhold, 1913 in Braun, 2016: 84).

Firstly, it is worth noting that rhythm is a principle of biomechanics and therefore constitutes one of the biomechanical layers. As noted above, Meyerhold suggests

that rhythm can be achieved through a number of factors which centre on precision of movement; 'precisely calculated, extended pauses and clearly articulated gesture' (Meyerhold, 1913 in Braun, 2016: 84). Through this precise physicality the actors were delivering a carefully considered externalised emotional dialogue; 'the manifestation of an inner tragic experience' (Meyerhold, 1913 in Braun, 2016: 84). Meyerhold wanted to ensure that the performer's body was actively contributing to the desired *mise en scène*, engaging in the heightened moments of contrasts between form and content. In the stillness of acting, the extended pause, the body was still communicating with the audience. The intention of the movements in stillness and in motion are designed to offer heightened moments of expression consistently, they do not stop due to a transition or pause.

Meyerhold's experiments with highly stylised movements continued to be integrated into his training which is evident through their inclusion in his programme for actors. As discussed in the introduction, Meyerhold emphasised the importance of *risunok*. By the 1920s the use of the actor's physicality in the paused moments has developed enough for Meyerhold to rename this specific aspect of training, suggesting it should be identified as a principle; the principle of *risunok.* Meyerhold states how visual art can be used to facilitate the actor's understanding of *risunok.* He suggests that, "[t]he actor as artist and his concern to live in the form of his pose or attitude… Why the study of primitive painting leads to the only true understanding of what pose or attitude on stage means" (Meyerhold in Hoover, 1974: 82).

As is made apparent from the above quotation, Meyerhold wanted the actor to understand the importance of the outline of their body; the theatrical importance of

the shape and lines they create can be manipulated to portray a dialogue and tell a story, even in stillness. The imperative thing to note about the above is that recognising the importance of *risonuk,* and therefore the precision of movement, requires an additional acknowledgement of the importance of its purpose. The purpose of each pose, outline, and extended pause is to communicate to the actor and to the audience; a Narrative Purpose conveyed through a Mechanical Purpose. The training offered to Meyerhold's biomechanical actors included exercises and études, by placing Narrative and Mechanical Purpose at the forefront of the explorations they will elicit the principles embedded within purpose.

In 1995 Jonathan Pitches and Anthony Shrubsall underwent biomechanical training with Alexei Levinski for one week prior to a re-staging of Gogol's *The Government Inspector.* Pitches took on the lead role of Khlestakov and Shrubsall directed the performance; both underwent the same training and reflected on their experience from either their perspective as an actor or director. Pitches reflects on Levinski's style of teaching, which directly relates to this discussion on pedagogy and Practice Structure. He states:

> [Levinski] resisted the participants' attempts to over-intellectualise the process and would only talk at the end of the class after we had gained some physical understanding of the method. His belief in this experiential approach extended even further as he argued (at least semi-seriously) for a rudimentary biomechanical training for the audience! Alexei himself performed the etudes we were to study - 'Throwing the Stone' and 'the slap in the face' - at the beginning of the first class. During the week's course, (running from 14th- 22nd October 1995) he would only show us individual actions, never the etudes in their entirety, until finally, at the end of the programme, we were invited for the first time to show our completed work and Alexei performed two new etudes - 'the bow' and 'the stab to the chest'. I was struck by how much my perception had changed at the end of the process. My understanding of the principles underlying the etude had been tuned to such an extent that Alexei's work was transformed. I had developed a sensitivity for detail. I noticed which

> foot was leading, where the actor's weight was situated, the rhythmic pattern of each action. In short, my eye had been trained to see the artistry in Levinski's performance (Pitches & Shrubsall, 1997: 101).

There are a number of important things to note from Pitches' observations of the training. The first is the way Levinski insisted on a particular pedagogy that controlled the way the information was passed from himself to those taking part in the training. His insistence not to talk until the end of the class, to encourage the actors and director not to 'over intellectualize' the movements, allows him to place focus on physical precision. As verbal language is not being relied upon to clarify or question movements, the focus is placed on precision of movement

The priority in this style of biomechanical pedagogy is to precisely recreate the physical positions Levinski demonstrates without deviating or reinterpreting the movements. Pitches goes on to explicitly stay that in these session '[w]e [the participants] then offered a representation of his [Levinski's] action, approximating his body shape whilst he circumnavigated the class painstakingly pulling us into position' (Pitches & Shrubsall, 2002: 101). Whilst Pitches doesn't explicitly state that the movements needed to be recreated precisely, the lack of discussion coupled with the focus placed on each individual movement as opposed to the entire sequence (the full étude) highlights where the emphasis was placed. Performing the full étude to the actors at the outset would offer them the opportunity to 'intellectualize' the movements, enabling them an understanding of its purpose. As was explored in the methodology, there is a desire for students to achieve goals in environments where something is being learnt – students will seek out the end goal before understanding if they have understood other aspects of what is being taught; such as the principles.

The pedagogical approach Levinski adopts limits the actor's ability to identify the purpose and focuses their attention on the physical precision, then over the period of training they embody the principles through the process. This method relies on two things that make it inaccessible in the UK. The first is a practitioner who has the embodied knowledge to carefully work through the precision of each movement. The second is that time is needed to ensure actors have mastered the precision of movement in order to elicit the principles. In interview with Thomas Wilson he described having had many years of biomechanical training with Bogdanov and "only on his last trip [to Perugia to study]" did he feel he had understood the component parts of the études in any depth. What becomes apparent is that the approach utilised by Bogdanov and Levinski works when they are able to train over a period of time which is unrealistic to contemporary actors in the UK.

Attempting to replicate the approach used by Bogdanov and Levinski would require prioritising the precision of movement and allowing the principles to develop through extended periods of training. There is therefore a connection between precision of movement, Levinski and Bogdanov and the Vertical culture. Therein lies some of the contentions surrounding three key terms that have populated this discussion thus far; precision, Practice Structure and Verticality.

The perceived 'original' Practice Structure is retained by the Vertical training model, and due to the experiences of practitioners such as Levinski and Bogdanov, they can continue to pursue a biomechanical system which centralises precision of movement in the early stages of learning. However, crucially this is inaccessible in a contemporary actor training setting. Materials which document the étude such as

video footage, photographs and descriptions do not allow actors to create the physical precision that elicits the principles. Therefore, in order to utilise the principles within biomechanical work in a way that is accessible in the UK there is a need to focus on the purpose of the training in new ways.

The fascination with precision over purpose is perpetuated by a number of external factors that were discussed above in relation to the Vertical training model. The idea that there is a "correct" and "incorrect" way to perform biomechanics encourages people to seek out the correct form. In addition, the suggestion that there are courses available which teach the original Practice Structure, specifically Bogdanov's theatre course in Perugia, which also claims that other courses are providing incorrect biomechanical training, again encourages people to seek out the correct form and teachings. This is further fuelled by limited access to the system and results in focus being placed heavily on the sources available; essentially attempting to find precision of movement through the available sources.

When access is limited to a select number of sources, such as the photographs and descriptions provided by Mel Gordon in his 1974 article entitled 'Meyerhold's Biomechanics', the focus and way that biomechanics is learnt is altered. In May 1975, one year after the article was published, Gordon attended a demonstration of Meyerhold's biomechanics as part of the Six Public Acts by The Living Theatre at the University of Michigan. The performers had used Gordon's article which included pictures of the étude *Shooting of the Bow* as material from which to construct their presentation. Gordon describes his thoughts watching the performance, stating:

> Watching their demonstration with a large and curious audience, I felt something between horror and amusement: Almost everything I had written was misunderstood. While the poses the actors had copied from the photographs in my article were correct, all the transitions and body rhythms were wrong, even inversions of the originals. It resembled nothing so much as the stop-start motions of a Kabuki actor who learned golf from a U.S. Army Air Force manual. [...] I identified myself and began to re-school the demonstrators, showing the correct Biomechanical movements. Much to The Living Theatre's credit, they quickly followed with high feelings and enthusiasm. (Gordon, 1984: 13)

There are several aspects of this quotation that bear relevance to this discussion. Firstly, the focus The Living Theatre had placed in their learning was on precision of movement, evidenced by their positions being determined as correct by Gordon. However, they were unable to achieve the principles that Gordon associates with this part of the training. Secondly, the statement presented above is that Gordon's understanding of Biomechanics is correct. If something has been identified as correct the implication that follows is that there is the option of being wrong as opposed to offering a different opinion or interpretation. This provokes questions surrounding correct and incorrect uses of the system that ultimately limit the accessibility of the system if practitioners seek out biomechanical pedagogies that market themselves as correct – as is the case of Bogdanov.

Gordon goes on to discuss that a similar situation to that with The Living Theatre occurred with the Scharazad Theatre in Stockholm, this situation prompted Gordon to note the 'value and difficulty of making live physical recreations' (Gordon, 1984: 13). Evidently, attempting to learn the physical aspects of biomechanics from an article and photographs is complicated and likely to be inflected dependant on the participants' personal interpretations and reading of the material, as Gordon experienced. As discussed above, this is also true of the Vertical model as the

pedagogy is an interpretation of the original Practice Structure. This therefore gives clear examples of how a focus on precision in place of purpose of movement can undermine the integrity of biomechanics' principles. As a result of that, there is a desire from people within the Vertical model to protect the Practice Structure to retain the original form of biomechanics.

Marianne Kubik details the exercise *throwing the ball* in partner work noting the role of precision within this element of biomechanical training. She explains how the exercise requires a pair of actors to throw a ball back and forth, holding the ball just below the chest and aiming just below their partner's chest. She further states that this action is intended to use force in both arms and the ball is thrown and caught with two hands. The action is repeated back and forth between the partners. Kubik suggests that whilst the exercise described above may seem elementary, it is through precision and repetition that the actor engages with the principles; 'any change in rhythm, speed, or number of balls too early in the game is likely to cause the ball to drop or the body to tense' (2002: 11). The suggestion is that the biomechanical principles are embedded within these exacting pre-prescribed movements and anything which falls outside of this won't elicit those skills which raises the question, if the movements are not correct can they achieve the principles?

This perpetuates the perceived concern over correctness and incorrectness as discussed above and limits accessibility through limited access to a training model in the UK can offer the precision of movements that elicits the principles. For example, are the movements correct if the principles are felt by the actor but not seen by the spectator, or perceived by the spectator but not felt by the actor? The answer is

arguably rooted within the Mechanical Purpose of the exercise, which can be understood as the *Posil.* This is due to the fact that the skills are elicited from execution of the movement sequence. Therefore, interpretation of the *Posil* does not then stop an engagement with the desired principles from this exercise. This is crucial to consider as it is precisely this idea of utilising the Mechanic and Narrative Purpose (the *Posil*) that was successfully utilised in the Practice Research Workshops, allowing the participants to elicit the principles even though it was an interpretation of the étude.

The exercises are designed to encourage the actors to engage with the principles so that the versatility of the skills learnt can be applied to other aspects of their stage craft. For example, in Jonathan Pitches' 'Tracing/Training: Object work in Meyerhold's biomechanics' he talks of the importance of stick work in Meyerhold's biomechanical training and addresses the application of skills in the broader context of biomechanical actor training. He states:

> The stick is important for two related reasons: firstly, because it brings together a number of Meyerhold's training sources – sport (the javelin, the foil), circus (the baton, the juggling club), commedia (the slapstick), silent comedy (Chaplin's cane); and secondly because the stick constitutes a kind of ur-prop in biomechanics - it is an object which carries all the associations of those disciplines but none of the baggage, an object which speaks to the performer as much as it does to the audience, an object which, in terms of the development of biomechanics, increasingly speaks for all other objects: the prop of all props, if you will. (Pitches, 2007: 5)

What is made apparent from Pitches' description is the multitude of uses that are embedded within object training. Not only does the stick work utilise various aspects of Meyerhold's theatrical influences (sport, circus, Commedia et al.), it also develops skills which are applicable to all props on stage. This include using props to engage

the audience to tell a story. It is therefore crucial to remember the purpose of the training as it is consistently eliciting fundamental Meyerholdian principles embedded within the exercises and études. This highlights the need to remain focused on purpose over precision in contemporary uses of biomechanics, both in relation to the exercises and the études, as focussing on precision may only offer an actor a replica of one aspect of the system despite its much broader potential.

Precision & Purpose

As was discussed above, in July 2012 Proper Job Theatre company produced a large-scale opera *Cycle Song* which was performed in Scunthorpe. The story was based on the Olympic cyclist Lal White who had come from the area where the performance was to take place. The cast was made up of a number of primary schools from the Scunthorpe area, students at The University of Hull and the protagonists, who were professional opera singers.[4] I was present throughout this production and took part in the training alongside two of the participants of my Case Studies, Andrew Ross and Sarah Isbell. I interviewed both Ross and Isbell and asked them to reflect on *Cycle Song* asking what they had understood from biomechanics as a training system. Initially this had been to ascertain how much of the training they had taken from the rehearsals for *Cycle Song* into my own Practice Research Workshops.

These two interviews offered an interesting perspective on the application of biomechanics in a contemporary setting. Ross had enjoyed the physical demands of the training and the consistency of using the system at the beginning of each session.

[4] Footage of the training and Beale talking about the production is available via this link: https://youtu.be/cfW1Xg6E8dM (Last accessed 10/04/2021)

He specifically mentioned enjoying the precision that Beale expected from each of the performers. He remembered Beale pausing the actors midway through étude work correcting their physical form to ensure they were doing it precisely. Ross had hoped to have more time to train to fully understand the use of biomechanics.

In comparison Isbell commented that she didn't understand the *purpose* of it at all. When I explained the principles that should be elicited through the training she was surprised and felt that wasn't something she had engaged with. She had found the experience had focused on perfecting the étude, which served no help with blocking and movement work. Isbell had found the experience interesting as a performer but was frustrated by biomechanics and ultimately didn't see the point in using such a time-consuming system.

Evidently, there was not enough time within the training schedule to allow for a focus on precision of movement without the loss of the principles and the purpose of the training. I was left considering whether there was value in retaining precision of movement in contemporary uses of biomechanics and if specific principles been identified to the performers, clearly explaining the relationship between form and principle, would that have befitted their engagement with the training?

In 2004 Katie Normington experienced the application of biomechanics in a contemporary setting when Red Shift Theatre Company produced a revival of *Bartleby,* with Normington in the role of movement director. In her article 'Meyerhold and the New Millennium' (2005), Normington highlights her concerns with trying to integrate biomechanics into a contemporary setting. She notes that she had 'two overriding concerns: the lack of time that could be given to training;

and how to integrate training and rehearsals, which are essentially two very different activities' (Normington, 2004: 120). This encapsulates the issues this thesis addresses and the concerns of contemporary training raised by both Ross and Isbell in relation to *Cycle Song.* Normington is very clear that she will be working with specific principles of biomechanics as opposed to attempting to work with the entire system. This decision acknowledges the complexities of working with biomechanics in a new context and Normington's article continues to demonstrate the difficulties with using biomechanics in a contemporary context. In her closing statement on the process she states:

> It would be thrilling one day to have the luxury of time to make a performance piece that created a physical outline for each scene: a system which engaged firstly with corporeal responses to the text, and then elaborated this through application of the words. But it was noticeable within rehearsals that I could only get through a couple of pages of script during an afternoon; about a fifth of the proportion that traditional rehearsing produced. It may still take many years of this millennium to find just what Meyerhold can offer. (Normington, 2005: 126)

Normington highlights the compromise of trying to use biomechanics in a contemporary setting. This suggests that 'the luxury of time' would have offered a more comprehensive experience and exploration of biomechanics. What is apparent is that there is a need for biomechanics to be altered, adapted and reimagined in order for it to be used by contemporary British actors.

Interestingly both Whitehead and Beale feel that their embodied understanding of the system has allowed them to manipulate it to work in a contemporary setting. Proper Job utilises biomechanics as part of the training for their actors and over the years they have accrued a number of actors who regularly perform with them, James Beale describes these actors as being 'proficient in biomechanics' (Skype interview

17 December 2019). As discussed, they both teach outside of the traditional rehearsal process offering Workshops in Higher Education – where I trained with Beale. This is essentially an indirect acknowledgement than in order for biomechanics to continue to be used in a contemporary British setting there is a need to alter format of the pedagogy.

The Practice Research Workshops sought to investigate a time-sensitive version of biomechanics, with the Workshops intended to decipher which aspects of the system were integral in order to retain the principles. My research, and training had suggested that the *dactyl* was the movement sequence that all actors learnt first.

The *dactyl* purportedly frames the études; with each étude beginning and ending with a *dactyl* (Beale, 2017:64). The purpose of this movement is to unify the actors as an ensemble in addition to an internal clarity where certain skills are invoked; such as rhythm and balance. By eliciting these skills through a specific movement sequence, the *dactyl,* acts as a preparatory movement to begin the longer and arguably more complex sequences; the études such as *Shooting the Bow* and *Throwing the Stone*. Law and Gordon suggest that the *dactyl* provides, 'first, concentration – to focus the attention of the performer; and second, balance – to establish coordination of the body in space and in relation to other participants before the execution of the exercise' (Law & Gordon, 1996: 103). In Marianne Kubik's chapter 'Biomechanics: Understanding Meyerhold's System of Actor Training' she states: 'The *dactil'* [sic] focuses both the A1 and A2 of the actor, reminds the actor of the need for balance and counterbalance, and establishes synchronicity between partners or among a group' (Kubik, 2002: 12). Both of the examples offered note the

importance of concentration among the actors, seemingly this requirement is to ensure that additional principles such as timing and balance can be elicited. To offer a sense of how this movement manifests, Whitehead discusses her experience of using the *dactyl* in training with Bogdanov. She states:

> The *dactyl,* which is carried out by all 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 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. (Whitehead, 2017: 64-65)

The description above suggests that the *dactyl* is essentially the use of clapping to unify the movements through the sound that the clapping creates; developing a shared rhythm among the pairs of actors that is guided aurally; essentially Whitehead focuses on the purpose of the movement instead of the precision of the movement. However, when comparing this description to the one offered by Robert Leach the movement seems far more complex. He states:

> […] the actor stands relaxed, arms down, on the balls of the feet which are placed one in front of the other as in a boxer's stance, with the toes pointing slightly inwards. Leading with the hands, which describe a wide-semi circle as they move upwards through 180°, clapping twice sharply as they go, the whole body is brought to a position stretching upwards, with the heels raised off the ground and the head thrown back. Then the hands describe a downwards semi-circle, clapping twice, ending flung backwards behind the actor; the arms again lead the movement – when they are parallel with the ground, the knees begin to bend the head is flung forward. The knee of the rear foot is no more than an inch off the ground, the back is bowed, the head beside the forward knee. By swinging the arms forward, enough momentum is created to return the actor to the initial standing position. The *dactyl,* like other biomechanical movements, was done staccato, legato, and in various rhythms […]. (Leach, 1989: 61)

Leach's description incorporates movements that affect the whole body as opposed to seemingly just the hands as could be inferred from Whitehead's description. The use of clapping is discussed in both the examples used above, though it is evident that Leach's perception of the movement sequence is a consideration of how the whole body contributes to the *dactyl* as opposed to just the hands. What is particularly interesting about Leach's description above is how effectively it demonstrates the how *the dactyl* will be interpreted, as the level of detail offered suggests an actor could use this to recreate the *dactyl*. However, without a consideration of the Principles the movements are likely to be completely ineffective. For example, Leach suggests that actors should adopt a certain stance which, without a consideration of balance is uncomfortable and feels unstable. If the movement is adapted slightly with a consideration of balance, specifically in this instance this is achieved by a slight bend in the knee and an awareness of your centre of gravity which shifts as the movement progresses then attention can be paid to the clapping and more specifically, the Principle of that movement; rhythm. Finally, the movement can be considered cyclical as Leach describes the way the movement returns to the original position, echoing the way Normington described the *Acting Cycle* cited above.

My own experience of learning the *dactyl* differed from both examples, though there are similarities to the description offered by Leach. Initially we were taught to adopt a specific position with our feet, which in contrast to Leach's description was side by side as opposed to one in front of the other. We were asked to create a dip in our knees which would simultaneously require a bend in our elbows, drawing the elbow

back and creating the same angles with the bend in the leg and in the arm. The arms would then shoot forward and up over the head, maintaining the same distance between the hands (as if carrying very light square box.) When a specific moment was reached with the hands above the head, and the knees now barely bent through extension, the hands dart downwards rapidly, fingers pointing towards the floor. As the hands descend towards the floor the knees also bend again as if directly affected by the movement created from the hands. It is at this moment the two hands move together in two distinct clapping movements, creating the sound as the connection is made between the palms. The actor stands again, returning to the original position.

There is also a lack of narrative within the *dactyl* which is present in études such as *Throwing the Stone,* and *Shooting the Bow.* The issue this presents, within this research project, is that the *dactyl* is reliant on precision of movement. As I try to move away from precision of movement to understand the value of purpose, the *dactyl* forces focus on precision as opposed to purpose. Therefore, my overwhelming feeling in response to the *dactyl* once it had been learnt to a standard whereby the participants could unify the sound of the clap, was that the complexity of the moment and time taken to reach that standard was not effective enough to warrant the time dedicated to that sequence - particularly in light of how little time was available in the Workshops. The difficulty with the unified clap, in my experience of training, was that the audible rhythm became the only aspect of the sequence the actors focused on. Essentially once the sound of the clap was unified the actors felt they had understood what the movement sequence was trying to achieve. Thus, once the rhythm was shared (through the unified clap) little else was being elicited from

this sequence. The time to identify and implement the additional principles embedded with the *dactyl* was something we did not have.

In designing the Practice Research Workshops, rather than starting with the *dactyl*, I chose to initially focus on *Throwing the Stone,* with the intention of working through the *dactyl* if the participants could not achieve a shared rhythm. The research and development Workshops were used to find methods which answered my research questions. The success of *Throwing the Stone* to address my research questions is why the other études and exercises have not been explored in a practical setting – though, that is something I would like to consider for future projects.

During Workshop 1 we worked through each point listed in the description of the étude repetitively and whilst most participants were unsure of the connection between each movement and the specific order to perform them, they were beginning to recognise elements. Essentially, their precision of movement was developing but we were rapidly running out of time in order for those movements to be embedded in a way which would elicit principles – which was precisely what I was trying to avoid. In order to trial how effective focusing entirely on purpose was, I asked the group to dismiss everything we had done so far so that we could focus on purpose as opposed to precision of movement.

The overall purpose of using the étude in this training was to elicit the principles, so the following experiment was to test whether that could be done through an altered physical form of *Throwing the Stone.* It was through this process that the discovery of a new model did elicit the principles and evoke the same form of the original biomechanical études. As a result, this next section will discuss the discovery in

relation to purpose, with the next two chapters exploring this in connection with imagination and ensemble.

Purpose in Practice

The new approach was to focus on the Purpose of the movements rather than precision of each stage of the movement. Initially this emphasised the narrative of the étude by allowing the participants to consider what they needed to communicate through their body. This method ultimately required a use of both an understanding of the narrative but also how the mechanics of their bodies could translate the narrative to the spectator.

The initial instruction to the participants in each of the Case Studies was to walk around the space, imagine they see a stone, pick it up and throw it, then continue to walk.[5] This was because during Workshops 1-3 when I had stripped back anything which referred to precision and focused on what the étude was describing (the *Posil/* narrative) the participants began to focus on the purpose of the movements. I utilised this method to begin the Case Studies Workshops as it allowed the focus to be placed on adding biomechanics layers without first having to clarify the precision of movement. This is of vital importance to a contemporary use of the system as it allowed everyone to get involved in the session immediately. No one fell behind or was doing it wrong because there was no correct way to perform the movement. Instead, their movements and ideas were challenged and developed through the

[5] To view this moment, follow this link: https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/796025349183

addition of biomechanical layers. All of the Workshops and Case Studies wanted to centralize purpose, specifically the reason the training would be beneficial to actors.

The physicality the participants adopted communicated to me, as the outside eye, that they were creating characters which had narratives attached to them. For example, from my perspective, watching a participant lazily meander around the room and pick up a small item which was then tossed to the side painted a picture in my mind of a man walking along a beach picking up stones and throwing them in the sea. When I asked this particular participant whether he had created a character with a narrative, he said his character had lost his favourite stone and was trying to find it discarding the ones that weren't *the* stone. We all laughed at the difference in how I had perceived the character's story in comparison to what he had intended. This prompted a discussion about the way physicality communicates narrative and how each part of your body contributes to that story. I encouraged them to take turns in observing one another performing and to discuss whether what they perceived to be happening with the participant performing. The need to consider an outside perspective relates to the principle *rakurs,* so I explained how the principle worked and asked them to consider how knowing that this is a purpose of the training might alter the way they perform.

The principle of *rakurs* can be expanded on when considering its relationship to kinaesthetic sympathy. The term kinaesthetic sympathy was developed by John Martin to describe the way audiences perceive movement in others (performers) and are able to reproduce the movements they witness in their own body using their own associations and connotations (Stanton, 2018: 3). Since the discovery of mirror

neurons, which is the neuron that fires both when the action is performed and observed, thus broadly supporting the notion of kinaesthetic sympathy (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004), In the past few decades research which directly links mirror neurons to performance work has been published (McConachie, 2008; Blair, 2008; Kemp, 2012). It should be noted that the specific way in which mirror neurons function is a contention among scientists, however the way it is inferred and utilised in performance is still of interest to this research project (Stanton, 2018: 4). Utilising kinaesthetic sympathy in devising work allows actors and directors to consider the value of communicating through a physical language. The audience recognise the movements that are being performed and engage with the expression encapsulated within movements through their own experience.

To apply this directly to what has been discussed as a crucial aspect of the new method presented as part of this research, kinaesthetic sympathy is directly linked to the physical purpose which identifies intention of movement. The audience can be encouraged to consider narrative and intentions through the physical movements portrayed. Listening to the conversations among the participants, they were becoming very focused on a naturalistic performance, by utilising Kinaesthetic sympathy I encouraged them to observe one another and to discuss what they understood the movements to feel like. The participants use of naturalism in relation to *Throwing the Stone* was interesting but did not serve the purpose of biomechanics when taking into account Meyerhold's love of theatricality. It was important that as we developed the movements, and recognised how the outside eye perceived the

movements (through kinaesthetic sympathy and proprioception), that they were constructed in a way which reflected the purpose of biomechanics.

Theatricality & Naturalism

Meyerhold's productions and actor training system were renowned for their stylized quality with theatricality at the heart of the work he produced which is made explicit in his essay entitled the 'The Fairground Booth' (1907). In this essay Meyerhold directly addresses the ways that theatricality should be dealt with, aligning a specific form of physicality to the term. This offered my own research a clearer understanding of Meyerhold's intentions for his theatrical style and how to apply that to future work, particularly when encouraging the participants to reconsider their approach to the "truthful" movements. It is in this essay that Meyerhold first discusses 'pure theatricality' making a distinct step away from the naturalistic theatre he originally trained in at the Moscow Art Theatre (Braun, 2016: 151). His intentions to find alternate methods were evident from when he first left the MAT and as Braun suggests this was in part why he was not included as a shareholder when the company reorganised:

> […] Meyerhold was not included in the list of shareholders when the theatre was reorganized as a joint stock company at the beginning of 1902. At the time, it was suggested that this is what forced Meyerhold to leave the company, but if that is so, he seems to have welcomed the opportunity. He was finding it difficult to reconcile his angular, grotesque style of acting with the muted naturalism demanded by Stanislavski […]. (Braun, 2016:21)

It is therefore evident that even at this early stage in his career Meyerhold was seeking out a style which incorporated his love of bolder, 'angular' and grotesque theatrical performance. There were a number of theatrical devices Meyerhold drew

inspiration from to create what was arguably his own unique approach to theatricality. Within 'The Fairground Booth' there are two key theatrical forms that Meyerhold draws on to describe the way this form of theatricality manifests: the cabotinage and the grotesque. Cabotinage is a tradition of the *commedia dell' arte* and in Meyerhold's opinion was a key component in theatricality on the stage, suggesting that, 'if there is no Cabotin, there is no theatre either, and contrariwise, as soon as the theatre rejects the basic rules of theatricality it straightaway imagines that it can dispense with the Cabotin' (Braun, 1996: 123). Meyerhold goes on to discuss ways in which the Cabotin has been used or overlooked and consistently refers back to the importance of movement without the reliance on text. He states:

> In order to revive the theatre of the past contemporary directors are finding it necessary to begin with pantomime, because when these silent plays are staged they reveal to directors and actors the power of the primordial elements of the theatre: the power of the mask, gesture, movement and plot. (Braun, 1996: 123)

Highlighting the importance of mask, gesture and movement supports the desire for a physical theatricality in Meyerhold's theatre. It is therefore important to recognise the value of physical communication within the training and how that develops an actor's ability to perform in a Meyerholdian style. Meyerhold's unique conception of the grotesque gives a clear depiction of the theatricality he sought in his theatre. In *The Fairground Booth*, Meyerhold discusses the grotesques relationship to contrasts:

> Surely the grotesque is not intended simply as a means of creating or heightening contrasts! Is the grotesque not an end in itself? Like Gothic architecture, for example, in which the soaring bell-tower expresses the fervour of the worshipper whilst its projections decorated with fearsome distorted figures direct one's thoughts back to hell. The lusts of the flesh, the sin of lasciviousness, the insurmountable bestiality of life: all these seem to be designed to prevent excessive idealism from turning into asceticism. Just as in Gothic architecture a miraculous balance is preserved between affirmation and denial, the celestial and the terrestrial, the beautiful and the ugly, so the

> grotesque parades ugliness in order to prevent beauty lapsing into sentimentality (in Schiller's sense). (Meyerhold, 1915 in Braun, 2016: 165)

This description highlights the juxtaposition of form on stage which emphasised contrast. This is evidently the product of work which occurred earlier than the official formulation of biomechanics. As has been discussed, Meyerhold's influences have stemmed from various aspects of his life and career; but his commitment to theatricality and the grotesque remained consistently evident in the clear visual aesthetic of biomechanics. Meyerhold further states that:

> The grotesque has its own attitude towards the outward appearance of life. The grotesque deepens life's outward appearance to the point where it ceases to appear merely natural. (Meyerhold, 1915 in Braun, 2016: 165)

What is apparent from his description of the grotesque is how each aspect that makes up the *mise en scène* contributes to his vision, including the actors. Therefore, in the workshops the participants were made aware of Meyerhold's love of the Cabotin and the grotesque in order for them to consider how this might alter the way they constructed the movements in accordance with the theatricality of biomechanics.

The participants began experimenting with an interpretation of the information they had been given and their movements went from small discreet, almost innocuous gestures to large and hurried sequences. The issue that presented itself was that the participants were now overwhelmed with information and how to approach it. I asked them to break the movement down into parts so that we could apply the *Acting Cycle* to *Throwing the Stone.* Initially this was to utilise the control over the movements that the *Acting Cycle* elicits, though it became far more beneficial to a number of aspects of the training – as is discussed below.

I asked the participants to consider how they would break the movement down into sections, in which each section would have a tripartite structure so that we could ensure the same level of precision and efficiency of movement the *Acting Cycle* is designed to elicit. This was to encourage a focus on the purpose of precision rather than trying to adopt precise movements – the difference encouraged them to consider each of the choices they made in relation to their physicality and the principles. What transpired in relation to purpose were careful and considered discussions which centred on how they made what they were doing clear to one another. Having moved away from the naturalistic style of performance they found that their experiments with exaggerated movements, in which arms would swing unnecessarily high to throw the stone for example, made the narrative clearer.

At the beginning of Workshop 3 I asked the participants to consider their balance – as it is a principle of the training. They spent time working through the movement sequence in a variety of ways and began to offer each other feedback on the integration of balance as a principle. Their conversations bore striking similarities to the exchange between Meyerhold and one of his actors which highlights the concern with what is perceived by the audience and what is felt by the actor. Meyerhold is cited, addressing an actor:

> Stop! (To the actor K, who is sitting on a high ladder.) Change your posture! Sit more firmly, more comfortably. (Actor: "I'm comfortable, V.E".) I don't care so much if you are comfortable. I care much more that the spectator doesn't fear for you, that he doesn't worry about your being uncomfortable. This pointless worry distracts him from the scene we are playing… That's it! Good! Thanks! (Gladkov, A., Law A (Ed), 1997,111)

What is made apparent, again, is Meyerhold's concern with the perspective of the audience as opposed to how the actor felt. Similarly, the participants in the workshop

were discussing how they felt balanced but were being told by their peers they didn't look balanced. The difference was a vital distinction in creating work which embodied Meyerhold's principles and the participants set to work to create movements in which they both felt and looked balanced.

The central ideas that were of huge value from the R&D workshops were the relationship between actor and "outsider" (audience, though without an audience this was a role they filled among themselves) and the way that relationship was facilitating the embodiment of principles. Each of these aspects of training could be broken down into a Narrative Purpose and a Mechanical Purpose.

Narrative Purpose requires the actor to consider the entirety of a story that is embedded within a movement sequence, so that they can bring the audience on the journey of that performance from the preparation through to the end point; essentially, how the actor constructs each action as an *Acting Cycle.* To offer an example of how this can manifest in biomechanics Marianne Kubik suggests that the *otkaz* is considered a 'refusal' or 'reversal' and offers the following suggestions for how this manifests as well as a further understanding of the purpose of the movement, stating:

> We bend our knees in order to jump; we inhale in order to speak or blow out a candle; we raise our fingers in order to strike a chord on the piano […] These recoils go against the main action and are inherent in every physical action, no matter how subtle. […] The *otkaz* is the body's organic way of collecting energy ready for the action […] (Kubik, 2002: 7).

This suggests that an audience and a performer have the capacity to understand what movements are communicated through both the action itself (*the posil)* and the action which precedes it (*the otkaz)*. It is therefore important to utilise the Narrative

Purpose of a sequence that communicates each aspect of the movements, from preparation through to conclusion. Biomechanics facilitates the audience's ability to embark on the performative journey which engages them from the indication that a certain sequence is about to play out from the pre-action through to the completion of the movement (*the tochka)*. Therefore, when creating movements for biomechanics there is a need to consider how the physicality of the actor communicates each stage of the *Acting Cycle* – this consideration is identified in this research as the Narrative Purpose.

The Mechanical Purpose accounts for the physical manifestation of each of the considerations noted in the Narrative Purpose. The actor must consider what the body needs to do in order to communicate what is felt by the actor to the audience. This utilises the *rakurs* as the actor considers specific angles and positions of the body within the space, and how that is understood by the audience through kinaesthetic sympathy. The second aspect of Mechanical Purpose is to ensure that the principles are being embedded within the movements, for example ensuring that the body is balanced throughout all sequences.

The application of Narrative and Mechanical Purpose in a training setting allowed the actors to engage with the étude *Throwing the Stone* from a range of perspectives, keeping their focus on the purpose of the movements. This shift away from precision of movement gave the participants control over the design of the étude and encouraged them to consider how to embed each of the principles within the movements. It was precisely this format that was taken to the group and solo workshops and through a focus on Purpose they were able to elicit a number of the

principles. The implementation of imagination and collaboration, as is presented in the next two chapters, progressed the participants with the étude further. They were able to elicit more principles and develop a clear visual aesthetic which reflected the form of the original études.

CHAPTER TWO

Imagination Arms the Technique

In Paul Schmitt's *Meyerhold at Work* (1981) Erast Garin, one of Meyerhold's actors, states that in biomechanics 'technique arms the imagination', however it has become apparent that in contemporary uses of biomechanics the reverse is true; it is imagination that arms the technique Garin 1967, in Schmitt, 1981: 41). Through the use of imagination in my Workshops and Case Studies, biomechanical technique became embedded into the movements. This chapter will discuss the importance of imagination and why it became a crucial element to a contemporary method of biomechanical training. This will be discussed in four sections. The first will address Meyerhold's relationship to imagination giving an understanding of his desire for the actor to utilize imagination in performance – something which has rarely been discussed in scholarship. Secondly, I will discuss how imagination enabled the participants in the Practice Research workshops to generate an imagined reality which facilitated their ability to achieve a Mechanical Purpose and Narrative Purpose. The core argument of this chapter will present the importance of an imagined reality which allowed the participants to engage with the quality of imaged objects (the stone), which was then inflected in their Purpose. Additionally, by imagining they were performing within the specific historical context biomechanics was intended for the participants were able to access biomechanical layers which are embedded within Meyerhold's intended theatre.

Meyerhold and Imagination

The use of imagination in Russian actor training is synonymous with Meyerhold's teacher Konstantin Stanislavski and his peer Michael Chekhov but not Meyerhold himself. Both Stanislavski and Chekhov published work which specifically addresses the use of imagination with their training techniques (Stanislavski, 1989, Chekhov, 1953). Academics and practitioners have continued to discuss the use of imagination in their work (Zinder, 2013; Rushe, 2019; O'Brien, 2010) demonstrating the continued connection between Imagination and Chekhov and Stanislavski.

The use of imagination in Meyerhold's theatre and subsequent actor training system is not made explicit in the theory which describes his work or in the various practical approaches currently available. Due to the études and exercises which have a specific Practice Structure, the need for improvisation or imagination is perhaps overlooked with practitioners and actors being concerned with the information that is available on how to recreate the biomechanical Practice Structures verbatim – again, reiterating a concern with precision over purpose. However, when considering Meyerhold's own training in the theatre, and specifically his approach to actor training, it is evident where his influence and understanding of the importance of imagination came from; his own teacher Stanislavski. Stanislavski's system explicitly centralised the importance of imagination, even as his theories developed and altered over his career. Elizabeth Hapgood echoes this by stating that Stankislavski:

> […] was revising his ideas until his last breath. But the fundamental aim never varied: "to create life of a human spirit, but also to express it in a beautiful, artistic form." No matter what the angle or approach, his efforts remained constant to achieve "a truth transformed into a poetical equivalent by means of creative imagination." (Hapgood, 2006: 6).

Stanislavski's work hinged on the actor's creative use of imagination and how they developed the imaginative scenes and stories presented by the writers and directors. He emphasised the need for an actor to recognise their role within the creative process. In *An Actor Prepares* he states:

> The play, the parts in it, are the invention of the author's imagination, a whole series of *ifs* and given circumstances thought up by him. There is no such thing as actuality on the stage. Art is the product of the imagination, as the work of the dramatist should be. The aim of the actor should be to use his technique to turn the play into a theatrical reality. In this process imagination plays by far the greatest part. (Stanislavski, 1936: 54)

The role of imagination to Stanislavski was evidently of paramount importance and needed to be integrated into every aspect of the theatre – with particular reference made above to the use of imagination in defining an actor's 'theatrical reality' (Stanislavski, 1936: 54). Meyerhold's years studying under Stanislavski will have impacted the way he approached the creation of the dramatic space.

Evidence of this is apparent when considering the approach needed to theatricalise the various aspects of his training system, which require imagination in order to turn the physical actions into a performance. The implementation of imagination to develop the actor's performance, which reflects Stanislavski's work, is particularly evident in Meyerhold's directions to the actors for his production of *The Government Inspector.* He meticulously works through the performance asking the actors to consider their character's context and how that would affect the character – more importantly, how that alters the way the actor constructs their performance of that character to the audience. For example, in conversation with an actor he states:

> Svistunov, you're answering like a countryman, not like a townsman. Even if he is from the country he will have acquired a military bearing from his training. He is a country lad who has become militarized in the town. Work on it. Answer

> a little more precise: 'By no means', 'Just so'. You should be precise in everything […]. (Meyerhold in Braun, 2016: 288)

The specific action Meyerhold wants from the actor is to use precise phrases. However, rather than just giving that instruction he offers the actor the opportunity to imagine the character's progression which includes an understanding of why he would respond in that manner. The actor can create an imagined character profile which includes a military background giving an imagined reason as to why that character would respond in direct and concise way. Meyerhold is essentially encouraging the actors to consider their 'theatrical reality' which directly demonstrates the training he had received from Stanislavski being used within his own work. Creating an imagined theatrical reality was one of two useful tools directly linked to imagination which became evident in the Practice Research workshops.

Further evidence to support Meyerhold's interest in imagination is evident in the way he demands a thinking actor; 'Training! Training! Training! But if it's the kind of training which exercises only the body and not the mind then no, thank you! I have no use for actors who know how to move but not how to think' (Meyerhold, in Gladkov, 1997: 104). This suggests that he is actively encouraging the actor to consider what is being asked of them as opposed to responding to a task without any consideration. The implication of this is that whilst the movements in biomechanics are specific and intrinsically designed there is still space for the actor to utilise their own mind. The Practice Research workshops support this as they evidence that imagination facilitated their engagement with the biomechanical layers. The specific aspect of the "thinking actor" that can be utilised in biomechanical training is embedded within kinaesthetic sympathy, as has been discussed, and proprioception.

The proprioceptive system connects the brain to the parts of the body which physically move. Through physical embodied experience your brain learns how to physicalise actions or intentions, for example it is proprioception that allows you to run up a flight of stairs without first measuring the tread and depth of each step. Schnebly-Black and Moore define proprioception as:

> The proprioceptive system is of primary importance in controlling body tension and relaxation. It feeds the brain information necessary for calculating how far, in what direction, and with how much energy the arms must move in order to send a basketball to the hoop. Such information is needed to balance time, space, and energy- the three characteristics of movement familiar to all dancers, actors, athletes and musicians. (Schnebly-Black & Moore, 2003 :29)

The human capacity to make decisions which respond to the various factors noted above, such as distance, direction and energy, encompass the ability to accurately distinguish those factors in the context of the given task. Essentially, human perception accounts for a large proportion of the mechanics of the proprioceptive system. Its relevance to biomechanical training is apparent for three distinct reasons. The first is the actor's use of proprioception to imagine the results needed to lift a weighted stone and throw it. This facilitated the workshops immeasurably as there was no need to use a real stone to train with, through proprioception they could imagine what would constitute a reasonable response to the task. For example, the proprioceptive system allowed the actor to ascertain how much you would need to stabilise your lower body to remain balanced whilst picking up the stone.

The second is that a judgement can be made, through proprioception, by the audience as well as the actor as to whether the task has been completed appropriately. For example, when watching an actor performing the task of drinking a full hot cup of coffee, do the audience believe that the cup is full or has the actor's

physical response to the task suggested that it is empty? The physical factors concurrent with an empty cup being lifted and "drunk" from include: the speed the cup was raised, the lack of physical caution to demonstrate it is a hot liquid, the lack of tension in the actor's arm to support a full cup and the over generous tilt of the cup which is supposedly full. All of these will be considered by the audience and amount to an incorrectly imagined proprioceptive response to the task; they will notice that the physical response was to drink from an empty cup.

The third reason this is an important term to consider and factor into the training is its use with Emile Jaques-Dalcroze's Eurhythmics – which was taught as part of Meyerhold's training programme where students were required to study its theory (Braun, 2016: 187). Dalcroze's Eurhythmics focuses on the use and development of rhythm in the body. Similar to biomechanics, Eurhythmics demands the use of the entire body and centralizes the importance of rhythm. The use of proprioception in Eurhythmics is discussed by Schnebly-Black and Moore (2003), who suggest that an awareness of the proprioceptive system will benefit the way you engage in a Eurhythmics class. Therefore, proprioception's specific use within this training encourages the performers to consider the purpose of the movements in relation to the audience. They need to acknowledge that through its ability to allow the performers to make informed judgements about their movements on stage the same system is utilised by the audience to judge the movements of the performers.

Imagination in the Workshops & Case Studies

One of the principles that was introduced in all of the workshops was 'the audience's perspective'. During both the Workshops and the Case Studies the participants were

developing movements within the space they were working without considering an audience.[6]

Observing the participants working in the space their movements were small and inconsistent. I wondered whether the movement sequences they were creating had accounted for an audience and if so, where that audience was. The response in Workshops 1-3 was transformative but I had asked the question late on in the process and noted that for future workshops it needed to be addressed at the beginning of the session to allow the participants to integrate it into their work. This is precisely what I did for the Case Studies and the same contrast of movement occurred in the professional performers' workshop and can be viewed in the raw footage.[7]

The initial instruction to the professional performers was to walk around the room see an imaginary stone, pick it up and throw it, then continue walking around the space. After a few minutes of letting them settle into their own unique performances of *Throwing the Stone* I asked them whether they had considered an audience being sat in the space. I asked them to add an imaginary audience into the space. As had happened in the R&D workshops all of their movements altered and their responses

[6] Case Study 1- **3:38:** Have you considered the audience? The entire group had no audience. I asked them to consider an audience and place them wherever they wanted.
https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/796025349183

[7] Case Study 1: **4.40:** What have you changed about the movement now you've considered an audience? – All of the movements were altered slightly.
Lucy Peacock said that she was "breaking it down a bit more. Because you're thinking about their [audience] perception.
Sadie Wild: I'm trying to angle it better so they're not getting my back.
5:38: Frances Allison: It's made me want to tell a story with it – to which the whole group agreed.
Adam Hepworth: It's no longer doing an action, it's doing an action with a purpose.
https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/796025349183

were a fascinating insight into the benefits of using imagination and 'the audience' as tools with this method.

The participants altered their movements in a variety of ways in response to an imagined audience. As the onlooker, I perceived this as a deliberate change in the angle of their bodies – accounting for the audience altered the position they stood in to account for the audience's perspective of their movement. When directly asked why their movements had changed their responses gave a fascinating insight into the value of 'the audience' as a biomechanical layer. For example, Frances Allison responded by saying, 'considering an audience has made me want to tell a story. It's got more meaning.' The imagined audience had encouraged Allison to deploy a Narrative Purpose to the Mechanical Purpose of the movements – tying the first two embodied insights together. When she said this the group audibly agreed they had done similar things. Whether or not Allison was aware of the reasons behind her decision to implement a narrative, she was either subconsciously or consciously utilising Kinaesthetic Sympathy by altering her movements to create a narrative with which an observer could engage.

Lucy Peacock commented that she was 'breaking [the movements] down' as she was now aware of 'perception of angles', to which Adam Hepworth agreed that he was 'conscious not to have [his] back to the audience'.[8] What this clarified was that before adding an imaginary audience the participants were creating movements which responded to the task but were essentially for themselves. Once the imaginary audience were positioned in various places around the studio the movements were

[8] Op. cit.

being constructed in a way which allowed them to perform the étude facing the observer. When I specifically asked them to begin the movement sequence at a given command, the participants would rush to alter their body to perform in front of the imagined audience – ensuring they perform the étude either facing or side on to the imagined observer.

During Workshops 1-3 I talked to the participants about Meyerhold's unrealized theatre, explaining that biomechanics was intended to train actors to perform in that space. I talked to them about the vast scale of the theatre particularly in comparison with the space we were working in, and the challenges the actors would face communicating intricate or small physical movements. I suggested that the movements created that were physically bigger were clearer and therefore more appropriate to Meyerhold's unrealized theatre. In order to make that distinction clear the next section will discuss the unrealized theatre and how that directly connects to Meyerhold's desire to incorporate the audience's perspective into his training – as this theoretically underpins what was the physically discovered in the Practice Research Workshops.

Imagining Meyerhold's Audience

To Meyerhold the audience was as important as any other aspect of the theatre. In Robert Leach's *Vsevolod Meyerhold* he discusses the way Meyerhold framed the audience as one of the four dimensions of theatre. He states:

> 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'. […] Meaning in the theatre there was therefore the creation of the theatre professionals and theatre spectators jointly. This was the cornerstone of Meyerhold's theatre. (1989: 30)

There was evidently considerable value placed on the audience's perspective and their understanding of what was taking place on stage. This is an integral aspect of training which seeks to address the primary concerns of biomechanics, particularly when there is a misunderstanding over who the training is for. Eugenio Barba states that 'Meyerhold's biomechanical exercises are theatrical organisms composed for the doers, not the observers' which misrepresents the importance of the audience in Meyerhold's work (Barba in Nicola Savarese, 2011: 118).

Meyerhold's career spanned nearly thirty years in a variety of vastly different theatre spaces, including the Theatre Studio in Moscow, the Theater of V.F. Komissarzhevskaia, the Meyerhold studio, and Meyerhold's Workshop in Moscow (Hoover, 1974: 281-295). The aforementioned theatres were not designed by Meyerhold and therefore did not represent his vision for the theatre, though they gave him the experience of working in a variety of spaces in which he could experiment. The visions for the theatre he designed would be the creation of a 'mature and experienced practitioner' (Skinner, 2019: 43).

In 1930 Meyerhold was granted funding to overhaul the former Sohn Theatre and with the help of architects Mikhail Barkhin and Sergei Vakhtangov he designed a completely new theatre space (Hann, 2010: 65). However, in 1938 following the

liquidation of Meyerhold's theatre company the work on the new theatre stopped and just nine months after Meyerhold's execution the theatre opened as the Tchaikovsky concert hall (Hann, 2010: 65). Whilst the theatre space was never completed, as part of her PhD research, Rachel Hann completed a computer-based 3D visualization of the space as it was intended. Pictured below is the preferred scenario created by Hann. She describes this as:

> representative of what I consider, based on my informed position, to be the most likely arrangement of the new Meyerhold Theatre had construction not halted in 1938. This includes information derived from two disputed sketches of the new theatre's interior by the architect who would later be commissioned to turn it into the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall […] (2010: 89).

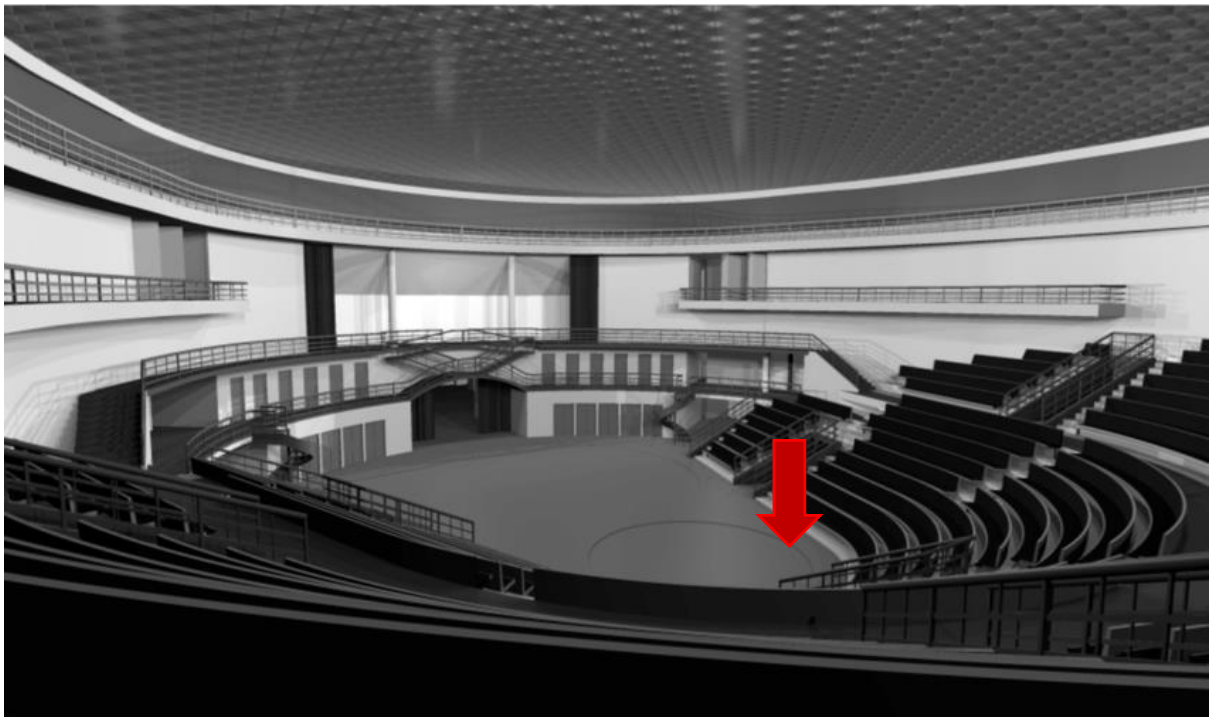

Figure 5 'Preferred Scenario' of the new Meyerhold Theatre, third variant circa 1933-1938. Author: R. Hann – Image altered to include an arrow to demonstrate where the actor could stand.

As is evident in Hann's scenario, Meyerhold envisaged a revolving stage at the front of the stage space which would allow the actors to be seen by as many audience members as possible. This has the potential to offer the audience an uncompromised

360-degree perspective of the actor's physicality, demonstrating Meyerhold's desire to ensure that the actor could offer a performance in the front portion of the stage which the entire audience would see from all angles, without an obscured view. The raked seating and lack of stalls additionally contributes to Meyerhold's desire to create optimum views of the performance for the entire audience. This re-iterates the importance placed on the audience's perspective and how this contributes to their understanding of the performance. The value of the audience to Meyerhold is why it is imperative to consider how that is integrated into a redesign of the études and therefore why the participants in each of the Case Studies were asked to consider the audience as a biomechanical layer.

The Imagined Audience in Practice

The scenario created by Hann is where I wanted the participants of this research project to imagine themselves performing. In Workshops 1-3 I asked the participants to imagine themselves performing where the red arrow points above. This was to challenge the way they constructed their physicality to account for the style of auditorium Meyerhold desired. It became overly complicated explaining the precise spots in the studio that would replicate the red arrow, so for the Case Studies I asked the participants to work in the round.

Working in the round forces the actor to ask questions about the way their physicality is communicating to the audience. For example, as noted above, Adam Hepworth expressed that he was consciously trying to perform in front of the audience and ensuring his back wasn't turned to them. If the revolve began to turn whilst Hepworth was moving it wouldn't allow him to face the audience, he would have to

consider how his movements were perceived from a 360 degree angle. All of these considerations would need to be achieved through the use of the actor's imagination. Within the context of this research the participants were asked to imagine an audience, they needed to place themselves into an imagined reality which presented additional challenges to the space in which they were working. By doing this the participants were able to access an aspect of the historical context Meyerhold worked in, allowing them to devise movements to adhere to the potential of biomechanics. I would also suggest that future uses of this method encourage actors to consider the vastness of the auditorium in addition to working in the round, as this will raise questions around theatricality.

To apply this directly to what has been discussed as a crucial aspect of the new method presented as part of this research, kinaesthetic empathy is directly linked to the physical purpose which identifies the intention of movement. When watching the performers, the audience will be observing the narrative that is embedded within the physical movements. The audience's ability to process this information is further helped by the proprioceptive system.

This directly links to a comment made by Hepworth in the workshops: "I'm no long just doing an action, I'm doing an action with a purpose" (05:58 Video 1).[9] The incorporation of an imagined audience had facilitated an engagement with narrative purpose. Hepworth had been creating a movement based on the Physical purpose of the étude, but it was by adding an imagined audience that he engaged with the narrative purpose. It became clear that the actions the group were creating became

[9] Op. Cit.

performative as they added biomechanical layers, the difference being the consideration of an audience's perspective and how they would read the physical language being portrayed on stage.

At this point in the workshop I encouraged all of the participants to engage with this biomechanical layer; to ensure that no matter where the audience is seated, they would understand what their movements were trying to communicate. Some participants discussed how the audience's perception was being integrated into their decision making, however it wasn't clear whether this was something all the participants were doing. To ensure they had each considered the audience, I suggested they all actively consider the audience and allow that to alter their movements. Essentially, allowing the ideas of some participants influence the way others approached the movements. This specifically related to the way in which the participants engage in certain styles of learning, as it is tied to the way the participants worked as an ensemble in addition to the way they learn as individuals in this laboratory setting of a Practice Research workshop. In order for the workshop to progress, and to complete a devised étude, it was necessary for me to encourage them and to facilitate conversation.

To return to the biomechanical layer of the audience's perception the participants began to experiment with how the movements could be understood from a variety of angles. As a group they became increasingly aware and responsive to one another which was a result of their work as an ensemble, which will be discussed in chapter 3, but a crucial moment in relation to imagination was to identify the qualities of the stone. Until this moment the actors were using an imagined abstract stone, but the

quality of the stone wasn't reflected in their movements, which was evident through proprioception. The participants would approach the stone as if it was light which was apparent through the lack of any stability which would support the weight of a heavy object. The throw itself would be forceful suggesting that the object was heavy. The physical responses to the stone didn't correlate with one another, as the approach suggest something light and the throw itself suggested something heavy.

I asked the participants how big their imagined stone was and this prompted a number of discussions which brought into focus how important deciphering the specific qualities of imagined objects were in the training. It was through these discussions that the participants were able to engage with another biomechanical layer; balance.[10]

I used Law and Gordon's annotated description of the étude *Throwing the Stone* in the Workshops and Case Studies to facilitate the idea of balance, which states that the stone is 'more heavy like a rock' (1996: 106). The reason this particular annotation was used was due to the fact that a heavier object would force the participants to consider how additional weight altered their movements – which is precisely what it did. The instruction to make the stone heavier like a rock was coupled with a brief description of proprioception as I wanted them to understand

[10] 19:34 – How heavy is the stone?
They offer a few suggestions and I take the opportunity to discuss eurythmics and the basics of proprioception. In order to challenge their ability to imagine the qualities of the stone, I told them to imagine that the stone was light enough to be picked up with one hand but on the cusp of that weight.
It becomes apparent in their movement, before we discuss it, that they are starting to alter their physicality to support the imagined weight of the stone. At 22:00 Lucy Peacock (directly in front of camera), lifts the stone to her shoulder before propelling the stone away with force. She's using her whole body in the movement to support her.
https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/796025349183

the value of physical language. I offered them the example that when you run up a flight of stairs you don't need to first stop and measure the tread and depth of each step. Your body has retained information from previous stairs and other movements your body has made with similar physical actions and is able to make an informed decision. The decision-making process (proprioception) should be the guiding tool the participants use to imagine how they would respond to a heavy stone, whilst also noting the importance of recognising that the audience can read that physical language through kinaesthetic sympathy.

The participants worked through the movements again, paying attention to the way they picked up a heavy stone. In the research and development workshops Cassidi White asserted that she naturally wanted to step forwards or backwards (so that one foot was in front of the other) to support the weight of the stone but also to stay balanced whilst propelling it away from her body – suggesting this was similar to physical stance she would adopt to throw a shot put. The importance of this analysis is that White had taken into consideration the weight of the stone, utilising her previous embodied experience, and adopted a physicality which allowed her to throw a weight whilst maintaining her balance. This observation from White coupled with her ability to physicalise a response to an imagined weight was explored by the other participants.

Figure 6 From left to right Annie Baskeyfield-Bride, Amelia Grimes and Cassidi White. The University of Hull, 2017

Figure 6, above, pictures each of the participants reaching for the stone. As discussed White, pictured on the far right chose to keep one foot slightly behind the other. As she reaches forward to pick up the stone her centre of gravity is just over her leading foot, which then transitions to the back foot as she lifts the stone to her shoulder – pictured below in figure 7.

Figure 7 Cassidi White. The University Hull. December 2017.

This exact observation was also made in the professional performer's workshops when Zeinah Gaafar asserted that she was creating a physical stance similar to throwing a shot put to support the weight of the stone.[11] Both the R&D group and participants in Case Study 1 acknowledged that this was a physical stance they were

[11] 22:54 Balance
After watching the two members of the group who offered very different interpretations of the movement to perform the sequence. I asked the group to reflect on the movements taking into account that one of the principles of biomechanics is balance.
Zeinah has also been lifting the stone to her shoulder – which I had noticed during the workshop. In precisely the same way Cassidi White had noted that she had used the movements she remembered from learning shot put at school. It's important to not that this experience was something that the majority of participants had experienced at school and even if they hadn't taken this particular sport at school they were aware of it. This embeds the participants design of the étude in their cultural context.
I asked the participants to adopt the lift to the shoulder into their sequence and asked them what their thoughts were once they had tried it. 24:17 Sadie Wild commented that she could now "feel the weight of the stone"

familiar with from their own experience of sport in their primary and secondary education in the UK.

Imagining the specific qualities of the stone guided the participants to alter their physical language to communicate those qualities to the audience. It took the ideas that the actor had within them to the audience, reflecting key ideas of Meyerhold's practice; to 'share' externally what happens internally to the actor. Meyerhold states:

> […] a theatre which relies on *physical elements* is at very least assured of clarity […] the actor reaches a point where he experiences the *excitation* which communicates itself to the spectator and induces him to share in the actor's performance: what we used to call 'gripping' the spectator (Meyerhold, 1922, In Braun 2016: 245).

In this context gripping is the means through which the actor communicates the internal *excitation* externally, which is essentially a developed and nuanced understanding of kinaesthetic sympathy. What is vital to take from the use of imagination in a contemporary use of biomechanics is the way it will be inflected dependant on the participants. As was discussed in the introduction, biomechanics is rooted in its social and political connection to Russia and to Meyerhold. If biomechanics seeks to capitalise on physical language which is shared between performer and audience there is opportunity for biomechanics to grow within a variety of contemporary settings. The participants will imagine the qualities of a stone and how to throw that stone based on their own experiences of lifting and throwing similar objects. That roots the new étude, designed by the participants as a process of the new model in specific social contexts. This will result in each new design of *Throwing the Stone* having the physical and theoretical histories of the participants embedded within the movements, as was the case with the groups response to placing a heavy object on their shoulder. Through the use of imagination,

the participants were able to conceive of an object which had qualities that allowed them to exist in an imagined space. That space gave them access to the historical context of Meyerhold's desired theatre in addition to allowing them to create physical movements which reflected their own experience, which they developed to be shared with an imagined audience. There is a wealth of potential embedded in a system which allows this flexibility within the structure of the étude, but which also retains biomechanical layers.

Throughout the process described above, a key quality that facilitated the design of the étude was how the group worked together. Specifically, they developed a collaborative ensemble that allowed them to address challenges they faced and to problem solve together. The next chapter addresses how this enabled the participants to work effectively as an ensemble, and how this would allow future uses of this model to function without an authoritative figure as a central part of the training.

CHAPTER THREE

Ensemble as Collaboration

In this chapter I will be addressing the use and importance of ensemble within the Practice Research workshops. This will specifically address the way ensemble was used as a point of focus going into the workshops and how that led to an integral new way to consider how a collaborative process enabled the group to work as an ensemble in developing the étude. This will be explored in three sections in order to explain the impact a nuanced understanding of ensemble offers contemporary biomechanical training – specifically the model presented in this thesis.

Firstly, this chapter will offer a definition of the term ensemble within a theatrical context which will allow a clearer understanding of how it has been used in reference to Meyerhold's practice - in both historical and contemporary uses. This will demonstrate how the initial approach taken in the Practice Research workshops was framed by utilising previously proposed correlations between ensemble and biomechanics. Secondly, I will address how this research uncovered a new way to understand the term ensemble, in relation to biomechanics. This highlights the importance of community and shared dialogue, which contributed an invaluable insight for a contemporary model of biomechanical training. Thirdly I will discuss how through the use of ensemble each of the component parts that have been discussed up until this point contributed to the final outcomes of the research.

Ensemble and Meyerhold

The term ensemble is used consistently in reference to Meyerhold's biomechanics, although this is often to describe both the company of actors who belonged to Meyerhold's theatre as well as to describe a quality that is produced by his actors. This is captured by Robert Leach who suggests, '[…] an acting style was established through the triumphant playing of Meyerhold's ensemble which may be regarded as almost definitive in revolutionary theatre. It was rooted in biomechanics, of course […]' (Leach, 2005: 110-111).

Leach makes the importance of ensemble within biomechanics evident, but capturing what is specifically meant by ensemble in relation to the actor training system was a journey of discovery through this research. The need to operate effectively as a large ensemble was evident in the way Meyerhold used large quantities of actors in small and multifaceted stage spaces. Pitches describes the importance of the ensemble in relation to Meyerhold executing complex work on stage in relation to *The Government Inspector* (1926), he states:

> Meyerhold chose to restrict the majority of the action to a platform a little less than fifteen metres square. This did not mean, however, that he neglected to use the full ensemble for the platform scene. On the contrary, Meyerhold meticulously composed huge canvases made up of fifty or more actors, all beautifully crammed on to the platform. He likened it to 'construct[ing] a palace on the tip of a needle' and it was a central part of his philosophy of acting. 'Having constructed such a platform, it became possible for me to comprehend the beauty of … *self-limitation,'* he argued, adding that *restrictions* encourage 'true craftsmanship' (Rudnitsky 1981: 39). It was a message which spoke volumes, not just about the production but about the acting system which informed the work: biomechanics. (Pitches, 2003: 101-102)

What is made abundantly clear from this description is that in this sense, ensemble in Meyerhold's theatre not only refers to a large body of actors but also the way they

were able to work efficiently and effectively together on a complex stage. Working towards a harmonious whole would be considered a biomechanical layer and something I was interested in exploring through the workshops.

The second aspect of ensemble I was interested in exploring was the specific quality produced by an ensemble. Britton uses 'the word 'it' to describe [his] sense of ensemble-ness' noting the lack of terminology which captures what 'it' is (Britton, 2013: 4). He goes on to discuss the inconsistency between a performer and audience identifying the same ensemble quality, the same 'it'. He states:

> While training an ensemble I would ask performers to sense when 'it' was in the room. Sometimes, in the middle of a scene or an improvisation, 'it' would leave. Sometimes the performers (once they had finished) would tell me that they had felt highly connected when I, their audience, had felt no such connectedness. They may have felt 'it', I didn't. At other times, I would sense deep and instinctive interconnections between the performers but they, after the event, would describe themselves as having felt a little lost. Then there were times when we all felt 'it', so all knew 'it'. (Britton, 2013: 4)

It is the quality of 'it' that within a Meyerholdian context unifies the outside perspective with what is felt by the actor. The specificity of that quality is something that I wanted to explore within the workshops, both to identify and to understand the benefit of 'it' within an actor training context.

The final aspect of ensemble that I wanted to explore in the workshops is centred on shared language. The training imparts knowledge which uses specific movements coupled with physical and verbal cues that allows everyone involved in the training to utilise the language to concisely refer to physical moments on stage, creating what Pitches describes as a 'new dramatic language' (1997: 116). In describing the use of the étude to create a shared language, Pitches refers to Shrubsall, stating:

> Anthony Shrubsall picked up on this communication with the cast illustrating gesture, tone, rhythm by referring to the etude 'throwing the stone'. The etude thus functioned as concrete point of reference for all the production team. (Pitches & Shrubsall, 2002: 101)

Pitches describes how Shrubsall utilised the étude as a point of reference in his directing to allow a clearer line of communication. The études provide a physical representation of an amalgamation of biomechanical layers. Each of the heightened moments of physical expression which can be seen in the études have been constructed to allow communication between the actor and director, the actor's internal communication (essentially an embodied understanding) and the actor's communication to the audience. As a result, the biomechanical language facilitates the communication between director and actor, allowing referral to the physical body in specific positions to replace descriptions.

This resonates with the description of ensemble by Ellen Lauren, co-artistic director of SITI (Show, Ideas, Training, Info). In interview with Paul Allain, Lauren discusses how the performers in SITI have 'found unity through a common training programme' [2002: 48]. Lauren further suggests that, '[a] family grows from this familiarity, as kinship and community are established by shared experience, systems, principles and vocabulary' [Allain, 2002: 48]. The parallels between the SITI performers and biomechanical actors are evident in the way that the actors build their understanding of a system collaboratively; sharing in experience, principles and vocabulary. The vocabulary in biomechanics is also referred to as a shared language that is built through an embodied understanding of the movements.

Ensemble in the Practice Research Workshops

Each of the examples above were ideas relating to ensemble I wanted to explore within the Workshops. As was discussed in Chapter 1, in order to understand whether the participants were engaging in deep or surface learning it was helpful to ask the group questions that prompted them to consider the wider context of learning. For example, when talking about a specific principle such as balance, were the participants considering the implications of balance within the whole movement and how that potentially altered the Narrative Purpose? Rather than ask them consistent questions throughout the process, I asked them to ensure their movements were in unison so that they would eventually each be performing the same movement sequence. By doing this it encouraged the participants to vocalize each aspect of their decision making and how it related to that specific biomechanical layer. This would then allow me, as a researcher, to get a clearer understanding of the reasoning behind each decision they made which in turn gave me the opportunity to consistently offer them more information about biomechanics if I felt it would help develop their work.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, the unification of movement was one of the primary functions of *the dactyl*; the unified movement allowed for the actors to engage in a shared rhythm. Within the *dactyl* this was achieved through an audible unified clap that was made possible through the ensemble's unity. Unlike *the dactyl* there would be no audible barometer to determine whether the participants were executing unified moments, instead each of the workshop ensemble groups utilised the *posil* of the *Acting Cycle* as a rhythmic indicator.

The importance of rhythm in Meyerhold's theatre has not yet been discussed explicitly, though its consistent appearance in this thesis demonstrates its importance to biomechanics and to this research. Leach suggests that rhythm was Meyerhold's 'chief guiding principle' and in his chapter on Meyerhold's use of rhythm, cites Sollertinsky's review of a 'pre-revolutionary opera production' Leach, (1989: 112). Sollertinsky comments on how the rhythm of the performance was perceived by him as a spectator. He states:

> Rhythm… could be sensed not only in the movements but also in the frozen immobility; the chorus … he breaks up into stylized, sculpted groups, only all of a sudden – in a mighty contrast – they erupt in a quick, agitated movement, which however, is still rhythmic (Leach, 1989: 112).

Rhythm, as described above, executed by a chorus of actors, suggests that there was harmonization between the actor's movements. In order to coordinate a body of actors to achieve a rhythm which is perceptible to the audience they would be executing a rhythm through the use of their physical movements – suggesting a capability to work in a shared rhythm. This is further substantiated by Worrall as in reference to the use of ensemble in *The Magnificent Cuckold*. He states:

> […] while an aspect of a liberated, revolutionary spirit, was a direct result of the collective synchronization of movement, the revelation of the individual pattern only in so far as it contributed to the organized pattern of the whole. Particular movement was structurally supported and reinforced, integrated with the physical structure of the stage architecture (Worrall, 1973: 23).

Training the participants in my Workshops to develop the étude with a sense of unity encouraged the idea of 'collective synchronization' as posited by Worrall (1973), but additionally it encouraged the participants to communicate their experience, ideas and solutions. This, in turn, gave me as a pedagogue and researcher a better understanding of what their processes were as they felt a consistent need to stop

and reflect on the work they were creating. This insight was invaluable in being able to note specific parts of the principles the participants were recognising (without being prompted), which aspects they were unable to engage with, and allowed me to instruct alterations where necessary to the workshop itself.

What transpired throughout the research and development workshops was a collaborative process between the participants which allowed them to overcome each of the challenges presented as part of this model. In terms of addressing the issues of the learning styles and the participants' desire to seek out end goals, through collaboration they sought out resolutions through group confirmation. This negated the constant concern over being correct whilst working through the movements. In terms of accessibility this was a huge breakthrough as it allowed a laboratory environment to function with participants who are used to learning in an environment which perpetually tells students to seek out end goals rather than focus on process – which is what this model was doing. For example, one of the differences between the solo workshops and the group workshops was my perception of whether the participants were engaging in deep learning. This was apparent in the ensemble group due to the conversations they had. For example, when a participant volunteered an idea which they felt would be a valid contribution the group would determine whether or not they supported this. If the majority supported the idea progress would be made and the group would adopt this into their own movement sequence. If they didn't agree they would continue to discuss how to respond to that specific biomechanical layer. This allowed me to hear them reflecting on purpose and strategy and therefore know they were engaging with deep learning, whilst also offering opportunities for me to be involved in those discussions. As the ensemble

group cultivated their own conversations there was no need for me to assert myself as a teacher by stopping their process to question them in order to get them engage with problem solving and physical explorations. Instead I was able to join their discussions pushing them to consider additional ideas or offering them information about biomechanics that might be helpful.

In contrast, the Solo Case Studies did not benefit from the value of deliberation and problem solving as a group. The clarity the participants sought would come directly from myself, reducing their perception of my role solely to teacher as opposed to teacher and researcher. There were obviously no conversations had in the solo workshop unless the participant was talking directly to me. As a result, this completely altered the way they responded to questions I posed. One of the distinct differences was what I perceived as a reluctance to allow silence to fill the space whilst the soloist was working. In the ensemble workshops there was opportunity for most people to remain quiet whilst others spoke, or they all remained quiet and were reassured by each other's silence. Attempting to measure the participants' awkwardness at the silence in the solo workshops isn't something that fell within the remits of this research project, but it helps offer an understanding as to the stark difference between the open conversations that were a product of the ensemble workshops in comparison with the lack of ease of discussion in the solo workshops. The solo workshops were unable to benefit from the value of working collaboratively and as the clarity the participant sought would be directed to me, I was consistently and unequivocally involved in their process. This is important as there are evidently a number of benefits for contemporary uses of biomechanics in group setting, where

actors benefit from working collaboratively, but those benefits are lost in solo training.

The success of the solo workshops was based on the framework that had already been established in the group workshop. My understanding of how to elicit the movements came from my involvement in the conversations the participants had as a group in the ensemble workshops. In essence I needed to provide the same conversations and ideas that represented an ensemble's deliberations, shifting my role to a teacher as I was now framing the soloist's learning experience. In order to ensure they were engaging in deep learning I consistently challenged Isbell, Ross and Steele to explain how they had arrived at decisions, asking why they had suggested certain movements to replace others. This encouraged them to verbalise a process of which I may have otherwise been unaware. In both the solo and ensemble workshops this ensured that all participants understood the purpose of the movements

Through a collaborative working environment, the participants engaged in a shared experience, working towards a common goal, uniting their principles – both literally and figuratively. It was through the shared experience that the group determined how and why they would construct the étude, rooting the principles in their embodied composition. This specific way of working collaboratively as an ensemble was utilised throughout Case Study 1.

Ensemble as Collaboration

As was discussed, the *Acting Cycle* was added as a biomechanical layer to encourage the participants to break the movements down in order to use the tripartite system. I explained to them the purpose of each part of the *Acting Cycle* and asked them to consider how they would embody that within their own movements. The conversations in each of the ensemble groups became fixated on the preparation to move and how that could be achieved. I used the example of throwing a ball to explain to the students how in an intention to move there was often a physical recoil in the opposite direction of the intended outcome. For example, as was demonstrated by James Beale in my own biomechanical training, when walking forwards, just before you move forward your body recoils and leans back very slightly. The preparation to move is also a signifier to other actors that a movement sequence is going to begin. The small movements indicate that the rest of the cycle is about to commence.

I spoke to the group about ways in which they could incorporate preparatory movement into their sequences and they decided to utilize a dip in the legs as a preparatory movement.[12] What was born from this movement was a shared rhythm. It was apparent that some of the participants had created almost identical

[12] 22:17 I asked each participant, in turns, to call out their rhythm on top of other people's movements to encourage each of them to listen to the way they had constructed their timing in correlation with the movement.
The use of the preparatory movement to demonstrate the beginning of each cycle is apparent in some parts of their movement but not others. The preparation to throw they adopted a dip in the legs as a preparatory movement with ease and when we discussed this they said that it's because it feels natural. When I reminded them that this for performance and it isn't necessarily to feel natural I's about communication, Adam Hepworth suggested that each of the preparatory movements needed to match the effort of that moment and offered a dip in the legs as the *otkaz* for each cycle.
https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/798235855474

movements which took them from seeing the stone to reaching for the stone, and with the addition of the preparatory movement they were performing this small sequence in unison.

The group deliberated how they could all share in that same rhythm and I asked them whether that would be achieved through everyone adopting the movements of those who had already achieved a unified movement or whether they needed to further develop the movements and agree on a shared sequence which would then allow for a unified rhythm. By this stage the group were working collaboratively and appeared to be unfazed by testing each other's ideas in order to better the group's work. They challenged some of the participants' decisions proposing other ways to reach for the stone and agreed that they wanted to establish how other parts of the sequence would manifest in order to make a more informed decision.

In order to offer insight into the success of the workshops it is helpful to discuss the key moments throughout the group workshop which helped frame the solo workshops, offering a comparison of the two. It is important to note that visually the solo and group workshops concluded with almost identical physical positions throughout the étude, however the crucial difference was the lack of embodied principles in the solo workshops. The engagement of the soloists was significantly different as without clearly defined end goals or the support of additional participants they found the process frustrating. For those in the ensemble workshops the moments they resolved collaboratively were pinnacle parts of the process which allowed them to move forward with the sequence whilst embodying biomechanical principles. This was due to their understanding of the purpose of the movements,

which was achieved through their discussions, and their embodiment of the physical purpose which included biomechanical layers such as imagination. The role of purpose and imagination became crystalized in the moments of ensemble discussion.

Collaborative Ensemble in Practice

The following four points will discuss key moments within the étude that allow the discussion to focus on how each of the embodied insights explored throughout the thesis worked in practice: Seeing the stone, reaching for the stone, prepare to throw and the throw itself.

1. Seeing the stone:

The first important moment which enabled the participants to consider how their physical position would contribute to the Narrative Purpose of the étude was when they performed the act of seeing the stone. The footage of the rehearsals demonstrates what you would expect to occur if you asked a group of participants who have varying degrees of performance experience to walk around a room, imagine they see a stone and to pick it up and throw it. Some completed the task as writ, others were applying character intent and throwing the stone with much more force suggesting a specific target. The longer they continued this task the more they began to develop their own intentions into the sequence. What became apparent in that moment to me was the need to strip away character intent and focus on the purpose(s) as the intent. This was due to the inevitable conversations we would need to have to decide which narrative was best suited to the movement, which detracted from the purpose of the physical aspects of the étude. I wanted to understand what would happen if we created the étude just using the principles as a guide.

The intention of the action needed to be clear to the audience as opposed to the actors internalising their intentions; requiring the actors to externalise a clear dramatic intent, which in this context refers to the way that they make the intention of the performance clear to the audience. In order for them to effectively execute the movements the participants were encouraged to consider additional biomechanical layers which altered their original approach. As was discussed above, the initial attempts saw some of the actors imagine the stone directly in front of them. This resulted in the only clear indication of dramatic intent to the audience being the eyeline of the actor. The studio that was used for the workshops had two small traverse banked seating areas, which meant that the actor's eyeline could be seen from the majority of viewpoints the hypothetical audience might occupy. However, when considering Meyerhold's unrealised theatre and specifically the seating that would be available to the audience, the majority of the audience would not be able to see the actor's eye line. With this additional information, which I provided, the ensemble set about experimenting with ways to make apparent the narrative of seeing an object that had caught their attention. The photographs below capture the result of their conversations and experiments and depicts the actors performing seeing the stone.

Figure 8 Participants performing *Throwing the Stone* – specifically the moment they see the stone.

Figure 8 above captures the moment the participants in Case Study 1 seeing the stone. They are each looking over one shoulder with their head tilted towards the floor where they imagine the stone is located. In the photographs below, solo participants Lizzy Steele (pictured left) and Andrew Ross (pictured right) also arrived at the same physical position looking over one shoulder towards the ground where they imagine the stone to be.

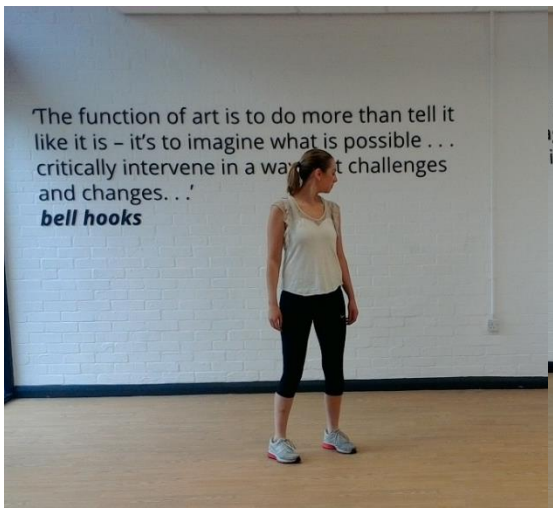

Figure 9

Figure 10

In Case Study 1 arriving at this decision took far less involvement on my part to encourage the group to consider how the positioning of their body would translate to the audience. They took it in turns to perform and reflected on the movements the group performed. They discussed the importance of the head movement needing to be distinct from the rest of the body. What is not captured in the photographs is that leading up to this moment the participants are walking around the space.[13] As the participants walked around the space their head and eyes were looking in the direction of travel making it harder for an audience to distinguish between them looking ahead or looking at something specific *if* the object they saw was directly in front of them. The moment at which the participants stopped walking to see the stone became integral to the sequence. If the participants saw the stone before they stopped walking they found it difficult to communicate that a stone had been seen. Instead, the ensemble group decided to stop and then turn their head to see the stone to make the distinction between them looking where they are going and looking at something specific – as was discussed in relation to communicating their intention to the audience. The established elements of the sequence at this stage were that the actor is walking around the space, they stop, the head turns to look over one should towards the ground looking at the imaginary stone.

[13] 11:01 How do the audience know you've seen the stone?
The group offered "eye line" as a response but were then using the turn of their head to communicate this. I offered them options which were reflections of their own movements to consider the importance of using their head. I asked them to discuss ways to make it clearer and Adam Hepworth suggested that if the stone isn't directly in front of you it's a bigger movement. With Sadie Wild adding that it's "more of a contrast".
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2. Reach for the stone

Returning to the purpose of the movements, the participants needed to pick up the stone and throw it. We discussed breaking that movement down and how to execute that physically.

In the initial experiments with the étude the participants created movements which reflected personal narratives that the actors had adopted. As noted above this was particularly prominent in Case Study 1 with the professional actors. In almost all of the cases this took away from their ability to focus on the dual purpose of the movements as well as the principles. As we worked through the étude I asked them to each construct the two stages of the étude that had previously been agreed, and to observe the differences between the movements that each participant created. This refocussed their attention on the physicality of the actor taking the audience's perspective into consideration – applying their perspective to the discussion. By reconstructing the reach for the stone, picking up the stone, and throwing of the stone the participants were able to compare and contrast their movements with one another. Importantly, by breaking the movements down but performing them together they were each able to apply their imagined response to the task using their proprioception. Encouraging them to challenge each other's response to an imagined weight the group began to distinguish which movements best responded to the task with each of the principles that had been noted thus far incorporated in the sequence. This method of working as a collaborative ensemble is what became an integral feature of the Workshops that allowed the group to progress through the design of the étude. It is additionally what I would suggest is a key feature to contemporary uses of biomechanics which want to utilise this method.

The physical response to reaching for the stone needed to incorporate the intention of the full movement sequence. For example, some of the participants performed the reach for the stone in a way that did not account for their balance to be retained with the addition of the weight of the stone. The photograph below depicts participant Frances Allison in the early stages of working through the movement.

Figure 11

Most of the group created movements similar to Allison's as they were focused on narrative. However, this didn't account for the additional principles that needed to be embedded within the movement sequence. On reflection, it was at this stage that the duality of Purpose, both Narrative *and* Mechanical Purpose became integral. If the participants didn't utilise the Mechanical Purpose, as well as the Narrative Purpose, of the étude principles would be lost.

The participants agreed that when the participants' physicality looked similar to Allison's, as though they were picking up a light stone, that there were no clear

physical indicators that the stone would be thrown. When taking into consideration the need to communicate the narrative purpose of the entire movement sequence the participants began to address how the way they approached the stone would affect each of the biomechanical layers we had discussed so far; purpose (narrative and physical), imagination, ensemble, unity of movement and rhythm.

Figure 12

What is evident from figures 6[14] and 12 and 13 is the progression of movement which captures the participants working towards a unified reach for the stone. Their legs are now positioned one in front of the other as opposed to next to each other in a variety of stances. By doing this they are able to support themselves and remain balanced once they lift the imagined weight of the stone.

In terms of the audience, the physicality is exaggerated to allow for a clearer depiction to an audience that might be sat in Meyerhold's theatre, which accounts for more perspectives from a range of angles and distances, as opposed to the limited

[14] See pp. 122

audience seating in the workshop spaces in which the Practice Research workshops took place. The ensemble groups agreed, in each of the workshops, that the bigger movements conveyed a clearer narrative.

It is important to highlight the theatricality of biomechanics within the new model. At the core of the movement sequences are additional principles which centre on the various ways in which Meyerhold sought to deploy theatricality within the theatre; the grotesque, the cabotinage and stylization. This important detail reminded the actors that they were performing as actors as opposed to mimicking the skills adopted by a sportsperson throwing a stone (or shot put – as was the example used). This encouraged them to draw out the theatricality in a variety of ways to explore the movements and offered them the opportunity to embody the principles in ways they had not previously considered. For example, as the actors reached for the stone their movements were becoming bigger in order to account for what the audience could see, as smaller movements were imperceptible to anyone except those sat in a small space - they imagined they were in Meyerhold's theatre. However, once we had discussed the theatricality of biomechanics the actors began to experiment with how that would physically manifest. There was a distinct shift from creating movement to be understood and creating movement for performance to be enjoyed. Essentially, they began to rediscover the movements through physically led performance as opposed to being stilted by what they had previously perceived as a lack of dialogue and language driven performance.

There was, again, a distinct difference between the way that the ensemble group responded to this layer and the responses of the solo participants. The ensemble

group were able to share in the fun of performance together, laughing and encouraging one another. By contrast the solo participants were reticent to explore the stylized approach for fear of getting it wrong. Without encouragement or critical guidance, something that the Case Study 1 group were able to share in, I was consistently relied upon to provide that conversational support. It is important to note that it was my experience from the Workshops and Case Study 1 which gave me a clear understanding of what the participants needed to consider in order to achieve the embodiment of certain principles in that context. Without being privy to the conversations the participants collectively cultivated I wouldn't have known how to guide the solo Case Studies as clearly as I did. There were numerous instances where participants in both the Workshops and Case Study 1 successfully resolved what they suggested were problematic or difficult movements in order to consistently add the biomechanical layers. In the solo workshops all of the problem solving would either happen internally or the participant would ask me directly hoping I would give them a solution – this became increasingly evident as the participants became fatigued.

Amy Skinner notes the following about the work of Sinéad Rushe, who teaches biomechanics at Central School of Speech and Drama:

> Rushe notes the importance of students encountering vigorous physical practice early in their professional training. Her students, she observes, are often shocked by the physical demands which biomechanical training places on them. It is this discomfort which is the crux of the training process, as the students attempt to work through the physical constraints of the system towards embodying the empty form with its theatrical potential. (Skinner, 2012: 94)

This description of the students trying to 'work through the physical constraints of the system' perfectly encapsulates the difficulties felt in all the workshops by the participants. As is noted above, the initial difficulties felt by the participants was

overcoming the physical demands of the training. In interviews with both Whitehead and Beale they explained how the training they offer to students or actors who are new to biomechanics needs to accommodate a lack of physical stamina (Skype communications 18 November 2019, and 17 December 2019). They both noted that even those students who would consider themselves as physically fit were shocked at the intensity of the training. The physical demands of the system have become synonymous with biomechanics. Jane Baldwin notes the following about the fitness of those who took part in the training in 1993:

> Despite the fact that their movement training varied from strong to almost non-existent, everyone found the classes equally arduous, not least the professional dancer, Llory Wilson. She discovered, somewhat to her chagrin, that it was "as much a challenge for me as for anyone else". (Baldwin, 1995: 185)

The unique movements the études were demanding in each of the training experiences I underwent were felt by everyone I trained with. To return to the idea of participants having to push through this frustration in order to embody 'the empty form [of the physicality] with its theatrical potential', there was an additional difficulty for the solo participants. In the ensemble workshops the fatigue felt among the group was shared, they were able to discuss and observe how strenuous they found the demands of the training. Encouraged by one another it reaffirmed to them as individuals that they were not performing incorrectly as each of them was struggling. However, in the individual workshops the participants did not have the support of others to discuss how hard the training was. This perpetuated the idea they were performing the movements incorrectly. Without directly telling the group they were correct – something which I had been trying to avoid – their physical fatigue began to manifest in mental frustration. They wanted to understand what the

end goal was so that they could achieve the goal and not ‘waste time getting it wrong’ – a comment made by one participant. It became increasingly apparent that the solo workshops were able to achieve the majority of the biomechanical layers that the ensemble group were, but without additional participants to engage in a physically driven knowledge exchange they were each convinced that what they had produced was wrong. After the workshops had concluded I showed them the photographs and videos of the ensemble workshop and they were shocked to discover how alike their movements were. The final movements had stark similarities, particularly from a purely visual perspective. Pictured below, figure 13, is Nikolai Kustov having thrown the stone. Figure 14 depicts the participants in Case Study 1 having thrown the stone.

Figure 13

Figure 14

The figures demonstrate the similarities in the physicality of the participants with Kustov, despite the focus of the training being purpose not precision of movement.

Through accessing the purpose of the movements, we also accessed the physical form that is synonymous with biomechanics.

In terms of accessibility the solo workshops were consistently working against the participants' inherent desire to seek out end goals – as was discussed above. Their frustration and self-doubt were not things I could mitigate.

3. Prepare to throw

As was discussed above the participants had broken the movement down into three sequences: seeing the stone, preparing to throw the stone and the throw of the stone. Encapsulated within the sequence of "preparing to throw the stone" the participants needed to pick up the stone (including its imagined weight) from the floor to a standing position, where the movement paused ready to execute the final sequence of "the throw of the stone". The transference of the imagined weight to a position that would allow them to throw it required the participants to consider a number of biomechanical layers that have been discussed above; purpose, imagination, and now ensemble as collaboration. There was no specific moment at which I discussed the importance of ensemble with the groups (or solo workshops) as it was something I intended to discuss with them at some point in the process in order to clarify how they interpreted the term and what they thought that would bring to the étude. The need for me to raise this biomechanical layer happened far later than anticipated as it was through the implementation of rhythm that they began to produce the unquantifiable 'it', that Britton notes, within their work. This 'it' was embodied by the participants and perceptible to me as the external eye. It was evident in the composition of their movements, the rhythm they executed and

the way they responded to one another; the participants who were in groups, as opposed to working as a soloist, were working as an ensemble and producing a distinct quality, the 'it' of ensemble.

As has been discussed the participants were being encouraged to create unified movements as this not only reflected the style of Meyerhold's actors, as discussed above, but it also encouraged them to verbally express their decisions around the choices they were making – allowing a clearer understanding of their internal, as well as their external, processes. However, the way this manifested was through an implementation of rhythm. This supports the idea presented at the outset of this research that the principles are intertwined; by embodying one principle, whilst utilising the physical structures of the étude, other principles would be elicited. In contemporary practices this is important to note as it suggests that there is a lesser need to identify each of the principles before entering into a workshop. Instead understanding and centralizing the purpose of biomechanics, both Narrative and Mechanical, will elicit the principles as part of the process. This would allow an improved accessibility of the system in a contemporary context as it allows actors to focus on Purpose of the training, eliciting the principles.

Figure 15

Figure 16

Figure 17

The three figures above capture the key physical moments within the sequence that both begin and end the “throw of the stone”. The discussions in the Workshops, which I will explain fully below, initially suggested that figure 17 would be the final physical stance of “prepare to throw the stone”. However, the different groups made decisions about their sequences that resulted in some transitioning from figure 15 to figure 16 whilst another group (pictured in figure 17) negotiated with one another to make the position adopted in 17 their final physical position of that sequence. The negotiation of what positions should be included is part of what made them an ensemble. Their ability to communicate with one another effectively, working towards building the étude encouraged a cohesion that was evident in their movements, this was the ‘it’ of ensemble.

By the time the participants began to discuss the throw itself it was apparent that this approach was allowing an embodiment of the principles and had the capacity to continue to add biomechanical layers with additional workshops.

4. The throw itself

The final aspect of this movement sequence was the throw itself. The participants stood with the stone raised in a position of readiness dependant on how they had interpreted it, or what the ensemble had negotiated, and projected the stone away from themselves towards a chosen target. They utilised the same dip in the legs that had instigated the previous *otkaz*, allowing them to throw the stone in unison. Balance and clarity of movement (which took into consideration the duality of purpose as discussed in chapter one) required the participants to consider how they were physically representing the weight of the stone, and the implied narrative. They needed to account for both the narrative that the audience perceived from their movements as well as the physical purpose of the throw and the principles that were to be elicited through that; the principles that had been accrued thus far were balance, rhythm, unity, narrative purpose, physical purpose, ensemble, theatricality and imagination. Their discussions focused on the use of the arm that was not holding the stone and how that would aid balance and narrative. Those participants who had previously thrown a shot put or javelin were quick to elevate the arm without the stone to offset their balance - as it evident in figure 16. From here the participants threw the imaginary stone towards an imagined target that they visually focused on – which was in the same direction that their arm was pointing, as can be seen in the figure below.

What is evident in figure 14 is the shift of balance from the back foot to the front foot with the core remaining central ensuring that the actor is balanced.[15] The participant's arm without the stone has transitioned from pointing in the direction of the throw to behind the body offering a physical support to offset the force of the stone being thrown – to keep the body balanced. These specific details in the movements all add to the theatricality of the performance and the creation of the imagined stone. There is no real weight being thrown but the participants' perception of the movement, their kinaesthetic sympathy, allows them to engage with the physical demand of the throw, the narrative, and the performance. The participants in turn experience the physical demand through the composition of the movement sequence.

The unity of movements the group had adopted are evident in each of the figures above. There are small differences if you carefully examine the physical positions of each participant with the others, however there is a consistency to their movements which is captured in these figures. This is important as it demonstrates a thorough process which aligned the ways they embodied the biomechanical layers into the étude. This unity is made more apparent in video extract 1 which captures the shared rhythm the group had adopted.[16] To clarify, in this video rhythm is referring to the timing with which the participants move from one position to another resting and beginning on the same beat. The rhythm is not always precise and where some participants perform in perfect unison others are slightly behind a beat. However,

[15] See pp. 148 above
[16] To view Video Extract 1, please click the following link:
https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/808697039024

what is apparent is their ability to be informed by a shared rhythm which they establish through the *otkaz* (the preparation to move) from the *Acting Cycle.*

In each of the Case Studies I introduced the *Acting Cycle* to the participants to utilise its ability to break down the movement sequences to allow them to place a concentrated focus on each component physical moment that made up each *cycle.* Identifying the smaller moments allowed a greater degree of precision to be placed upon each physical position the participants adopted throughout their movements. All three elements of the *Acting Cycle* contribute to the precision and rhythmic movements synonymous with biomechanics, as Pitches states '[t]he rigid discipline of the ensemble testifies to the collective training of biomechanics, slowly building up an unspoken understanding between actors which is underpinned by a strong sense of rhythm' (Pitches, 2003: 105). Within my own workshops it was evident that using the *Acting Cycle* created a way for the participants to organize a rhythm collaboratively. Taking into consideration that there was no metronomic pulse audibly underpinning their movements they needed to establish the pulse using another method, whilst also constructing the movements in a way that would allow for this. It should be noted that the solo participants did need an audible beat, which is discussed later.

In addition to its role as part of the *Acting Cycle,* the *otkaz* serves two independent purposes in biomechanics. The first, as discussed above, is the recoil or refusal in which the actor physically moves in the opposite direction of the intended movement to galvanize energy to complete the action. The second purpose is that it is used as a 'pre-action' which Kubik describes as the indicator to the audience that the 'refusal'

or ‘recoil’ are indicative of the action that will follow. My own training in biomechanics, with Whitehead and Beale, suggested that the *otkaz* could be used as a subtle indicator to other actors on stage when movement sequences were going to begin, allowing a distinction between phrases. To clarify, this manifested as one actor being chosen in a particular scene to begin the next sequence of movements, as they moved into the preparation other actors would follow using this as their cue to begin. This would allow them to erupt harmoniously into the next movement as an ensemble. The use of physical prompts to communicate with one another on stage supports the notion that biomechanics can be used as a physical language, as discussed above, which is another way in which the participant become an ensemble sharing in their own language.

It was the method I had learnt from Whitehead and Beale that I explained to the participants in my own Practice Research workshops, encouraging them to consider how the *otkaz* could be used to signify the transitions from one movement to the next. This also included a discussion around their physical placement in the space; if they couldn’t see the person leading the movement sequence, they could at least see one other participant in the space which would allow them to remain harmonious. This was one of many moments throughout the research which saw a separation between the ensemble workshops and the solo workshops. The ensemble groups were developing their movements as a group, identifying and discussing where some movements allowed them to adhere to their perception of the biomechanical layers. In the composition of the movements there were differences in what each individual body was capable of doing, particularly as they were trying to include a consistency to the movements which utilised the *Acting Cycle.*

As can be seen in video extract 1 the preparation to move was established as a dip in the legs, each fragment of the entire étude was signalled using the dip as the *otkaz.*[17] This made a distinct beginning to each physical movement sequence in which all the participants tried to work harmoniously together – which was successful. As they lifted the stone from the floor the participants would dip the knees slightly to indicate that the movement had begun with each of them raising the stone from the floor to its final position to conclude the movement. This is the moment at which the ensemble groups, and soloists, each differed on what constituted the final physical position of "picking up the stone"- the two positions adopted are evident in figure 13 and figure 16. The differences were due to the conversations had by the participants, or lack of conversations as was the case with the soloists. In the ensemble workshops the participants had to negotiate their movements in order to unify the sequences – a key element of the method presented as part of this research. This offered insightful conversations into the future of accessible actor training practices – including biomechanics. Biomechanics is, as has been discussed at length, synonymous with complex stylized movements (the études) which form a large portion of what constituted the actor training system. In terms of accessibility, for actors to physically use the system in a contemporary actor training setting, the new model as presented in this thesis, requires the participants to negotiate the movements deliberating the extremes they will collectively push their bodies to achieve. There are possibilities embedded within the collaboration process this model which encourages actors to devise their movements in accordance with one

[17] To view this moment, click the following link:
https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/808697039024

another and to have a heightened awareness of how each member of the ensemble portrays themselves on stage.

To return to the discussion of how the participants performed the movements for "prepare to throw", due to the differing opinions and negotiations that took place, each group had a unique method which resulted in them either lifting the stone to their shoulder where that sequence concluded (as seen in figure 15 and video extract 1) or from the floor to a raised position with their body tilting back (as seen in figure 17 and video extract 2).[18] The group who essentially added an additional fragment of the sequence, taking their physical position from figure 15 to figure 16, deliberated the fluidity with which some of the group could lift the stone to figure 17 when others could not do so. Their decision considered the abilities of all the group in order to remain unified with their movements as much as possible. This required a further consideration of the imagined weight of the stone including the perspective of the audience. Their concerns with the unity of the movements as well as a distinctive *otkaz* resulted in the additional movement.

The ensemble groups were aware, with minimal prompts from me, that in order to unify their movements having a beat with which they could map each sequence against would benefit them. Again, each group produced a unique rhythm which allowed them to perform their own choreographed étude. Through the use of the *otkaz* the groups used the dip in the legs as the downbeat which leads into the movement. Those participants who were familiar with dance or music understood

[18]To view Video Extract 1, click the following link - https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/808697039024
To view Video Extract 2, click the following link: - https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/808698425115

the purpose of a downbeat to lead them into the movement but also recognised that it formed part of the sequence – it is not separate. In biomechanics the downbeat is included in training sessions and is represented in the *otkaz* by the count of 'and'. To reiterate, the *Acting Cycle* is designed to create an 'underlying rhythmic structure' which Pitches asserts should be 'absorbed through practice rather than imposed on the work afterwards' (Pitches, 2003: 123). The method presented as part of this thesis has ensured that the *Acting Cycle* and therefore the rhythmic structure is embedded within the structure of the movements from the early stages.

Comparing Collaboration in Case Studies 1,2,3 & 4

It is important to discuss the way the soloists dealt with this method of training as it was through a direct comparison between the soloists and the ensemble groups that the importance of ensemble became apparent. As has been discussed one of the unique contributions this research is presenting is an accessible approach to biomechanics through ensemble; one aspect of that is through facilitated conversations between participants in which they work together to build the étude; implementing the biomechanical layers as they go, which is why there is a need for the facilitator (in this instance, me). In the solo workshops my role was entirely altered and far more prominent than in the ensemble workshops. The soloists were reliant on me to guide them through the work. Each of the solo participants had different experiences with actor training or theatre in any context. Each of them had completed an undergraduate degree in Drama and Theatre Practice at The University of Hull, giving them experience of training as part of modules or productions led by staff and students. However, their experience of actor training in a professional

context after their degrees varied and this was evident in the way they responded to each task. Sarah Isbell is a professional actor and has experience of auditions where she would perform for a panel, be asked to alter certain aspects and/ or repeat what she has just done then asked to leave. In terms of her aptitude to the learning bias discussed above, she appeared to be more comfortable with the laboratory environment as she didn't consistently ask questions or seek out approval. By comparison, Lizzy Steele was continuing her studies and completing a Masters degree which therefore meant she was still a part of the British Education system and an assessment centric structure. Steele consistently wanted clarification over the instructions I'd given to ensure she was 'correct' – as is evident in video 3.6.[19] On numerous occasions I tried to assure Steele that there were no incorrect interpretations of the instructions I was giving as I wanted to understand how different people would respond working in this laboratory environment. Similarly, Andrew Ross had recently completed a clowning training programme which he explained had a strict structure. This again, reinforced the search for end goals within the workshops and Ross and Steele's frustration at having no markers as to how they were progressing was evident. Whilst this research does not explicitly deal with the way the participants felt during the workshops, it's imperative to consider how their previous experience affects their ability to engage in workshops like this for the future. This research is presenting a new method in which actors can engage with biomechanics, and understanding how participants are likely to respond offers

[19] To view Video Extract 6, click the following link:
https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/808699576411

pedagogues the opportunity to alter the training to suit the needs of those undertaking the training.

My understanding of how the processes embedded within this technique developed alongside the participants. Whilst my theoretical knowledge and previous practical knowledge of biomechanics was far greater than that of the participants, the results that would be produced from the workshops were theoretical until applied in a practical setting - which is why it was of vital importance for this research to be carried out through Practice Research. The insights offered through the workshops and explored in this discussion allowed me to learn how actors respond to an actor training system like biomechanics in a contemporary context – putting my own ideas into practice. Therefore, for future work with soloists the key difference would be to initiate the training as a solo workshop but bring the participants to work together in an ensemble workshop to engage in the shared rhythm evident in the videos of the groups. In videos extract 3, 4 and 5 it is evident that each of the soloists have constructed études which bear striking similarities visually to the ensemble group's work, however their rhythmic patterns are very different.[20] The physical positions they have adopted are less defined than the ensemble group's work which is most likely a factor of not needing to organise your body in accordance with others. The *otkaz* was important for the ensemble to establish the beginning of each new sequence, the *posil* encouraged the correlation of physical positions throughout the

[20] To view Video Extract 3, click the following link:
https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/808697315677
To view Video Extract 4, click the following link:
https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/808700177084
To view Video Extract 5, click the following link:
https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/808699590683

sequence so that they could execute *the tochka* together. The lack of need for this for a soloist was apparent as essentially, it was asking the solo performer to achieve a goal which they deemed to have no purpose as the need to develop a shared physical language on stage did not exist. By encouraging the soloist to consider how their movements will be adopted by others once they were part of an ensemble they understood the value of dedicating their time and energy to developing that movement. This was something I began to include within the discussions I had with the soloists once it became apparent how important this was, for example, by asking them direct questions which allowed them to consider how their movements could be mapped against someone else's choreography. This facilitated an enlightening outcome in which the participants needed to consider the possibilities of other actors and the way they would approach the task – again, utilising their imagination. They explored their responses to the task and mapped it against an imagined actor in order to allow for a unified sequence to be adopted once they were in the same space. Whilst there was no way of ensuring the participants would imagine an actor's response to the task, encouraging them to consider their place within an ensemble as a collaborative group resulted in the physical structure of each étude looking remarkably similar.

Collaboration, conversations and shared experience were a crucial aspect of what allowed the participants to engage with the biomechanical layers. It required trusting their abilities to problem solve as performers to the demands biomechanics presents. By working together, they cultivated conversations which allowed them to explore verbally and physically the parameters of their tasks. Their desire to achieve an end goal inevitably played a part as a driving force for the achievement of finishing the

étude, but by doing it collaboratively they were unable to skip ahead to a final outcome. Instead they challenged one another to consider the possible ways in which principles or movements could be utilised in this context. Crucially, the audible discussions allowed me as both teacher and researcher to engage in their thought processes giving me a clearer understanding of their decision making. This also presented opportunities to give them additional information on biomechanics and Meyerhold as it seemed appropriate. In order to engage students in active learning, encourage deep thinking and for them to be aware of process in addition to the end goal there is a need to be responsive to the way material is interpreted and to navigate questions in which students want to understand the wider implications of the learning.

Ensemble in the method presented above allows the participants to work collaboratively towards a shared goal of creating a biomechanical étude. My role within that was to ensure that they had access to information which would facilitate their discussions and physical explorations – ensuring that the biomechanical layers were consistently at the core of the work. Additionally, the 'it' of ensemble in this context, was the established rhythm which was executed using the *Acting Cycle*. The participants were able to embody the principles through utilising the physical structure of the étude and engaging as a collaborative ensemble.

CONCLUSION

This research project began with the intention to discover a new model of training which was suitable for a contemporary training context. This would specifically be catering to a one-day workshop or for integration into a rehearsal process, but in a way which did not compromise the principles of Meyerhold's system. The need to seek out a new model came from two core ideas which relate to the future of biomechanics in Britain.

The first was with need to address purist training and adaptive training and the way that the terminology that we assign to training structures affects how users engage with those systems. Within biomechanics there is a clear stronghold of embodied knowledge which is retained by those practitioners who work within a Vertical and 'purist' model of training (Skinner, 2012: 95). The belief that Bogdanov preserves Meyerhold's biomechanical legacy, and crucially that the training cannot and should not be altered, undermines the value of new uses which have expanded and developed ideas that Meyerhold created. Acknowledging the value of a blended model which utilises sources which go beyond a Vertical Practice Structure allows biomechanics to remain focused on core ideas developed by Meyerhold, for example, its purpose as a system, or to create ways to continue the training in new formats, such as Jonathan Pitches' MOOC.

The second is that the training system still offers skills to contemporary actors which can be applied in a variety of contexts today and the value of that training warrants exploration in order to understand how it can continue to be used. Practitioners such as Bryan Brown and Cariad Astles demonstrate uses of the system which have found

new ways to use the principles embedded within the system, but do not retain the form of the movements. I wanted to explore the relationship between the form and principles in order to improve the accessibility of the system. Would the form of biomechanics need to be compromised in order for it to maintain its currency in a contemporary setting, echoing the approaches of Brown and Astles by extracting the principles without retaining the physical form of the classic études.

The new model developed in my research project discovered that by focusing on Purpose (Narrative and Mechanical), Imagination and Collaborative Ensemble, the actors were able to engage with the principles and create a physical form which bore striking similarities to that of one of the classical biomechanical études. The intention of the model was to find a method to train biomechanically in a setting which accommodated contemporary actor training demands - and was therefore suitable to be used in a specific time-frame as opposed to being taught over a period of years, whilst still retaining the principles.

The success of the workshops was based on centralizing the actor in the design of the étude, which completely contradicts training within the Vertical model. Rather than instruct the participants to perform specific movements within a precise pre-designed format, I encouraged them to choreograph their own version of the étude *Throwing the Stone* using three core ideas, which allowed them to understand each aspect, embed that within the movements and elicit the principles through the form of the movements. This also removed the authority that is present in Vertical training cultures, allowing the participants to respond to principles as opposed to commands. As a training model this has applications in contemporary uses of biomechanics, as

presented in this thesis, but it also suggests that there are new ways to explore ensemble actor training in any setting. The model will be autopoietic, allowing a group of actors to function as a collaborative ensemble without requiring an authoritative figure or specific outcome. The goal is the training itself, which is maintained through use – hence its autopoietic nature.

The New Model

The new model is predicated on utilizing Narrative Purpose, Mechanical Purpose, Collaboration (Ensemble) and Imagination as the central guide to the training. The participants play a vital role in choreographing the étude *Throwing the Stone,* using each of these embodied insights as a guide, and through this elicit biomechanical layers. Narrative and Mechanical Purpose are used to frame the decisions the participants make in relation to the intention of the movement, essentially requiring them to consider the purpose of the decision. The duality of Purpose, as is presented in this thesis, allows a number of ideas to be incorporated into this aspect of the training. A consideration of Narrative Purpose requires the participants to ensure that anything which relates to the story embedded within the movement sequence is communicated to the audience. For example, the participants needed to embed the intention for an action as well as the action itself into a movement – ensuring that the spectator follows the journey of intending to throw a stone in readiness for the actor to throw it. This corresponds with but does not solely account for Mechanical Purpose, in which the actor must coordinate their body to achieve the physical representation of the Narrative Purpose. For example, asking the actor to consider how the angle of their head communicates the intention to throw a stone.

The Mechanical Purpose additionally includes the embodiment of the principles - as fundamentally that is the purpose of the training. It was through the use of Imagination and Collaboration of the ensemble that this could be executed.

Imagination was vital in engaging the actors in the potential of the movements and the principles, both within the context of the space we were working in but also in allowing them access to an imagined history. The participants were encouraged to imagine the qualities of abstract concepts in order to implement those details into the design of the étude, which combined the used of imagination to facilitate Narrative and Mechanical Purpose. For example, the participant imagines they see a stone that they want to throw but the quality of the stone is rough and heavy and will require strength and stability to pick it up. The Narrative Purpose is to communicate those qualities to the audience, and the Mechanical Purpose is to ensure the body physicalizes strength and stability in the movement, but it was through imagination that the stone obtained qualities which informed the Narrative and Mechanical Purpose.

Finally, each of the decisions made in order to create the étude needed to happen through collaboration (ensemble). It is through this method that the participants explored a variety of ideas and challenged each other to meet the demands of Narrative and Physical purpose, utilizing their imagination in the process. For example, if the participants wanted to decide how to physically embody a movement sequence which represents a heavy and rough stone being thrown they would decide collaboratively. Through collaboration they present ideas to one another allowing themselves to be the spectator in the space, but also imagining the perspective of

others. It encouraged them to verbalize their understanding of the principles, unifying the group's intentions to work towards common goals.

In direct response to this thesis's intention to create an accessible model of training which elicits the principles of biomechanics, each of following purposes of the training as established by Meyerhold can be achieved through this model.

a) A feeling of balance and a center of gravity within himself and within the frame of his surroundings;
b) Coordination with the stage space, one's partner and the stage properties;
c) A state of physical alertness or "reflex sensitivity," quick reaction to the task assigned by the director without loss of psychic balance and calm;
d) A director's consciousness, an outside perspective on the material in its coordination with the stage space, partner, costume, and properties (Hoover, 1974: 311).

The Mechanical purpose requires the participants to consider specific principles, of which balance is included. In addition, the combination of imagination and narrative which seeks to communicate a heavy stone being thrown also requires the participants to maintain balance and an awareness of their centre of gravity throughout the movement, which is executed through physical purpose. Imagination was key in ensuring the participants considered point (b), as this allowed them to coordinate themselves not only within the physical space they occupied but also to imagine the potential of the space and how that affected both narrative and Mechanical Purpose. Through collaboration and imagination, the participants considered themselves as spectators as well as the possibility of other perspectives, which responds directly to point (d). The ability to execute reflex excitability was established throughout the workshops, as I consistently challenged the participants to react quickly to my command to perform the sequence. This ensured they were

consistently focused on the purpose of the movements so that they could respond instantaneously.

What is of vital importance to recognize about this model is that it went far beyond the four points noted by Meyerhold, and allowed the participants to embody many biomechanical layers. By using the *Acting Cycle* as a way to deconstruct the narrative and re-build it mechanically they were able to establish each of the five components. Through the *otkaz* they developed a shared rhythm, exploiting the preparatory movement as the cue to begin each new sequence. Each phrase within the overall sequence was considered in relation to the *otkaz, posil* and *tochka*. By imagining Meyerhold's audience, they were able to consider the need for theatricality within an auditorium which reflected Meyerhold's unrealized theatre. This additionally forced the participants to consider the theatricality of their body and from the perspective of the imagined audience, which utilized the *rakurs*.

The most exciting aspect of this new model of training is its ability to grow within a given context, where actors continue to develop biomechanical layers. Its ability to function within a restricted time-frame makes it accessible to contemporary actors, but its ability to grow with a group of performers suggests that it has a longevity in which companies can use the model to train the actors working in a variety of spaces. The training encourages a heightened awareness both of the present surroundings and the potential for the space – giving the model a multitude of possibilities to explore with companies or groups of actors in the future. Ultimately this model trusts the actor, places the responsibility in their hands to find and embed the principles

within the movements. To give Meyerhold the final word on the role of the actor, he states that:

> It's essential that the actor find pleasure for himself in executing a given movement or action pattern [risunok]. If you find that pleasure, then everything will work out. Victory awaits you. (Meyerhold, in Gladkov, 1997: 103).

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 8 Workshop 4. Photograph by Lucy Fielding. The University of Hull, May 2018.

Figure 9 Case Study 1. Photograph by Lucy Fielding. The University of Hull, June 2018.

Figure 10 Case Study 3. Photograph by Lucy Fielding. The University of Hull, August 2018.

Figure 11 Case Study 4. Photograph by Lucy Fielding. The University of Hull, August 2018.

Figure 12 Case Study 1. Photograph by Lucy Fielding. The University of Hull, June 2018.

Figure 13 Workshop 4. Photograph by Lucy Fielding. The University of Hull, May 2018

Figure 14 Nikolai Kustov, performing *Throwing the Stone* 1930(s) Biomechanics Berlin [2021] Available online: https://biomechanics-berlin.com/glossary [last accessed 16/05/2021]

Figure 15 Case Study 1. Photograph by Lucy Fielding. The University of Hull, June 2018.

Figure 16 Case Study 1. Photograph by Lucy Fielding. The University of Hull, June 2018.

Figure 17 Case Study 1. Photograph by Lucy Fielding. The University of Hull, June 2018.

APPENDIX

Annotations of raw footage.

Video 1: https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/796025349183

Please walk around the space – You see an imaginary stone throw it and then continue to walk around the space.

Practice that.

2:26: Asked them to observe each other's initial sequences.

Differences between force of throw. Some skimming others propelling the stone a distance.

3:38: Have you considered the audience?

The entire group had no audience. I asked them to consider an audience and place them wherever they wanted.

4.40: What have you changed about the movement now you've considered an audience? – All of the movements were altered slightly.

Lucy Peacock said that she was "breaking it down a bit more. Because you're thinking about their [audience] perception.

Sadie Wild: I'm trying to angle it better so they're not getting my back.

5:38: Frances Allison: It's made me want to tell a story with it – to which the whole group agreed.

Adam Hepworth: It's no longer doing an action, it's doing an action with a purpose.

6:03: Walk around the space and I will tell you when to stop, see the stone and pick it up. (challenging their ability to respond instantaneously but also for them to work out what needed to change physically when they couldn't reposition themselves quick enough to be facing the audience as the movement began.)

Perform to each other

7:03: What do you notice about the difference in how you're all performing it?

- They sped up. Quicker movements.
- Their movements became more similar
- More aggression behind the throw

I noted that they shuffle their feet to get into position because they are not facing the "correct" way for the audience to see them. They agreed.

8:18: Consider how you can change the way you're performing so that no matter where the audience are they understand what you are doing.

Continuing the method of observation followed by discussion gave them opportunity to reflect of the process and witness how others were interpreting the instructions I was giving.

I continued to be a voice of reflection to encourage them to notice aspects of the work that they weren't verbalizing or were unaware were occurring. Once they had been asked to alter their movements to account for an audience sat anywhere their movements began to unify.

10:17 In order to focus their attention back to the physicality of the movement I moved myself into a position on one of the seating banks and asked them to imagine me as their only audience. Focus on clarity of movement – communication between actor and spectator.

11:01 How do the audience know you've seen the stone?

The group offered "eye line" as a response but were then using the turn of their head to communicate this. I offered them options which were reflections of their own movements to consider the importance of using their head. I asked them to discuss ways to make it clearer and Adam Hepworth suggested that if the stone isn't directly in front of you it's a bigger movement. With Sadie Wild adding that it's "more of a contrast".

Frances Allison

14:55 – I explain the need to remove superfluous movements and include a quick demonstration of how the biomechanical neutral pose encourages your body to remain focused and ready for action.

17:24 – Rhythm! If we were to make the movements rhythmic what would need to change?

They identified the following points as needing alteration to make the movement sequence rhythmic:

- Time taken between movements (timing of transitions)
- We need a beat

There was a reluctancy at this point for them to engage with the need to unify their movements in order to create a shared rhythm. I asked two participants who started in different ways to alter the movements so they began together – essentially asking Sanna not to walk to his stone.

19:34 – How heavy is the stone?

They offer a few suggestions and I take the opportunity to discuss eurythmics and the basics of proprioception. In order to challenge their ability to imagine the

qualities of the stone, I told them to imagine that the stone was light enough to be picked up with one hand but on the cusp of that weight.

It becomes apparent in their movement, before we discuss it, that they are starting to alter their physicality to support the imagined weight of the stone. At 22:00 Lucy Peacock (directly in front of camera, lifts the stone to her shoulder before propelling the stone away with force. She's using her whole body in the movement to support her.

22:54 Balance

After watching the two members of the group who offered very different interpretations of the movement to perform the sequence. I asked the group to reflect on the movements taking into account that one of the principles of biomechanics is balance.

Zeinah has also been lifting the stone to her shoulder – which I had noticed during the workshop. In precisely the same way Cassidi White had noted that she had used the movements she remembered from learning shot put at school. It's important to not that this experience was something that the majority of participants had experienced at school and even if they hadn't taken this particular sport at school they were aware of it. This embeds the participants design of the étude in their cultural context.

I asked the participants to adopt the lift to the shoulder into their sequence and asked them what their thoughts were once they had tried it. 24:17 Sadie Wild commented that she could now "feel the weight of the stone"

Frances Allison suggested that this movement had encouraged her to throw the stone in a balanced way as opposed to concentrating on throwing it a specific distance – which is previously what she had been doing.

24:41 Pulling the principles/ ideas/ movements covered so far together

1. Audience – ensuring clarity of movement to everyone/ anyone in the space
2. Balance – how does the distance you throw the stone affect your balance? If you throw it closer to you does that allow you to stay balanced?

26:03 – Frances Allison says that now she's not throwing it as far she has more control over the whole movement.

26:24 – Balance. I demonstrate some of their movements which sees them folded over the stone which looks unbalanced. We discuss their centre of gravity in relation to picking up the stone to ensure they remain balanced.

28:10 I ask them to slow the sequence down so they can focus on the different movements.

29:04 We watch Lucy Peacock perform. Her sequence is fluid with no superfluous movements.

31:44 Zeinah Gafaar notes that it no longer feels like a “real” movement.

32:53 Lucy Peacock discusses muscular engagement (unfortunately she’s out of the cameras view). What she is explaining is the way the weight transitions through the body as you work through each element of the movement. At the core of what she is saying is that IF you are balanced you can maintain the integrity of the movement.

I then ask them to work through the movement exploring the how the weight of the stone affects the centre of gravity. This is also an opportunity to discuss the other arm and how it can be used to decipher where the stone is being thrown and as counterbalance.

34:43 This is a performance.

37:24 Video Ends

Video 2 https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/795794752394

0:48 – Introduce Springiness of Legs

I asked the group to consider how the springiness of the legs altered the way their physicality. Sadie Wild said it was important to allow for a recoil. This directly links to the preparatory movement of the *Acting Cycle* and demonstrates how intertwined the principles are. When you elicit one another one. It was at this moment I introduced them to the *otkaz* as this was essentially what Sadie Wild was already implementing into her movement – a preparation to move. We discuss how to implement each of the three elements of the *Acting Cycle* into this part of the sequence.

5:00 The group takes a break – video ends

Video 3 https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/798235410256

1.05 – I ask the group to consider how many cycles are within the overall sequence.

1.33 – Ask the group to form a circle so they can see one another

2:26 – Ask them to perform it “in time”, firstly they do this in the circle and then they move around the space.

I reflect to them that when they are performing in a circle they are keeping time and that is probably to do with the visual cues they are able to use. Whereas when they perform in the space, those cues are not necessarily there and the movements began and finished at different points.

Frances Allison notes that a clear preparatory movement would enable them to remain in time.

6.26 – The group began to deliberate the differences between their movements after watching one another perform. They began considering the outside eye and how this looked to them as a spectator.

We discussed the importance of implementing principles over form for the training to remain embedded in the actors minds and bodies.

10:38. After reminding the participants about each of the principles covered so far I asked them to go back to the sequence and decide whether there are any changes they would make which they feel would better implement the principles

Frances Allison thinks the movement needs breaking down further so that the group can map the movements to one another. They establish a distinction between the movement sequences – a clear *tockhka.*

13:20 Adam Hepworth notes that deciding how to approach the movement is similar to Tai Chi in that you shift the wait – his demonstration suggested that you guide the weight around your body with a fluidity of movement, imagining the weight.

The group enter discussions around using your legs to support the weight and begin to really delve into their imaginations of applying the properties of the imagined stone into the sequence. Noting how it alters their physicality. For example, they discussed the surface of the floor and how dependent on that surface it would alter the way they picked it up. If it was soft like sand they would scoop the stone, but if it was concrete they would place their hand on top.

Video five https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/798235855474

1:30 – What do you think needs to be improved to be working well as an ensemble.

3:25- How many beats are in each *Acting Cycle*?

Perform in pairs the beats within each part of the *Acting Cycle*. Once counting in your head second time counting out loud.

8.53 We want to find a mutual rhythm – how does that alter your movements if at all? At this point I was encouraging those whose rhythm was different or movements were different than the group to either discuss why or to join the groups shared movement and rhythm.

As they began unifying the beats they were breaking *Acting Cycle* into three beats- when I asked why they said it made sense to use the count of three as they were already working in threes (referring to the *Acting Cycle*).

The group decide there is an extra beat which isn't accounted for – a pause. We use that and integrate into the movement. So it's counted as:

1,2,3,pause. 1,2,3,pause

22:17 I asked each participant, in turns, to call out their rhythm on top of other people's movements to encourage each of them to listen to the way they had constructed in timing in correlation with the movement.

The use of the preparatory movement to demonstrate the beginning of each cycle is apparent in some parts of their movement but not others. The preparation to throw they adopted a dip in the legs as a preparatory movement with ease and when we discussed this they said that it's because it feels natural. When I reminded them that this for performance and it isn't necessarily to feel natural I's about communication, Adam Hepworth suggested that each of the preparatory movements needed to match the effort of that moment and offered a dip in the legs as the *otkaz* for each cycle.

32:00 the sequence with the additional preparatory movement marries begins to unify movement and rhythm. I asked Adam Hepworth to demonstrate his sequence as his preparatory movements were the clearest. Once everyone had watched this I asked him to be the rhythmic guide for the next sequence to test the ability of the preparatory movement for the group to remain in a unified rhythm.

Video Six https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/798227025256

By this stage it was evident the participants were beginning to get tired and they had repeated the sequence so many times some of the ideas were beginning to blur. But mostly the unity among the group was evident. The shared rhythm was consistently developing and their movements were designed to incorporate balance, an understanding of their shifting centre of gravity and that the springiness of their legs allowed them to perform a preparatory movement for each cycle.

To encourage them to reengage with the movements I asked them to return to the purpose of the movements. Think about what was happening and why rather than just being focused on the unity of their rhythm.

6.25 – walk around the space sideways. Running stopping. Trying to build their awareness of each other but also reduce the superfluous movements which hindered quick responses. We went through quick responses to get the recognise the need to keep their body ready for action. Adam Hepworth and Lucy Peacock would return to a biomechanical neutral position when they stopped moving. This meant they could move straight into the action of *Throwing the Stone* on command.

It encouraged them to control their movements in a careful manner. Each *tochka* could lead into another movement and if their body wasn't prepared this would be challenging. For example, at 12:33 Frances Alison has concluded her walking movements with her feet positioned far apart. As she moves into the sequence for throw the stone she looks uncomfortable and unbalanced.

Raw Footage End at 17:00 – I ask the participants to perform specific parts of the étude for the benefit of the research and dissemination.

Sarah Isbell: https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/798234297691

Video begins – adjusting camera angles.

Session begins at 1.05

2.10– I introduce Sarah Isbell to the need to walk around the space and familiarise herself with it, even though she's alone. I would ask her to stop and close her eyes and then tell me how many steps she could take without touching a wall or reaching the edge of the stage space.

3.34 – Imagine that you've seen a stone, pick it up and throw it then continue to walk around the space.

5:41 Isbell says that she is trying to make the movement as natural as possible. Watching the stone when it lands.

6:17 – I ask Isbell to imagine an audience in the space. She can decide who they are, where they are and how many there are.

Isbell does that and begins altering her movements.

7:20 – I ask Isbell how she has altered her movements now she's accounting for an audience. She says that she is trying to give them a good angle of her body – trying to position herself on an angle.

I start telling Isbell when to perform on the command of 'hup' rather than her performing when she wants to.

Again, she starts altering her movements so I ask her what she's changing. She says that she feels more aggressive (which was a comment also made in the professional performers workshop). She says that thinking about an audience has made her consider the purpose of throwing a stone.

I prompt her to consider that she has to keep turning her body to throw the stone at the specific angle she wants for audience.

12:05 – I ask her to consider how she can alter her movements to ensure that no matter where the audience is, that they understand what she is doing. Every time she performs the stone is thrown in a specific direction when I ask her to explain why she describes the scenario she has created in which she is walking along a pebbly river bed. Her description is very descriptive and its apparent that as she's working alone the "compromise" that developed through sharing a space isn't something I could use in this workshop.

13:50 I ask Isbell to imagine that there are other people in other workshops spaces who are being asked to create the same movement. The audience can see everyone at the same time.

She immediately suggests that she needs to neutralise the space to account for other people's interpretations.

I then tell her that the movements she creates will need to be the same as the movements created by everyone else in their own rooms. Without other participants in the room this was to encourage Isbell to create a sequence that could be performed alongside others. To do this she had to imagine the possible approaches that the other group might make and incorporate that into her design.

15:30 - Without anyone else in the room to have the discussion with or to watch I performed aspects of her movements to give Isbell a sense of the additional movements she was adding to her sequence which would be difficult to coordinate with others.

16:50 – She feels like the movement is now more controlled and contained. She also said it "feels alien not to throw it in a specific way" which transpired because of the way she had positioned the audience. I asked her to put the imagined audience in the round to see how that affected the movements.

When Isbell performs the sequence again the movements have completely altered and are drastically simplified. When I ask her why she has altered the movement she said to "make it easier to replicate".

18:17 – How does the audience know you've seen a stone?

Isbell initially suggests that when she claps the stone the audience will know she's picked something up. I tell her that by clasping something on the floor they will know she's picked something up but I want her to consider the movement before, specifically seeing the stone. We discuss ways to do this and agree that her head needs to turn in a different direction from the way she is walking to offer a distinction between walking and seeing a stone.

22:50 The weight of the stone

To develop the movements further I tell Isbell to imagine that the stone is as heavy as you would naturally pick up with one hand, but is still heavy. I then ask her to use this information to inform her balance and what she does with the stone both in the approach and whilst she's holding it.

Trying to make the throw simpler – so its easier for more than one person to do.

24:50 Introduce the *Acting Cycle*

Sarah Isbell had been part of the Cycle Song production and so when I refer to James, that is in reference to James Beale who she had trained with. As a side note, she didn't know what the *Acting Cycle* was or remember the exercises with balls or sticks which we had briefly done with James.

I asked her to break her sequence down into a number of *Acting Cycle*s. Isbell talks through which parts of the sequence would be a cycle and talks out loud to communicate how she is breaking the movement down.

31:00 This next section demonstrates how hard it was for a single participant to work through the movements alone. The only person they had to discuss ideas with is me and that is problematic as they know I won't give them "answers". I try to offer Isbell guidance which reflects things she has said, reminding her which direction her head should be facing – for example.

I was aware my involvement in this workshop was far more than in the group workshops as Isbell needed someone to bounce ideas off and some reassurance about progression. I remind her principles such as balance.

38:03 _ I perform and ask Isbell to critique my movement so she acts as the outside eye.

We continue this and I keep reminding her of the principles. When we return to the weight of the stone, and incorporating that into a specific part of the *Acting Cycle*.

Video 2 https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/798234723374

4.55 Isbell mentions a "bob" which I ask her to explain. She explains that the "bob" is the bend in her legs which gives her the motion to propel the stone, which she then recognises as the *otkaz.*

8:45 – We discuss the need to move away from naturalism. Isbell has continued to talk about naturalism throughout and I remind her that I have never mentioned naturalism. I briefly note the theatricality of Meyerhold's theatres and ask her to consider the opposite of naturalism in her performance.

11:27 Sarah Isbell says that she begins the movement in neutral, which I ask her to explain. She says that a neutral starting position would be an easier start point for everyone.

12:34 Isbell asks me if she looks balanced. At this point it's clear that the only way she can determine the outside perspective on her movements is to ask me for my perspective.

Isbell began to struggle with repeating the same end movements which were still balanced both to her and from an outside perspective.

20:35 I demonstrate the way her centre of gravity transitions across her body to encourage her to use her legs to support the imagined weight of the stone.

23:36 – Water break

24:20 – Session resumes

Consider the springiness of your legs

28:30 I introduce the idea of rhythm and the use of the *otkaz* to signify the beginning of each movements phrase. We discuss how this will help unify the movements when she performs with "others".

Isbell uses the “bob” she had discussed earlier, which is the same dip in the legs the Professional Performers used. The bend in the knees served as a preparatory movement for each cycle.

I ask Isbell to count out loud the beats within each of the cycles to give an understanding as to how she has broken it down as well as the rhythmic structure that underpins her sequence.

39:45 Isbell performs her sequence with the rhythmic structure and each of the principles now embedded within the movement.

41:45 Video ends

Lizzy Steele Video 1 https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/798251774607

3:17 – Session begins

You see an imaginary stone, pick it up and throw it.

3.39 – Audience

Steele has vaguely pictured an audience stood near to where I’ve set up the camera but hasn’t really considered it. I ask her to imagine an audience wherever she wants.

5:16 – How has changing/ implementing an audience alter your performance?

Steele is ensuring she faces the audience, so that they can see her body.

5:48 – I tell Steele that I will be asking her to perform on the command of ‘hup’. As soon as I begin adding layers she starts to question whether she is doing it “correctly”, asking questions such as ‘Is there any particular way you want me to throw this?’ and ‘Should I be using a specific hand to throw it’.

When I ask Steele whether she thinks the audience can see what she is doing with her back to where she’s positioned them, she says yes as she’s performing the movement “quite vigorously”.

8:13 Audience in the round – does it alter anything?

Steele again asks if there is a specific way she should be Throwing the Stone.

8:39 – How can the audience tell that you’ve seen a stone?

9:35 – What did you change to make seeing the stone clear to the audience. Steele says that she changed her head movement so that they could see she’d noticed something and also changed her direction to do this.

10:30 – I introduce the idea of other participants also creating this movement sequence and that at the end of the process they will also be performing the exact same movements.

Steele says that the movement would need to be considered far more deeply than she had done originally. I explain to her that the reason when you are training alone you lose the value of dialogue that happens in an ensemble group, this gives us a way to incorporate the "other" and I will continue to play devils advocate to facilitate discussion.

Steele is overwhelmed by the amount of options that are available when throwing a stone. I suggest she develops the movement she began with but removes her personal idiosyncrasies from the movements.

16:21 – I remind Steele that she has now removed her alteration to the movements when she see's the stone and ask her to put it back into the sequence. To which she remarks:

"it's really hard when you're not being told what to do".

I ask her to ensure that once the movement is developed it is the same each time – so the movement can be replicated as that will allow a shared rhythm.

17:36 – As I go to add another biomechanical layer for Steele to consider she remarks:

"Am I getting it wrong, I feel like I'm getting it wrong"

18:09 – Consider the weight of the stone.

Steele had imagined that it was a light stone. I ask her to imagine that it is the heaviest she would naturally pick it up with one hand, but it is really heavy. I ask her to consider how that would alter her movements – particularly in relation to her balance.

Steele immediately takes the weight of the stone to her shoulder where she appears to balance the stone before propelling it away from her body.

We begin to work through her movements with me performing her sequence back to her so she can see the way she's constructed the movement with balance.

It was clear that the options available were beginning to frustrate Steele and when I asked questions she began to shrug looking confused by how she would approach answering.

I remind her that the movements don't need to be naturalistic.

24:35 Steele again says "I feel like I'm getting this wrong" Adding, "was it this difficult for everyone else?"

As I challenge her balance – which looks like she has no balance to pick a weighted object she clearly thinks I am telling her she is wrong rather than that the movement needs to be developed.

I mimic her performance to try and get her to see how she looks, as well as how she feels.

She asks whether it would be beneficial to stop walking when she sees the stone – looking at me for an answer. I ask her whether she thinks that would be clearer to which see laughs but clearly frustrated says:

30:33 – "I DON'T KNOW!"

I ask Steele to consider precision of movement. Noting the angles of her body.

32:31 – Introduce the *Acting Cycle*

Prompted by Steele's language she explains each part of the movement and I suggest she uses those as *Acting Cycle*s. This was more involvement from me than I had intended but her frustration with the sequence and concern she was wrong meant that she needed support from me to progress the session.

39:40 – How is the weight of the stone being transferred across your body as you throw the stone?

42:28 – Steele states that the repetition of movement is confusing her. She also goes on to say that this method is the opposite of her learning style which is "to see it done, and then replicate it". She wants to imitate me but actually that undermine her ability to embed the principles.

Video 2 – Lizzy Steele https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/798251687391

The beginning of the video is entirely discussion which is based around why we are not just allowing her imitate the movements. This was mostly to reassure Steele she was doing a good job and wasn't wrong.

4:58 – Session resumes

I continue to mimic Steele's movements to discuss how she moves and what it looks like to an outsider.

10:50 – Springiness of the Legs

I ask Steele to walk around the space and practice not locking her legs so that she can move into the next movement.

12:07 - Slow the movement down and add the springiness of the legs as a preparatory movement.

15:56 – Incorporating stylized/ Grotesque/ Theatrical movements – another step away from naturalism.

26:30 – Adding counts to each cycle.

33:05 – Steele performs the movements with the counting out loud. She has now embedded each of the principles we have covered so far.

39:09 – I show Steele Isbell performing the same sequence, she is shocked at how they have composed almost identical movement sequences.

Session ends

41 minutes end video

Video 1 – Andrew Ross https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/798251275273

3:24 Session begins

I tell Andrew ross that throughout the workshop I will be referring to the actors in other rooms whom he has to consider when devising the movement sequence.

Andrew had already had training with James Beale (also a cast member of Cycle Song). He had remembered more than Sarah Isbell and entered the space asking a number of questions about how similar this session would be to the training he'd had with James. We have a brief discussion about the *Acting Cycle* as Ross had remembered part of its function but not specifically how it worked or its name. This altered the approach than with other participants as he was already aware of the purpose of the *cycle* I decided to offer it as a starting point.

4:16 – I would like you to imagine that you have seen a stone, pick it up and throw it

Ross' performance of throw the stone began with large carefully considered movements which visually seemed to account for a number of the principles I would be adding. The challenge here would be to deconstruct a movement sequence which looked balanced, with a clear narrative purpose, to ensure each of the principles were embedded.

8:30 The Audience

Establish where Ross has positioned his audience.

9:45- What did you change and why?

Ross: Audience are in the round.

"I changed it so that it was more open" – essentially, he was talking about the way he altered the movements to ensure everyone around him could see what he was doing. He took longer with the stone and moved it to a position which ensured everyone could see.

12:26 – Creating a sequence that can be unified with others

What would you change if anything?

Once Ross started to strip back the movements he said they now feel "more boring".

16:09 The weight of the stone

“The stone is as heavy as you would naturally pick up with one hand, but it’s as heavy as you can hold with one stone”

Ross had already imagined that the stone was that heavy and he starts to become frustrated at having to strip back what was already a creative piece of performance.

What became clear to me at this point is that Ross had integrated a physicality that reflected the stylized shapes of the biomechanical études we had learnt with Beale. The angles of his body were using the lines we had been taught in our own training and there was a distinct sense of theatricality to each part of the movement. I wondered whether Ross felt he would get it “correct” quicker by adopting the movements he had remembered from previous training, not taking into consideration that this model was entirely new.

21:34 – How can you make it clear that you have *seen* a stone.

22:58 – It doesn’t need to be naturalism.

Ross’ ability to create dynamic movements which were charismatic with a clear narrative made this exceptionally hard. Rather than consider simple steps he would create complex sequences which eliminated the simpler steps everyone else had created. Essentially what was clear at this point is that without other people in the room with Ross this would become increasingly difficult to get a sequence which was similar to others without me guiding him.

42:00 we discuss that Ross is naturally very strong and so when he lifts a stone to a midway point by his hip he may be able to hold it there but most people couldn’t, so I question whether that is an effective way to demonstrate the weight of the stone.

I also ask him about how he is naturally balanced the whole through the movements as he had integrated a pause into the movements.

Video 2 – Andrew Ross https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/798247619977

1:20 I ask him to consider the throw of a shot put and resting the stone on his shoulder

3:20 I additionally ask him to remove the little steps that he keeps adding in as we had discussed not having superfluous movements.

5:14 – Ross feels the movements are becoming too natural

I reintroduce principles: balance, centre of gravity, rhythm

9:08 – Ross says that his preference is to do everything at once, but he recognizes that isn’t the point of the training.

17:35 Ross goes through a double handed lift to understand the weight of something exceptionally heavy

24:25 – I perform the movements and ask Ross to critique my movement to give him a sense of how his movements look to the outside eye. It also allows me to understand where his stone lands and why he runs into the movement. This method continued for the rest of the session to allow Ross to use my performance and questions to facilitate his engagement. However, he became increasingly frustrated with the lack of individual performance that he had created at the outset.

38:40 Ross recounts a story of throwing tennis balls at school and his demonstration of this game reconstructs the movements sequence he had created at the outset. He also cannot move away an individual narrative where a stone "should be thrown as far as you can".

42:46 Introducing the *Acting Cycle*

Video ends

Video 3 – Andrew Ross https://universityofhull.app.box.com/file/801190008438

1:20 The springiness of the legs

2:33 Comfort Break

4:05 session resumes

13:35 Ross starts to become increasingly frustrated that without the specifics of his narrative the movement becomes "wet". When I ask him to clarify what he means he suggests he needs to try harder with the throw. There is quite clearly a disconnect between what he is producing and what he thinks he is doing. As far as he is concerned everything he has done I have challenged and pushed him to reconsider and the lack of definitive progress or praise is clearly difficult for Ross to navigate the session.

30:36 Ross asks if I can give him a time constraint of when he needs to achieve everything by so he can work within that parameter. (Discuss in thesis) I don't but suggest that as we are nearing three hours of training we should aim to finish soon regardless of how far we have got. I explain that I don't want him to pretend to have understood anything because of the time limit.

32:46 Add a beat to each *Acting Cycle.*

Ross does this and settles on three counts per cycle. I then offer to count so he can focus on the movements whilst I say the counts out loud.

40:21 Session Ends

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