

PRESENTNESS:

DEVELOPING PRESENCE THROUGH PSYCHOPHYSICAL ACTOR-TRAINING

OFER RAVID

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Abstract

There is a variety of understandings of the notion of presence in theatre and performance studies as well as in the field of actor-training. Presentness, an aspect of presence, is the experience of the emerging here and now as shaped by the performer's psychophysical engagement with his or her surrounding. It is, thus, a tangible aspect of presence that can be enhanced and developed through training. Presentness developed through training is an acting skill although it does not necessarily determine how actors act in terms of style or form. Rather, techniques of presentness are meant to develop and fine-tune the actor's instrument as a psychophysical whole that can be used for any style and type of acting.

This dissertation examines processes of developing presentness in the practice of three prevalent psychophysical acting techniques in North American actor-training: Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq. It is based on three years of practice-based research as participant and observer in various training sites with these techniques. Building on detailed descriptions of practiced moments accompanied by interviews and conversations with practitioners and teachers, various emerging manifestations of presentness are exposed to make a complex and deep understanding of this term. Using Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology alongside theories from the emerging field of cognitive neuroscience grounds the experiential accounts of ephemeral processes within concrete existing constructs of motility, perception, and cognition.

In loving memory of Lisa Wolford-Wylam.

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Introduction

It was February 2008 in Chicago on an extremely cold weekend. I happened to glimpse an ad by the Chicago Shakespeare Theater presenting Peter Brook's production, *Fragments*, hosted by the theatre for the weekend. In this production director/icon Peter Brook assembled five of Samuel Beckett's short plays: *Rough for Theatre I*, *Rockaby*, *Act Without Words II*, *Neither*, and *Come and Go*. The cast included three masters of the European stage: Marcello Magni, Jos Houben, and Kathryn Hunter. The three are graduates of *École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq* in Paris and had worked together before on various occasions, including as part of the well known Theatre de Complicité. It was clear that this production was as much the actors' work as it was Brook's. I was familiar with Magni and Houben's work as I had taken workshops with both and had seen both onstage before. However, it was the second short play, *Rockaby* – a solo performance by Hunter, which had become a defining moment for my understanding of one of the most essential aspects of acting and its potential in performance.

Beckett's plays pose a significant challenge for any actor. This is particularly true of a play such as *Rockaby* in which there is almost no 'activity' onstage, no conventional dramatic action, and almost no change in the *mise-en-scène* throughout the play. The

static nature of this play was further accentuated by the pieces that came before and after it, *Rough for Theatre I* and *Act Without Words II* respectively, both played by Magni and Houben. The contrast between the two energetic men, who were trying to find reason in their relationships to each other and in their daily habits through physical actions and active engagement, and the woman who keeps going inside her head, was striking.

Hunter's performance was riveting. In spite of the spatially static staging as dictated by Beckett, Hunter's small figure managed to pull us in and at the same time expose her internal emotive stir, even though there was no apparent expression of emotion. Her body extended, it seemed, to grab every atom in the theatre space. Every moment was carefully shaped by her, as if time as experienced by all present was flowing through her and shaped by her. How, then, did she create such a strong effect without moving her body? How did Hunter move us without moving?

Stripped of most conventions of stage acting, the skill required from an actor playing *Rockaby* might be defined as controlling presence. Specifically, it is the ability to tangibly affect the here and now of performance by means intangible to the audience. It requires of an actor to be extra involved in the present of performance, demanding heightened engagement with the space and everything that happens in it for the duration of the theatrical encounter. Clearly, the particular presentness of performance, the quality of its hereness and nowness, includes both performers and audience alike. Nevertheless, it is up to the performer to lead the encounter and shape it. As Hunter's example demonstrates, this engagement does not necessarily require movement, activity, or text although it is entwined with all of these performative elements. At the core of the

performer's immediate presence, which I call presentness, is her availability, sensitivity, and responsiveness to what emerges in space and time; space and time including both performers and audience. Further, unlike other notions of presence, presentness can be developed, grown, deepened, and widened by training the actor's sensory-motor apparatus.

This dissertation explores psychophysical actor-training processes in techniques that focus on developing presentness. The premise is that presentness, the emerging here and now as shaped by the performer's psychophysical engagement, is a tangible aspect of presence that can be enhanced and developed through training. The skills developed through these forms of training are acting skills although they do not necessarily determine how actors act in terms of style or form. Rather, these techniques are meant to develop and fine-tune the actor's instrument as a psychophysical whole that can be used for any style and type of acting. Particularly, I examine the ways in which presentness is practiced within processes of training in Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq techniques.

Following this short introduction, **Chapter 1** acts as an in depth theoretical and historical introduction, laying the ground for the rest of the dissertation. In it I survey the various theoretical and practical areas in which my research engages. It serves, then, to (1) position my research vis-à-vis the ongoing debate about presence, (2) outline and explicate the main theories and methodologies I use, and (3) provide a genealogy for techniques of presentness in general and the techniques I examine in particular.

Exploring the particularities of presentness in practice can take many forms. As my practice-based research progressed along with the writing, I discovered that before

getting down to the minute details of the actual practices of presentness I need to situate myself within the sites of practice and to map the different sites. **Chapter 2**, titled “Various Positions: Locating Practices,” presents an overview of my multi-sited practice-based research and the various methodologies I use in it. In this chapter I situate my research within and as part of the material sites and examine the complexities of my positionality as a participant-observer. I explore how the various positions I inhabit generate different types of knowledge, affording a multi-dimensional outlook on the praxes. My research sites include a number of workshops and long-term training processes with the Suzuki, Viewpoints, and Lecoq techniques, in which I participated as teacher, student or observer. Through this discussion I also revisit a number of questions arising from the much debated theory-practice rift as it pertains to practice-based research.

The third and fourth chapters examine presentness as emerging during practice within and as part of the structuring of the experience of space and time respectively. If the essence of presentness is a heightened experience of being here and now, these two chapters answer the need to articulate how the techniques shape the experience and embodiment of the here—space—and the now—time. This division of spatiotemporal experience is artificial since spatial and temporal experiences are intertwined. Nevertheless, it is possible to focus on either the spatial or temporal aspects of a single experience. Moreover, in some occurrences our experience of time may be at the center of our attention, e.g. when we listen to one especially long musical note, and in other occurrences space takes our focus, for example when we enter a cathedral with especially

high arched ceiling. Psychophysical practices similarly build up spatial and temporal presentness in tandem, although the focus of a particular exercise may be directed toward specific spatial or temporal aspects to be developed. I make this division, then, as a methodological move.

Chapter 3, “Know your Lines: the Vertical and Horizontal,” explores the spatial aspects of presentness in praxis. In it I focus on the ways in which verticality and horizontality, as two essential spatial elements, are explored and heightened in the praxis of Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq. By “reducing” the spatial relationships of the practitioner to her surrounding to its most essential elements spatial engagement is heightened, developed, and honed. Drawing on embodied phenomenology of space and theories of cognitive embodiment, I contend that spatial presentness can be achieved through long-term training in heightened vertical and horizontal engagement.

In **chapter 4**, “Training Time: Temporal Presentness in Practice”, I examine the ways in which the experience of time is constructed by the practices of Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq. Each technique does so in its particular way: by exploring varieties of temporal dynamics in movement—tempo and duration, by heightening the difference between one moment to the next, specifically through repetition, and by challenging the practitioners’ response time. Within the common theatre practice of creating a *line* of action, these techniques try to capture each point on this line and extend and differentiate it for the practitioner’s perception so that she can fully register the particularities of the momentary experience. The importance of such training for actors is immense: it

habituates them into constantly finding new experiences at every moment within the prescribed structure of the performance.

While space and time provide the dimensions for the operation of presence, it is by re-habituating the practitioners' relationship to them that presentness is practiced. Failure can be seen as one of the principal mechanisms by which practitioners of Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq techniques provoke and heighten presentness in space and time. In **chapter 5**, titled "Failure or the Paradox of Embodied Success", I examine the ways in which embodied failure is integrated into the practice of Viewpoint, Suzuki, and Lecoq in order to summon heightened presentness. I examine the disparate ways in which each technique creates the experience of embodied failure for the practitioner and the ways in which this experience may lead to making heightened presentness more readily available.

Presence remains a much debated issue in theatre and performance studies and is particularly significant for better understanding stage acting/performance. The praxes grouped under the general heading "actor-training" often invoke presence as an important condition for, or result of, "good acting," positioned high on the list of desired qualities and aesthetic values. Choosing to discuss presentness, rather than presence, is more than an evasion of the traps presence may pose. Primarily, it replaces the common understanding of presence as a static, singular, individually created phenomenon with a focus on process, multiplicity, and intersubjectivity. Basing this dissertation on practice-based research of long term training processes is significant for this claim, which cannot be based on any single occasion of staged performance. Further, it is an attempt to ground

the discussion, on the one hand, in tangible and practical aspects of theatre and performance and, on the other hand, in cutting edge theory. My hope is that this research will contribute to the ways in which we theorize actor-training and phenomena of stage acting. In the first chapter, then, I start to delineate the practical, theoretical, and historical aspects of my research, connecting the dots and laying the ground for the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter 1

Presentness in Practice and Theory

Contemporary actor training in North America includes a myriad of techniques and approaches, each with its particular aim in shaping the actor's skill. Despite the continuing prevalence of text-based, psychologically oriented acting techniques, that is techniques focusing on the conventions of "psychological realism," in recent years several psychophysical techniques have gained influence in theatre training programs in both Canada and the USA. While "text-based" acting techniques have traditionally focused on ways to create character and tell story, many psychophysical techniques shift the focus of the actor's work from this traditional psychological/behavioral interpretation of text to being psychophysically engaged in the moment.¹ Although psychophysical approaches do not exclude text and story, they also do not privilege them as the single source and basis of all training and creative processes, nor do they emphasize the interpretation of text as emanating solely from linear psychological interpretation. This shift positions psychophysical engagement at the core of the actor's work in training, creating, and performing. According to some of these approaches, developing her

¹ Most text-based techniques do give room for practices that integrate the body into the creative process. However, the body usually remains subservient to a psychological understanding of actions and techniques that do not correspond directly to this type of understanding are regarded as supporting techniques rather than actual Acting Technique. See further discussion below.

psychophysical awareness enables the trained actor to be engaged physically, cognitively, and emotionally as three intertwined aspects of her self in performance. Through ongoing training in psychophysical techniques actors integrate and synthesize these three realms, which have been habitually separated through widespread practices of Cartesian paradigms and praxes.

While each psychophysical technique fosters a distinct set of practices, they share some common essential principles. The most defining principles are the negation of Cartesian body/mind separation and the privileging of embodied processes as a gateway to experience as a whole. Backed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and recent developments in the interdisciplinary field of cognitive studies (alternatively referred to as cognitive neuroscience), this standpoint dismantles one of the common debates among theatre practitioners – whether acting techniques should focus on promoting precise physical expression of the body or psychological processes that expose 'true' emotion. The debate among theatre practitioners often circles around Denis Diderot's *Le Paradoxe Sur le Comédien*. Simply put, at the heart of the paradox is the distinction between a performer who identifies emotionally with the character to the extent of "losing herself" within the role, and a performer who retains some distance from the emotional life of the character and thus maintains physical control and precision. This binary, as well as various attempts to avert it, dominated much acting theory throughout the twentieth century.

The same dichotomous point of view can still be detected in acting techniques today and in the ways in which actor-training programs are structured. Questions such as

“Are you and innie or an outie? [...] Is your approach to acting an internal approach or an external approach?”² become irrelevant when we understand that the inner/psychological and outer/physical are two inseparable aspect of a single whole. In his canonical *The Player's Passion*, Joseph Roach shows that even Diderot's understanding of the *paradoxe* was eventually in line with the psychophysical approach that negates such a dichotomy.³ Roach's investigation of the emergence of two distinct notions of spontaneity—a ‘vitalistic’ viewpoint promoting freedom of all behavioral restrictions and inhibitions; and a ‘mechanistic’ approach that promotes strictly structured comportment—results in a balancing act that allows what Stanislavsky himself sought after, namely, “actions that are at once mechanical and organic.”⁴ Rhonda Blair claims that “there is further evidence for abandoning the polar positions [...] (‘Feeling’ vs. ‘Reason’) and the tired acting binary of ‘inside-out’ vs. ‘outside-in,’ of the inwardly/privately psychological vs. the observational/externally technical.”⁵ In addition to Merleau-Ponty's claim for the entwinement of the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ aspects of experience, Antonio Damasio, a well known neuroscientist, claims for the innate interdependency between reason and emotional states, which he defines in general as bodily states underlying the ‘feeling of emotion.’ According to him emotion and feeling are entangled with both body-bound and brain-bound processes, triggered by and affecting both.⁶

² Mackavey 199.

³ See, for example 149-59.

⁴ Roach, *Player's* 206. Organic in this context is akin to spontaneous.

⁵ “(Refuting)” 129.

⁶ See for example Damasio, *Descartes'* 160-4.

Alongside the persistence of the inside/outside dichotomy, our language is still trapped in the use of such tropes that position “text-based” and “psychological” acting in opposition to “physical” acting/theatre. Evoking the psychophysical realm, which is meant to avoid such binaries, does not relieve us from the need for specificity when dealing with particular practices. My discussion in the last two sections of this chapter and in chapter 2 is aimed at revealing and untangling some of the complexities and cultural biases that take part in each particular context.

The various psychophysical acting techniques, each in its particular way, attempt to facilitate the development of the actor’s awareness as well as the embodiment of her responses to emerging contexts. Rather than learning a way of acting, the processes of learning the psychophysical techniques I deal with can be described as, at first, experiencing, and at a second stage, constant reaffirmation, deepening and further elaboration of psychophysical enactive engagement with one’s surrounding. Being psychophysically engaged “in the moment” is seen as the optimal state for playing, underlying all other processes. Although this state of heightened psychophysical presence, or as I call it – *presentness*, is important for all acting approaches, in psychophysical approaches it moves to the forefront and becomes the centre of attention; it becomes both the condition for and the result of the training processes.

Using these contentious terms—presence, presentness—requires carefully laying down a theoretical and practical foundation for a definition of “presentness” in relation to the more widely used (in practice) and controversial (in theory) “presence.” I turn to this discussion shortly.

This dissertation examines the emergence of heightened presentness in the praxis of three of the most widespread contemporary psychophysical acting techniques in Canada and the USA: Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq. It investigates the ways in which students and practitioners of these techniques in the North American context may conceptualize, realize, and utilize the state of heightened presentness through on-going, long term training. By undertaking practice-based research in various sites of training with the Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq techniques, I aim to locate emergent moments of heightened presentness and examine the experience of the practitioners present in those moments.⁷ The various sites of practice enabled me to participate, observe, and interview other participants, all of whom were aware of the purpose of my documentation and gave their consent to be quoted either by their full names or by their initials.

All acting abilities, heightened presentness included, “are not ‘natural’ but are learned techniques that have become ‘second nature’ through repetition.”⁸ Developing heightened presentness through training can be likened to developing a muscle for a cause that is beyond its daily use. In order to develop a muscle one must repeat various exercises so that the full range of movement is maintained as the muscle’s volume and strength grow. If one stops training, the muscle will immediately start a process of atrophy and may eventually return to its everyday size and ability. Similarly, training in presentness is not something you learn and then know for the rest of your life. It requires constant reiteration and “flexing of the muscle” for it to be available on a heightened level. As John Lutterbie claims, using the classic example of learning how to ride the

⁷ For a detailed account of the different sites see chapter 2.

⁸ Lutterbie, *Toward* 13.

bike “It may be true that once you learn how to ride a bike, you never forget, but if you have not ridden for a while, you quickly realize that you need some practice to recover the skills that were second nature when you were a child. You need to relearn, that is, to reconsolidate the data through the strengthening, once again, of the synaptic connections.”⁹ While Lutterbie’s example refers to the commonly acquired skill of riding a bike, we expect the performer’s skill to be equivalent to the level of a professional rider rather than that of the merely proficient one. Repeating the heightened intensity and form of each practice becomes, then, crucial for going beyond mere skill into artistry. Underlying this investigation is an attempt to foreground the premise of on-going training fostered by leading practitioners of these techniques in light of recent and new understandings of the actor’s craft. What is at stake, then, are widespread assumptions about the nature of training and technique and the way these assumptions form theatre praxis at large.

In the next section of this chapter I present a critical look at the discourse of presence and presentness in theatre and performance studies, defining my use of the terms in light of the prevalent understandings of these convoluted concepts. I then turn to delineate the main theoretical constructs I use in this research. In the following section, “Theatres and Techniques: definitions and genealogies,” I position my research within theatre praxis at large, portraying the general background out of which psychophysical approaches to acting emerged. I then turn to describing in more detail the three techniques that serve as the basis of this dissertation, namely Viewpoints, Suzuki, and

⁹ Ibid 109.

Lecoq. This section provides some historical background and important context in order to make clear the significance of these techniques for praxis in general and for this research in particular.

Presence and Presentness in Practice and Theory

Presentness is rooted in the actor's ability to psychophysically engage with her immediate environment. It is, in other words, a perceptual, enactive entwinement of the actor with what occurs around, to and within her through space and time. It is a real-time responsiveness that underlies any action or behavior and embeds them with the sense that the performer is fully and truly connected to the 'here and now' in a level and quality fit for her art. It could be said that when training in the state of presentness, the actor's conscious attention flows organically between the perceptual awareness of the changing environment and that of her physical and emotional state, allowing for embodied responses to surface in the midst. A way to describe the result of training in techniques of presentness, then, is as heightening the natural synthesis of the sensory-motor being of one's body-self and/in the surrounding.

Like the state of flow, first defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi more than three decades ago, presentness emerges in moments of total immersion in skilled practice to the extent that conscious exercising of technique disappears. The state of flow, particularly when connected to physical activity, creates a sense of entwinement with the surrounding: ideas and actions as well as one's awareness of the environment's responses become part of a single process of high creative potential. Presentness in performance,

however, is more than a particular instance of flow because of the performer's need to share the experiences that emerge within this state with all those present: both other actors and observers.¹⁰

Taking Amelia Jones' definition of the "subject as *intersubjective* (contingent on the other)"¹¹ I further define presentness as creating a space-time charged with heightened intersubjectivity that enables both the sharing of meanings through representation and shared experiencing. Jones' phenomenology draws on Merleau-Ponty's theory that the self emerges through an embodied relationship with the world and others in it; only through intersubjectivity can one know the world and oneself. It is in the heightened intersubjective space of practice that presentness can be integrated into the actor's habitual way of acting.¹²

The intersubjective focus is particularly significant for actor training as it enables both outward going attention as well as self awareness.¹³ Although training in psychophysical techniques often begins by developing the performer's private experience of presentness, which may be simply defined as heightened awareness, this experience must at an early stage be embodied, i.e. have an effect that is apparent, even if subtly, in relationship to the immediate changing environment. Hence, the performer's presentness enables, and is dependent on, a reciprocal influencing among performers as well as

¹⁰ Some of the conditions for reaching the state of flow through physical activities can be traced in the practice of Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq. According to Csikszentmihalyi, the general conditions for the emergence of flow in any physical activity include: setting a specific goal and ways of evaluating progress; focus on the activity and its adjustments; responding to emerging circumstances; and raising the stakes (97). These conditions can all be traced in training processes with Viewpoints Suzuki and Lecoq.

¹¹ 10, italics in origin.

¹² See also Zarrilli, *Psychophysical* 96.

¹³ See also my discussion of Bogart and Landau's idea of "Feedforward and Feedback" on p. 62.

between performer and observers. The latter may bring the action of spectating as well into a state of flow. In other words, heightened presentness cannot depend solely on the individual actor's awareness but on actor in an enactive relationship with her environment, other actors and spectators included.

As opposed to presence, which has become one of the most convoluted and heavily criticized terms in theatre and performance studies, presentness is a phenomenon that practitioners claim can be brought about by practiced skill. Although as an emerging state presentness is not *what* the performer does or *how* she or he does it (as in style), it can still be developed and honed through training. However, unlike learning the "how to" of acting, which can be understood and encapsulated as a body of knowledge to be implemented directly in the work, presentness requires repeated, ongoing practice in order to keep it available for the actor. An actor cannot do presentness or create it in rehearsal or on stage. Rather, an actor who experiences it and maintains connection to this experience through ongoing training can usually create the conditions for reaching heightened presentness while rehearsing and performing.

In his book *Varieties of Presence*, Alva Noë's main argument is that presence is availability. This availability, according to Noë, is not an inherent human condition but rather it is achieved through our dynamic enactive involvement in the world. This implies, Noë suggests, that presence can be further developed, since a richer and more varied involvement in the world opens more facets of the world for the individual, making them more present for her. Enhancing the world's availability for the actor is a step toward developing her reciprocal availability to the world. It is, then, a two sided

process by which the practitioner becomes more available to the surrounding by training in heightened, embodied, dynamic responsiveness. To be more precise, as theories from cognitive studies suggest, the availability honed through practices of presentness operates in the already existing “inextricable interweaving of mind, body, and world.”¹⁴

Most scholarship on presence in theatre investigates it on stage, in the public sphere of audience-performer relationships. The books *It* by Roach and *Stage Presence* by Jane Goodall explore such public presence. Roach focuses on the performer’s personal attributes, celebrity power, which becomes a part of their public persona. Goodall particularly emphasizes the “uncanny” aspect of stage presence. She makes an important point when claiming that “a term as loaded and as nebulous as ‘presence’ can be a way of labeling whatever we most value in performance but, like the medium of theatre itself, it should be taste proof.”¹⁵ This dissertation is, in part, an attempt at doing just that: defining, explicating, and theorizing an aspect of presence that may be practiced, developed, and used regardless of aesthetic and stylistic preferences. That is also the reason that it is effective to look into three very different approaches as Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq. While Goodall’s theorization raises many important issues, her discourse of the uncanny seems trapped in the conceptualization of presence as a metaphysical quality thus somewhat contributing to its mystification, particularly for practitioners and investigators of praxis.

¹⁴ Lutterbie, *Toward* 79.

¹⁵ Goodall 188.

Jon Erickson presents a different position on the individual performer's presence. He grounds it in specific spatiotemporal situation as "a kind of a saturation of feeling, of sensibility, a condensation of experience that *in the right circumstances* emanates from the person or performer."¹⁶ Erickson suggests that "it is not simply a condensation of experience but of *practice* as well."¹⁷ His emphasis on situated experience and practice is aligned with my understanding of presentness. Accordingly, examining the routine of ongoing training from the practitioner's point of view enables me to focus on the ways in which presentness, as a particular instance of presence, emerges from technique and develops over time. I thus hope to contribute to the demystification of this phenomenon and to ground it in concrete evidence originating in practice.

The prevalence of presentness makes it one of the most sought after skills in contemporary acting praxis. Within the discourse of North-American actor-training, "being present" often connotes varied and vague notions like "acting moment-to-moment," "living the role," and "stage presence." Practitioners and theorists of practice tend to use various definitions for the performer's heightened physical presence. For instance, Suzanne M. Jaeger's list includes "being in the moment," having an "on performance," spontaneity, flow, grace, vulnerability or risk-taking and sharp awareness of self and others.¹⁸ Eugenio Barba refers to the "dilated body,"¹⁹ a term that suggests an intertwining and extension of the body into the space around her, heightening both its perception and the actor's influence on it. Lorna Marshall invokes a "rich inner landscape

¹⁶ Erickson 147. Italics mine.

¹⁷ Ibid. Italics in original.

¹⁸ Jaeger, Suzanne M. "Presence and Embodiment." In Krazner and Saltz, 123.

¹⁹ Barba, *Paper* 81-100.

coupled with physical ease and readiness.”²⁰ In this context presentness is “not [related to] the presence of positivist metaphysics with its myth of an essential unified self and its ‘belief in unmediated communication’ (the possibility of pure self-expression), but [to the] presence constituted in the moment by means of attention to the processes of the organism and its relationship with its environment.”²¹

Anna Fenemore’s understanding of presence as “an altered bodily state determined by an opposition between ‘holding back’ and ‘pushing forward’”²² is similar to the spatial approach fostered by Suzuki training (see chapters 3). Positioning the body in the midst of two opposing forces seems to be at the center of several articulations of presence in practice. Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese articulate this principle and demonstrate its workings in various traditional forms stemming from a wide range of cultures including, for example, ballet, Balinese dance, and Etienne Decroux’s mime. This tension, however, can be detected not only in the physicality of the actor but in constructs of mental spaces as well. Declan Donnellan, whose book *The Actor and the Target* is one of the recent most influential publications on the actor’s craft, suggests such tension should exist for the actor in most stages of creation. His repeated insistence on the division of the actor’s attention, at each moment, into two opposing foci creates an effect similar to Fenemore’s description. For example, rather than focusing on one immediate objective to be achieved, Donnellan suggests a dual focus.²³ The duality he suggests always includes something to be won *and* something to be lost; something desired *and*

²⁰ Marshall 105.

²¹ Riley 448.

²² Fenemore, Anna. “Way of Working: Eight Things I know Now That I didn’t Know Before” in Christie 9.

²³ See for example Donollan 71-4.

something feared. If we read this tension within the psychophysical understanding that takes the physical as influencing and influenced by the mental/psychological (and vice versa), we see how the two articulations can meet – Donnellan’s narrative opposition and Fenimore’s embodied opposition can be seen as two starting points of a single process that includes both narrative and embodiment.

Lutterbie claims that, perhaps more than any other understandings of presence, being-in-the-moment “is one of the more universal concepts in acting.”²⁴ However, Lutterbie points out that phenomenologically speaking “we are never *not* ‘in the moment,’ responding to the life world in which and with which we exist.”²⁵ The emphasis given to ‘being-in-the-moment’ within acting theory, then, refers to a particular way of being (in the moment), which “privileges attendance to perceptual data over the self-isolating ruminations of thought.”²⁶

As an element of staged performance presentness can be located within the theoretical discourse of presence, absence, and disappearance that has long been prevalent in theatre and performance studies. Alice Rayner claims that the experience of the present moment of performance is similar to the experience we have when we are between dreaming and waking up. This experience of a “present that is always missed”²⁷ resides in the “gap or syncopation”²⁸ between perception and consciousness. Within the repetition of this structural syncopation, in this gap, is the presence of what Merleau-

²⁴ Lutterbie, John. “Neuroscience and Creativity in the Rehearsal Process,” in McConachie and Hart, 154.

²⁵ Ibid 155, italics in original.

²⁶ Ibid 155.

²⁷ Rayner 11.

²⁸ Rayner 10.

Ponty defines as “a certain hollow, a certain interior, a certain absence, a negativity that is not nothing.”²⁹ This constant negativity and loss seems to be at the heart of the theatrical experience or presence. Herbert Blau’s famous assertion that “When we speak of what Stanislavsky called Presence in acting, we must also speak of its Absence, the dimensionality of time through the actor, the fact that he who is performing can die there in front of your eyes; is in fact doing so,”³⁰ entwines presence and absence, life and death in a kind of a twist to Bertolt Brecht’s “not... but....”³¹ Absence on stage, then, is not necessarily the lack of presence, but can be seen as presence’s Other. To use Richard Schechner’s double negativity, presence on stage is both not-absence and not-not-absence.³²

Evoking the ephemeral present moment in order to write about it in a concrete manner and analyze it is one of the challenges taken by leading scholars in the field. Peggy Phelan stresses that “description itself does not reproduce the object, it rather helps us to restage and restate the effort to remember what is lost. The descriptions remind us how loss acquires meaning and generates recovery – not only of and for the object, but for the one who remembers.”³³ While the objects and acts of performance that Phelan describes perform meanings that may be recuperated in the memory of the performance, presentness, though entangled with those objects and acts, does not primarily create meanings. Rather, it is a tacit, experiential aspect of performance, underlying the palpable

²⁹ *Visible* 151.

³⁰ Blau, “Seeming” 8.

³¹ Brecht 137.

³² Schechner 111-12.

³³ Phelan 147.

acts and objects. Like Rayner's project in *Ghosts*, this dissertation examines the kind of "epistemology by which perceptual experience is transformed into knowledge of experience."³⁴ This knowledge, however, "is neither a topic nor an issue for discourse"³⁵ and it cannot be put into words simply and explained away. As Michel de Certeau claims, "modern writing cannot be in the place of presence [...] Its condition is its non-identity with itself."³⁶

Another place presence has been prevalent is in the philosophy and theory of such luminaries as Jerzy Grotowski, Barba and Peter Brook. According to Jane Turner, Barba believes that "the emphasis for all actors must be on training his or her potential scenic presence. Training scenic presence requires working on exercises that engage the whole body and that will serve both the body in exercise and the body in performance."³⁷

In one of the often quoted book openings, Brook posits: "A man walks across [an] empty space whilst another man is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to emerge."³⁸ Regardless of the assumptions and biases imbedded in Brook's book, what he describes is still considered the common conception of the essence of theatrical experience: a performer in action is watched by a spectator.³⁹ In this stripped down model the moment of performance is clearly shared: the performer's essential role is to be in action and the spectator's is to watch. Watching, witnessing, or spectating is of

³⁴ Rayner 114, italics in original.

³⁵ Ibid 47.

³⁶ Certeau 161.

³⁷ 27.

³⁸ 9.

³⁹ Although the assumed passivity of the viewer has been contested and complicated by both practitioners and theorists (such as Brecht, Boal and Grotowski) it is still the prevalent assumption in most theatres.

course at the core of how we tend to define theatre. This visuo-centric approach goes as far back as the Greek etymological origin of the word theatre.⁴⁰ In the word audience we find a competing or complementing focus on the auditory aspects of theatrical performance reception. This focus is part of what Elinor Fuchs, following Jacques Derrida, calls “the phonocentric fabric of performance.”⁴¹ The psychophysical model I follow in this dissertation changes the focus of both the actor and audience’s experience in performance. Arguably, the actor’s focus on being in a heightened embodied intersubjective state invites a shift in the audience’s experience from privileging text and semiotic representation, emanating from the habitual double visuo/phono-centric focus, to a more wholly embodied experiencing of the performance through the actor’s presentness.

Fuchs’ critique of the “idealization of presence”⁴² in theatre marks the beginning of an era in theatre and performance scholarship. Consequently, Jacques Derrida’s critique of the metaphysics of presence⁴³ has dominated much of the theorization of presence in our field. His “La Parole Soufflée” and “The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation”⁴⁴ have become defining texts in deconstructing notions of presence and representation in theatre. While Derrida positions Antonin Artaud’s notion of pure presence in opposition to the repetitious essence of Being, it is exactly through

⁴⁰ The word theatre comes from the Greek *theatron* which means a place of seeing.

⁴¹ Fuchs 166.

⁴² *Ibid.* 164

⁴³ For example Derrida 180-81.

⁴⁴ Both in *Writing and Difference*.

repetition that presentness is enabled, not as the revelation of a pure essential self but as a momentary sensory-motor entwinement within the dynamic flow of Being.

Philip Auslander uses Derridean deconstruction to complicate the ways in which presence and notions of self are articulated and practiced within various contemporary acting techniques.⁴⁵ In *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* Auslander challenges Phelan's seminal "Ontology of Performance," positing that live and mediatized performances share similar ontologies of presence. Although he makes it clear that there are phenomenological differences between the two, he does not mention what those are.⁴⁶ In a response to Auslander's theories of mediatized presence Blau asserts that "liveness is variable in definition, with inflections of value through a spectrum of meaning from being alive to being lively."⁴⁷

Auslander's discussion of "Presence and Theatricality" includes an examination of the use of the term presentness as coined by Michael Fried.⁴⁸ Fried claims that modernist art, which he favors, has presentness: "*at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest.*"⁴⁹ He contrasts his idea of presentness, an experience that transcends any particular time and place, with "theatricality" that represents for him the contingency of the experience of an art work on a particular context and a specific point of view of a particular audience. I should add that Fried included postmodern theatre and performance together with the more conventional forms of theatre, all on the side of theatricality.

⁴⁵ *Acting*.

⁴⁶ *Liveness* 54.

⁴⁷ Blau, "Human" 23.

⁴⁸ *Acting* 56-7.

⁴⁹ 182, Italics in original.

Fried's problematic definition of the term notwithstanding, presentness has been used by various performance theorists to connote emergent moments of *shared* experiencing in performance. With the rise of Performance Studies and attempts to define the differences between performance and theatre, Fried's definitions were adapted with a twist.⁵⁰ While theatre (embodying "theatricality") was critiqued as a mere *representation* of action, performance was seen as embodying action actually taking place in the here and now of the event. In other words, performance was defined by its presentness – not as the transcended decontextualized presence articulated by Fried, but rather as representing the actual occurrence in the specific time and space.⁵¹ That is, for performance theorists theatricality becomes identified with modernist theatre while performance's ontological status takes the features of what Fried calls theatricality – directly tied to the particularities of the emerging context it inhabits.

The dichotomy that Fried brings up between the experience of art as part of a particular context versus a transcendent experience of art defines the tension that is perhaps at the core of any debate about present, presence, and presentness. This tension might be describing the dialectic nature of presence. As Goodall claims, "One of the strangest paradoxes of stage presence is that, the more powerfully it draws us into the here and now, the more palpably it seems to connect us to a time zone that stretches beyond the boundaries of natural life, to invoke the supernatural."⁵²

⁵⁰ For an in-depth discussion of Fried's understanding of presence with regard to theatricality see Power, *Presence* 96-108.

⁵¹ See also Féral.

⁵² Goodall 169-70.

Cormac Power's *Presence in Play: a Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre*, is an exhaustive critical perspective on the ongoing debate about presence. Power suggests that theatre enables us to "explore the intricacies of presence in particular ways, as we move away from merely privileging theatre as an essentially 'present' phenomenon."⁵³ He categorizes the different ways theatre and performance scholars theorize presence into three different presences: Making-Presence, that is, the presence of the fictional body/world; Having-Presence, also called auratic presence, which is the personal attribute of a performer (charisma, "it"), a company or a production; and Being-Present, the performer's heightened energy in performance. Power's Being-Present is the closest to my definition of presentness, although he defines it within the context of staged performance rather than training, thus looking at what might be the end result of a process of training. Taking as an example the famous chorus' speech at the opening of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Power asserts that

[The speech] neither affirms the drama as an unfolding present, nor the wooden stage as an immediate 'here and now', but invites its audience into a process of theatre-making. The point this speech seems to make is precisely that we do not enter into a 'now' but experience theatre as a form of representation where the very impossibility of fully inhabiting a given 'present' is itself playfully presented. Theatre can be seen not so much as 'having' or containing presence, but as an art that plays with its possibilities.⁵⁴

Power is hence critical of the complete negation of presence as he is of the advocating of "pure presence". Similarly, my stance towards presence, disappearance, and absence goes

⁵³ Power, *Presence* 198.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 8.

against the apparently prevalent either/or approaches. Further, Power's claim that theatre may serve as a playground (possibly a lab) for exploring possibilities of presence resonates well with my argument concerning presentness as a particularly situated instance of presence. While for him, playing with presence occurs onstage (and in some way, its potentials can be detected in the written drama), I contend that the conditions of actor-training in psychophysical techniques make for an even more intensive process of playful examination.

To make it even clearer, the understanding of presence that I propose is that of a dynamic process that is always at work, with multiple potential qualities rather than a static, inherent quality to be had. It stands in opposition to the common equating of presence to a certain "*je ne se quoi*."⁵⁵ Although there are, and probably will always be, metaphysical aspects to presence, by looking at technique and processes of training, we can look beyond this veil of mystique and find the concrete ways presence is practiced. Presence onstage and in training is the result of that which emerges "in front of our eyes" and becomes available to the entire perceptual apparatus. Like disappearance, I argue, presence is an unstable, emergent, and process-based phenomenon. Something in a performer is always in the process of presenting itself to our perceptual field in a certain way just as something is disappearing from it. Heightened presentness emerges in an instance of a particularly intensified moment within the flow and fluctuation of presence. The unique "here-ness" and "now-ness" of this instance are highlighted, and the particular experience of this spatiotemporal context is thus intensified. Using practice-

⁵⁵ Patrice Pavis qt. in Goodall 1, 19.

based research, then, affords me a look into processes of exploring and playing with the variations, fluctuations, and intensities of presence and presentness. The situated essence of presentness, always a part of a particular here and now, also means it is operating within and as part of a specific cultural context.

The notions of presence and, as a result, of presentness are naturally influenced by culturally specific praxes and philosophies. While the majority of the theories I use are a product of ‘Western’ thought, some have been heavily influenced by ideas emanating from non-Western, mostly East and South-East Asian, philosophy and praxis. Notably, Brook, Grotowski, and Barba’s praxes have been ostensibly ‘multi-cultural,’ inserting non-European practices (and, in some cases artists as well) into their European-based companies. This move can be seen as part of a process occurring throughout the twentieth century, including, for example, Stanislavsky’s use of Hatha Yoga,⁵⁶ Vsevolod Meyerhold’s Japanese influenced productions, and Antonin Artaud’s fascination with Balinese theatre, to name just a few. This influence was accompanied, in some instances, by a revering exoticism toward the ‘Eastern’ performer’s presence, which seemed superior to the more naturalistic essence of European styles of acting.⁵⁷ Consequently, the influence of non-Western concepts and practices can be detected in contemporary North-American actor-training.

Although Suzuki’s practice of presence can be seen as a clear cut example of an ‘Eastern’ approach implemented into the heart of North American actor-training, Suzuki

⁵⁶ See Carnicke 167-84.

⁵⁷ The conflict between practitioners who privilege what they define as Western or Euro-centric practices and others who include non-Western approaches in their praxis is still prevalent. See, for example, the debate between Anne Bogart and Kristin Linklater in Diamond.

himself was influenced by ‘Western’ techniques and styles, such as Ballet and Flamenco, and assimilated some of their principles and practices into his training system. SITI’s ongoing process of translation through practice is part of their attempt to transmit Suzuki’s notion of presence to their students in the various sites of training. In a different example, Daniel Mroz teaches, mostly in Canada, a psychophysical approach to actor training based on his life-long training in Chinese martial arts. This requires him to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap between the origins of his practice and the practitioners he works with. In his recent book he uses both Chinese concepts and their English translation, for example, *shi* and presence.⁵⁸ However, from the text it seems that *shi* would be a far more specific term for a Chinese practitioner of martial arts, than the notion of presence would be to a North American acting practitioner. Notions of presence, then, are both culturally specific and can change through cross-influences among cultures.

As opposed to presence, presentness relates to the simple and rare experience of emergent shared time and place. It is simple because we encounter such experiences in our everyday lives: we share intimate, revealing and vulnerable moments with other people, whether we are conscious of it or not. However, it is rare in performance because more often than not, as Blau puts it, “the dubious presence of the actor in a facsimile of performance that, if occurring in real time, nevertheless feels like a rerun or rather

⁵⁸ See Mroz 62-4.

embalmed in advance.”⁵⁹ Moreover, mundane presentness differs from the presentness sought after in practice both in its repeatability and its heightened, focused potential.

For Jill Dolan, the rare occurrence of presentness connotes a “utopian performative.”⁶⁰ She uses this term when speaking of the unique and unrepeatable nature of a specific performance by Deb Margolin:

Through the night, as we watched Margolin perform around the growing puddles, and cupped our ears to hear, the rain came to sound like applause, its rhythm a recognition of the presentness of the moment we shared and its uniqueness. The show will probably never be played quite that way again. Yet those of us watching that night were stirred by the intimacy, by Margolin’s vulnerability, by her courage and refusal to let the environment silence her, by the urgency of what she had to say.⁶¹

While Dolan’s emphasis is on the influence the rain had on Margolin’s performance, an effect that cannot be reproduced in its “natural” spontaneous form, I would argue that she describes the kind of experience that practitioners of psychophysical acting techniques (and perhaps any theatre practitioner) strive to achieve regardless of the unpredictability of the forces of nature. That is, a performer who is trained to be responsive to the non-fictional emergent circumstances, both in herself and in the environment (including audience), would potentially succeed in making each performance into a unique experience while evoking the experience of “intimacy” and “vulnerability.” We might say, in an analogy to Margolis’ performance, that developing presentness helps make it rain in every performance.

⁵⁹ Blau, “Human” 23.

⁶⁰ Dolan 460.

⁶¹ Ibid. 475.

André Lepecki describes the final moments of the dance piece *Aatt...e...enen...tionon* as creating “a powerful reiteration of the generative force of the body, by means of a constant insistence on the body’s presentness, its material aliveness, as it transpires through pain.”⁶² Presentness, then, is part of a process of “reiteration” and, in an echo of Blau’s morbid assertion,⁶³ is not negated by transpiring through pain. In an article about the various artists that were a part of the Judson Church Theater, Sally Banes claims that “[p]oetry, music, theatre, and dance stressed the performative aspect—embodiment—over the literary aspect of their forms, aspiring to greater and greater immediacy, ‘presentness,’ concreteness of experience.”⁶⁴ In aligning presentness (despite the fact that she cautiously puts it in quotation marks) with embodiment and in contrast to “the literary,” i.e. to text, Banes brings us back to Fuchs’ “Revenge of Writing,” this time from the other side of the equation.

This text/presence dichotomy is reshuffled in the works of writers such as Helen Cixous. Cixous’s theatre is connected to psychophysical acting, specifically Lecoq’s work, both philosophically⁶⁵ and through her collaboration with Ariane Mnouchkine.⁶⁶ Marc Silverstein describes her theatrical impetus as originating from

the desire for a theater in which the closure of representation yields the plenitude of the real; in which the line dividing subject/object, audience/character and spectator/spectacle dissolves in an undifferentiated totality. Cixous dreams of a theater in which the stage, rather than a space of semiological mediation

⁶² “Skin” 137.

⁶³ See p. 29.

⁶⁴ Banes 101.

⁶⁵ See Chamberlain and Yarrow 12.

⁶⁶ Lecoq, *Theatre* 134

structured by absence, would serve as a site of phenomenological immediacy disclosing presence.⁶⁷

Like Cixous' theatre, in order to explore the intricacies of presence and presentness we need to take a theoretical and practical phenomenological approach that enables us to avert Cartesian observation and ground the body/self in the world. In the next section I give an account of the main phenomenological theories I use in this study alongside more recent research from cognitive studies.

Phenomenology and Cognitive Studies

Centering experience around psychophysical processes can be traced in ontological and epistemological constructs originating from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and, more recently, in the interdisciplinary field of cognitive neuroscience.⁶⁸ The understanding of embodiment as including, or taking part in, most processes of human experience and cognition blurs the boundaries between individual 'internal' experience and 'external' processes that participate in social, communicative, and aesthetic activities. Similarly, psychophysical techniques seek to enable the performance of both the 'outer' physical and the 'inner' psychological or mental aspects as part of a unified embodied phenomenon. According to Merleau-Ponty all experience is intersubjective because I am present to myself "as identical to my presence in the world and to others, as I am now realizing it: I am all that I see, I am an intersubjective field, not despite my body and

⁶⁷ Silverstein 508.

⁶⁸ Many of the theoretical and philosophical strands in cognitive Neuroscience draw on phenomenology, particularly Merleau-Ponty's. See for an example Hart and McConachie, 6.

historical situation, but, on the contrary, by being this body and this situation and through them, all the rest.”⁶⁹ This stance allows me to examine the enmeshing of structured techniques of the body with emerging subjective states as they are experienced by both practitioners and observers.

Phenomenology is not only an amalgam of theories but also a “way of seeing.”⁷⁰ Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology explores experience as it appears to perception, maintaining that the inner/subjective experience and the outer/objective experience are part of the same process of lived experience. By evading Cartesian paradigms and positioning the body/self as *belonging* to the realms of space and time while still having subjectivity and agency, phenomenology provides methodological tools suitable for observing embodied experience. Thus, individual experience, its spatiotemporal manifestation and the way it both affects and is affected by others can be analyzed as part of the entwinement of the body/self with its environment. Merleau-Ponty claims that there is no objective experience of the world that can be universally understood, nor is there subjectivity that is separate from the world it inhabits. In order to be able to discuss and understand human experience we need an ambiguous realm, which he calls the phenomenal field, in which we can examine “the thickness” of subject and object as they come together.⁷¹ This thickness he calls the Flesh. This approach to the body and objects around it is particularly useful for investigating the psychophysical actor’s body in its relationship to elements of time and space. It enables an observation of the body with/in

⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 525.

⁷⁰ Moran and Mooney 1.

⁷¹ *Phenomenology* 61.

its environment without erasing the actor's individual identity and self. It also enables an observation of the relationships of objects to bodies as they engage within one lived space.

The body, according to Merleau-Ponty, stands in front of its world like a metaphorical dynamic mirror, reflecting the experience of the world in its own constitution and being. This metaphoric reflection is not caused by the world and cannot be traced and understood as knowledge of the world; rather, it is perceived experience itself, which is motivated, not caused. This means that the motivation and its result are reciprocal and intertwined within a circular dialectic rather than a linear progression. Since presentness emerges in moments of heightened entwinement in the circumstances of the performance or practice, it not only takes part in processes described by Merleau-Ponty as defining the subject in its environment but also exposes the subject-in-the-moment.

In exploring presentness, Merleau-Ponty's theory helps explore a world structure that fluctuates between the layers of the existing (material) world and the immediacy of lived experience. Further, in stressing the interdependence between the body and the world as well as the fact that external perception (of the world) and internal perception (of the body) are entangled as two aspects of a single act of being, both the private and public realms of presentness can appear as part of a singular experience. Further, Merleau-Ponty's claim that "an analysis of [time and space] that is at all searching really

touches upon subjectivity itself”⁷² positions my investigation of the emergence of presentness as spatiotemporal experience in dialogue with research of the actor’s self and identity.

Most phenomenological research of theatre, including the influential works of both Bert O. States and Stanton Garner, focuses on stage phenomena and on the transposition of plays to the stage. Although for the most part both States and Garner focus on the audience’s point of view, Garner provides a significant instance of including the actor’s experience. Due to its livedness,⁷³ Garner claims, the actor’s body on stage both embodies the dualities of reality/illusion, sign/referent, and threatens to break these dualities and send them back into the “real” real. The spectator’s body in its particular orientation and positionality is invisible for the actor’s virtual gaze (as character), yet visible for the actor’s actual gaze. It is the actor’s ability to gaze back onto the audience that makes the theatre experience different from most other arts. These variables of presence and absence show that “embodiedness is subject to modification and transformation, multiple and varying modes of disclosure, and that the forms of ambiguity that characterize the phenomenal realm represent experience in flux, oscillating within and between modes of perceptual orientation.”⁷⁴

Rayner uses phenomenology to theorize the experience of the present moment of performance.⁷⁵ Although she focuses on staged performances rather than training or rehearsals, I find her way of using phenomenology to theorize time and her attempts to

⁷² *Phenomenology* 477.

⁷³ Garner’s term, see for example p. 50.

⁷⁴ Garner 51.

⁷⁵ Rayner 10; see also p. 10-11 above.

explicate the unspeakable, embodied “knowledge of experience”⁷⁶ to be especially pertinent for my research. In *Body/Art: Performing the Subject*, Jones provides a phenomenological model for analyzing and theorizing gender, sexuality and race in performance. Of particular value to the research of psychophysical theatre praxis is Jones’ focus on the positionality of the artist within and in relationship to his/her work. In body art, she claims, the artist’s body/self is positioned as the originating artist, the source from which the art’s content and form emerge as well as the performed material body. The same can be said of most devised psychophysical theatre. Jones’ analysis of the body artist as performing his or her self can prove to be fruitful in the way it exposes the complexities of performing identity and self through the body.

Cognitive neuroscience complements phenomenology by providing models for neuro-cognitive processes that may correspond to and explain the state of presentness. As Blair puts it, echoing Merleau-Ponty’s intersubjectivity, “we are connected in ways we cannot yet conceive that allow us to imitate each other, empathize with each other, speak with each other, and make performances with each other – because our brains are literally firing each other up in ways that mirror each other.”⁷⁷ In his book *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, Mark Johnson claims that “art matters because it provides heightened, intensified, and highly integrated experiences of meaning, using all of our ordinary resources of meaning-making.”⁷⁸ Johnson uses examples from different arts to show how meaning-making processes depend on more

⁷⁶ Rayner 114.

⁷⁷ “(Refuting)” 130.

⁷⁸ Johnson 208.

than content, propositional logic, and verbal understanding but in fact stem from various facets of our embodied experience. His argument can be extended to the process of training in psychophysical acting techniques that are meant to inform processes of theatre creation. That is to say, while training and rehearsal processes teach us specifically about the art of making theatre, they also expose aspects of our experience of the lived-world and, therefore, can serve as fertile ground for learning about ourselves.

The various disciplines grouped under cognitive neuroscience theorize the physical, cognitive and emotional processes as connected aspects of the whole of human experience. By connecting the lived embodied experience to newly found empirical evidence about the body, language, and cognition, cognitive neuroscience is enhancing the ways in which phenomenological methodologies can be applied to theatre research. It is crucial, however, to stress out Lutterbie's caution that "science does not provide us with answers, but with a way of reframing our understanding of acting that offers a more useful and dynamic way of talking about the actor's art."⁷⁹ Moreover, in spite of the presence of "science" in cognitive neuroscience, we are not dealing here with complete proofs and absolute truths. There is still a gap between the understandings neuro-scientists have on the operation of the brain, neuro-system, and body and real-world experience and behavior. In addition, some of the sources I use construct hypotheses that are *likely* to be true based on scientific results. This is the case with, for example, Damasio's Somatic Marker Hypothesis as well as Benjamin Libet's hypothesis about the

⁷⁹ 73.

temporal gap in our conscious awareness of the present moment.⁸⁰ Scientific evidence, then, cannot replace the theoretical constructs commonly used in the humanities and social sciences; and although it “can help us to confirm our ideas, it can never prove them absolutely.”⁸¹

The recent influence of cognitive neuroscience in theatre and performance studies helps to ground new research in scientific evidence and empirical data as well as to extend the theory by closing gaps that the traditional phenomenological methodology left open. Perhaps the most substantial gap is with language and textual practices. By relating lived embodied experience to language and cognition, the field of cognitive studies is finding ways to reformulate the experience/signification duality by intertwining them. As Elizabeth Hart suggests “both the *things* and the *signs* (or more inclusively, language) that make up the full theatrical experience emerge jointly from the materiality of the human body. And both take shape – complexly, and in the general context of human behaviors, uniquely – in the very fact of performance.”⁸² According to Hart, cognitive science owes Merleau-Ponty the concept of embodied consciousness “and it is through this logic of mind-embodiment that cognitive researchers have pushed Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy past the point of speculation and into the realm of scientific inquiry.”⁸³ Although many researchers in cognitive neuroscience see in his phenomenology their philosophical ancestor, they are also aware of its limitation when it comes to detailed analysis of empirical facts.

⁸⁰ See chapter 4.

⁸¹ McConachie 8.

⁸² In Hart and McConachie 48.

⁸³ Hart, Elizabeth in Hart and McConachie 33.

In their influential book *Philosophy in the Flesh*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson advocate for empirically responsible philosophy “because it makes better self-understanding possible. It gives us deeper insight into who we are and what it means to be human.”⁸⁴ Moreover, Lakoff and Johnson critique the division between phenomenological and cultural researches, claiming that “all experience is cultural through and through.”⁸⁵ Their theory of embodied metaphors helps in including language as part of psychophysical experience by showing how “language and discourse are *themselves* embodied: They are *cognitively* embodied.”⁸⁶

Lakoff and Johnson’s theory is one among various cognitive theories that have already been applied to theatre practice. In some cases these new theories may change the very definition of what the actor’s work should and could be. For example, Johnson’s assertion that “meaning is grounded in bodily experience”⁸⁷ and Antonio Damasio’s claim, in *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, that “emotion is integral to the processes of reasoning and decision making,”⁸⁸ break down the traditional divides: thing/sign, embodied experience/meaning, and emotion/logic.⁸⁹ Thus, Damasio’s Somatic Marker Hypothesis as explained in *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* is used by Shannon Riley to begin developing a new way for practitioners to avert Cartesian terminology in practice and to promote integrated embodied techniques. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner’s

⁸⁴ *Philosophy* 552.

⁸⁵ *Metaphors* 57.

⁸⁶ Hart 31.

⁸⁷ *Meaning* 70.

⁸⁸ 41.

⁸⁹ See also Hart and McConachie 48.

Conceptual Blending Theory in *The Way We Think* is used by Amy Cook in her essay “Interplay: The Method and Potential of a Cognitive Scientific Approach to Theatre,” to unpack the meaning-making process in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. In her more recently published book, *Shakespearean Neuroplay: Reinvigorating the Study of Dramatic Texts and Performance through Cognitive Science*, Cook provides a thorough analysis of *Hamlet*, using conceptual blending alongside Lakoff and Johnson’s embodied metaphor theory. In *Psychophysical Acting* Phillip Zarrilli develops an enactive approach to acting based on Noë’s enactive perception theory as delineated in his book *Action in Perception*. In *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* Bruce McConachie uses various theories from cognitive neuroscience to reexamine audience reception and engagement.

Of all the various publications in theatre and performance studies using cognitive neuroscience, the most pertinent for this research are the writings of Blair and Lutterbie as well as the recent book by Ric Kemp. Blair, Lutterbie and Kemp look at actor and acting as the subject of their investigation. In *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience*, Blair asserts that the mental images an actor uses when acting “do not need to make ‘logical’ (i.e., rational or reasonable) or even ‘biographical’ sense.”⁹⁰ According to her approach, the traditional psychologically based play analysis makes room for a more efficacious psychophysical approach, following cognitive patterns that avert linear ‘psychological-realist’ tendencies.⁹¹ Kemp’s book, *Embodied*

⁹⁰ Blair 95.

⁹¹ Blair’s contribution to the field also includes various articles that mainly focus on different aspects of theatrical production from the director, teacher or actor’s perspective.

Acting: What Neuroscience Tells us about Performance, follows a more eclectic route. Kemp uses the theories of Lakoff and Johnson, David McNeill's theory of gesture, Joseph LeDoux's theory of the synaptic self, Paul Ekman's theory of emotions, and Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending theory to examine various aspects of acting in the techniques of Lecoq, Stanislavsky, Michael Chekhov, and Grotowski. In his book, *Toward a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance*, Lutterbie turns to Dynamic System Theory to analyze acting.⁹²

A dynamical approach rejects the idea that cognition is best understood in terms of representational content, or that cognitive systems can be decomposed into inner functional subsystems or modules. Linear decomposition of cognitive performance into functional subsystems (i.e., 'boxology') is inadequate to understand the dynamical systems that cut across brain-body-world divisions.⁹³

Lutterbie is relying heavily on Evan Thompson's monolithic book *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*, as well as Shaun Gallagher's book *How the Body Shapes the Mind*.

Both Thompson and Gallagher combine phenomenology with various cognitive and neuroscientific accounts. I use Gallagher's theory of body-schema and body-image in my exploration of the experience of space in chapter 3. Thompson's early work with Francisco Varela, the founder of neurophenomenology, is at the basis of his writing. He explains Varela's basic approach as relying on the hypothesis of "reciprocal constraints"⁹⁴ between phenomenological accounts of experience and dynamic

⁹² For sources on Dynamic System Theory see Thompson; Kelso.

⁹³ Gibbs 11.

⁹⁴ 329.

neurological models. Of particular significance is Thompson's description of the way first person accounts of phenomenologically trained subjects is used by neurophenomenologists to validate and enhance the understanding of neurological models of brain behavior. That is, according to Varela and Thompson, by collecting subjective data from practitioners who may have access to fleeting pre-reflective aspects of experience we may learn the meaning of certain neurodynamical models and their corresponding effect in the body-environment interaction. They particularly refer to time-consciousness as the "acid-test" for this approach. In chapter 4 I will take a closer look at Thompson's elaboration of Varela's neurophenomenology as I examine the experience of/in time in practice.

Theories from phenomenology and cognitive neuroscience enable an informed analysis of the emergence of presentness in the practice of Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq as a natural, experiential phenomenon that is enhanced by these techniques in unique ways. My intention in this dissertation, then, is not to explain Viewpoints, Suzuki, or Lecoq exercises as such; this has already been done extensively by others. Rather, within these three different approaches to psychophysical actor training, I focus on specific moments that expose presentness. Nevertheless, a certain outline of psychophysical acting praxis in general and of Suzuki, Viewpoints, and Lecoq in particular is in order. In the next section I propose a general genealogy for the emergence of psychophysical techniques in the 20th century while outlining the major sources available, in order to better define the terminology of praxis I am using. The section that follows focuses specifically on Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq. While a complete survey

of the three techniques and their historical background and development is beyond the scope of this dissertation, a certain juxtaposition of historical, material and practical factors as well as the extant literature on each technique, better positions the discussion I develop further on.

Theatres and Techniques: sources, genealogies, definitions

Presentness can be viewed as equivalent to Konstantin Stanislavsky's term *experiencing* (from the Russian *perezhivanie*), which according to Sharon Carnicke is one of his most important yet elusive acting principles.⁹⁵ Experiencing often relates to the actor's state of creativity and flow. It is elusive because it is a subjectively experienced, tacit state, which cannot be broken into components and is never separate from the totality of experience in each moment. Moreover, the state of experiencing ambiguously resides in-between the spontaneous revelation of the actor's 'authentic self' and the 'technical' representation of character, action, and emotion.⁹⁶ Similarly, contemporary psychophysical techniques attempt to strike a balance between the emerging, 'authentic' present-moment and the technical, predetermined physical elements of performance as two inseparable aspects of the actor's embodied presentness.

The term psychophysical theatre originates from Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Action.⁹⁷ Several of Stanislavsky's students, notably Michael Chekhov, continued to develop this approach to acting and most of their writing is practical in

⁹⁵ Carnicke 107-23.

⁹⁶ 112-23.

⁹⁷ Carnicke 138-45.

essence. Jacques Copeau, Stanislavsky's contemporary, developed his own approach to psychophysical theatre heavily influenced by commedia dell'arte and Delsarte movement technique, instigating a lineage of innovators in embodied techniques including, among others, Jean Dasté, Michel Saint-Denis, Jean-Louis Barrault, Étienne Decroux, and Jacques Lecoq.⁹⁸ Both Barba⁹⁹ and Zarrilli¹⁰⁰ seek to theorize the manifestation of body-mind unity and psychophysical presentness within their own embodied praxes. However, even though their theories have been ostensibly influential, the techniques they focus on have not gained similar popularity in North American actor training programs.

Psychophysical theatre often replaces the more commonly used term *physical theatre*, which has become a catch-all phrase, describing almost any acting technique that is not psychologically based. It is hard, however, to find theatre that is *not* physical, since the one aspect common to most theatre forms and techniques is the actor's body as the primary mean of communication and meaning creation.¹⁰¹ In addition, this term invokes a Cartesian separation that negates the participation of psychological processes in the same way that *psychological realism* disregards the actor's physical body.¹⁰² In his introductory survey of Lecoq's life and work titled *Jacques Lecoq*, Simon Murray claims that physical theatre "is more a marketing tool than a useful framework for analyzing new developments in theater practice."¹⁰³ Nevertheless, in the two volumes titled *Physical*

⁹⁸ See Felner.

⁹⁹ *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*.

¹⁰⁰ *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski*.

¹⁰¹ See for example Benedetti, Robert 73; Zarrilli, *Acting* 86.

¹⁰² In *The Philosophical Actor*, Donna Soto-Morettini critiques the use of the term Psychological Realism, claiming that psychology and the "real" can hardly be taken for granted as compatible and calling for a reexamination of the language practitioners use to describe such widespread ideas (63).

¹⁰³ Murray 34.

Theatres (Introduction and Reader), Murray and John Keefe engage in limited critical discussion while contributing to the problematic use of this term. These introductory texts focus mostly on theatre in the UK where physical theatre has been established as a genre since the 80s under the strong influence of approaches such as Decroux and, most prominently, Lecoq.¹⁰⁴ Unlike the British context, in Canada and the USA physical theatre is not solely identified as part of any particular style or genealogy of practice (at least until recently); rather, it has been located within other ‘movements’ or genres such as experimental theatre, environmental theatre, mask work or clown.

This conflation and overlap of terminologies, genres and techniques requires a (re)definition of the principles used for analyzing and grouping together different praxes. In *Actor Training* Alison Hodge shares this premise in her attempt to uncover fundamental principles that are “capable of transcending their origins.”¹⁰⁵ She leaves it to the reader to connect the threads among the various in-depth essays that cover major developments in actor training in the twentieth century. In *Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* Zarrilli compiles a variety of essays into three parts: theorizations of acting, the actor’s body and training, and actors in performance.¹⁰⁶ My research is positioned in the intersection of the first and second parts. That is, I rely on practical experience and a deep understanding of the techniques while applying theory to the analysis in order to gain new understanding on both practice and theory. In *The Purpose of Playing* Robert Gordon outlines six dominant tendencies that *a priori*

¹⁰⁴ See Chamberlain and Yarrow.

¹⁰⁵ Hodge xxv.

¹⁰⁶ Zarrilli, *Acting* 7-81, 85-238, 241-343, respectively.

organize and group together different acting approaches. Gordon's survey focuses on contextualizing acting techniques, but although it is expansive and more critical compared to other similar publications (such as Ley and Milling, for example), it does not significantly expand the existing knowledge base on either the praxes it explores or the organizing principles it posits.¹⁰⁷

Gordon mentions Anne Bogart and Jacques Lecoq (as well as Jerzy Grotowski, among others) as theatre practitioners who "understood that the nature of the performer's techniques are [sic] functionally related to performance composition."¹⁰⁸ Indeed, both the Viewpoints and Lecoq techniques are often used for devising, and training in these techniques is seen as good preparation for collaborative creation. Bogart uses Viewpoints in tandem with Composition in the creation of new plays. In order to do so, she "delegates major creative responsibility to her performers regarding the scenic composition of her mise-en-scene."¹⁰⁹ Joan Herrington claims that "the Viewpoints can have no regisseur, in the traditional sense."¹¹⁰ Hence, using it in devising requires work of collaboration in which all components of the performance originate from the actors' expressive world. The directors of Zen Zen Zo, an Australian company that practices Viewpoints and Suzuki claim it is "an excellent tool for unlocking the creativity of our company members, as well as empowering them to do the majority of the creating in our

¹⁰⁷ Many published compilations and surveys that gather various techniques under a single term (such as Oddey's *Devising Theatre* and Potter's *Movement for Actors*) remain introductory and often lack sustained theoretical depth.

¹⁰⁸ Gordon 360.

¹⁰⁹ Lampe, "Disruption" 106.

¹¹⁰ Herrington, "Directing" 160.

production.”¹¹¹ Suzuki also shares his creative responsibilities when he “demands that his actors creatively develop their *own* work in the initial stages of working on a new play.”¹¹² Although when taught outside of Japan the Suzuki technique is not usually seen as a framework for devising and collaboration, in Suzuki’s company much of the early composition work is done autonomously by the actors.¹¹³ Ian Carruthers and Yasunari Takahashi suggest that, as opposed to the North American actors, in the Japanese company the familiarity and traditional understanding of structured practice enable them to engage in improvisation and devising even without practicing a thoroughly improvisatory technique such as the Viewpoints.

In Lecoq training, and consequently in companies trained by Lecoq teachers, the students “are constantly thrown back on themselves and have to invent their own theatre. We may suggest themes, offer advice, stimulate the students by imposing restraints, but we can never go any deeper until they are engaged by the work.”¹¹⁴ Lecoq treats the actor as a creative rather than interpretive artist. In addition, by facilitating the *auto-cours*, weekly presentations of the students’ devised creative work, Lecoq’s pedagogical journey is geared towards training the creative actor to find his or her own artistic voice.¹¹⁵ Similarly, other psychophysical techniques go hand in hand with devising practices. For example, in the later part of his production phase, Grotowski stressed that “in the end I am not the author of our productions, or at any rate not the only one. [...] In our

¹¹¹ Qt. in Heddon and Milling 173.

¹¹² Carruthers and Takahashi 75.

¹¹³ In fact, many of the forms that are used in the training were developed by the actors as short compositions of movement elements for performance.

¹¹⁴ Lecoq, *Moving* 23.

¹¹⁵ For more on the auto-cours see Sherman.

productions next to nothing is dictated by the director.”¹¹⁶ Similarly, Barba’s work with his actors at the Odin Teatret is based on the development of individual technical expertise of each actor.¹¹⁷

The close relationship among psychophysical acting techniques, devising and collaboration seems to be evident. This relationship requires and consequently leads to radical changes in all aspects of theatre production and creation including, for example: breaking down the hierarchy of playwright/director/actor; ridding the actors of the tyranny of the written word; and positioning various elements of performance, including text, in a horizontal relationship among one another. In the first part of his book, *Reading the Material Theatre*, Ric Knowles correlates and interconnects practices of training and rehearsal with organizational structures and hierarchies as well as other aspects of theatre production. Knowles advances research that takes into account various material elements and conditions, seemingly peripheral to the theatre work itself, as a viable part of theatre research. For him, the material conditions in which a theatre piece or a process of training and creation are situated (including, for example, the architecture of the working space and the neighborhood in which the theatre is located) cannot be truly ignored as they take part in constructing the experience of the theatre work itself.¹¹⁸ Following Knowles, in chapter 2 I situate my practice-based research within the various sites of my practice-based research.

¹¹⁶ Qt. in Schechner, Richard. “Introduction: The Laboratory Theatre in New York, 1969,” in Schechner and Wolford 116.

¹¹⁷ See Watson, Ian. “Training with Eugenio Barba: Acting principles, the pre-expressive and ‘personal temperature’,” in Hodge 237-49.

¹¹⁸ See for example p. 79-87.

Knowles goes on to show how, as a result of their artistic process, physical theatre collaborative ensembles (re)negotiate artistic and institutional structures and hierarchies. Knowles mentions Theatre de Complicité, which draws its practice on Lecoq,¹¹⁹ as an example of the way physical theatre practice is inseparable from its aesthetics and politics in that their performance “encapsulates [their] method.”¹²⁰ According to Knowles, the particular acting techniques and processes of collaborative creation they employ, as well as their techniques of production and organizational structure, are all eventually apparent in the end result – the staged performance. The example of Complicité suggests that ongoing training in psychophysical acting techniques and their constant use by a company within collaborative devising processes may affect the process of creation, its aesthetics, the politics of the performance as well as the organizational practices.

The collaborative nature of SITI Company’s working methods, as a relevant example, leads to novel ways of assimilating the work of production staff who traditionally do not take part in the improvisational process. In creating the play *Cabin Pressure* for example SITI Company’s sound designer, Darron West, and stage manager, Megan Wanlass, contributed actively to the devising process in ways that traditionally they would be excluded from.¹²¹

In spite of the link between training in psychophysical acting techniques and devising, not much sustained research has been done to establish this connection beyond the local examination of the work of particular companies. Although the majority of

¹¹⁹ Knowles 46-53; Murray 97-110.

¹²⁰ Morris, Tom. Qt. in Knowles, 51.

¹²¹ See Bogart’s notes in Herrington, “Breathing” 126.

writings on devising include at least some reference to “physical theatre” techniques, usually no significance is given to the inherent relation between the two. Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling’s historical survey of devised theatre offers a look at collaboration in theatre through history and explores this significant characteristic of physical theatre. Alison Oddey’s book, *Devising Theatre: a Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, and Govan et. al. complete the picture from a more practical stance. Like most books dedicated to this topic, these three books focus on theatre in the UK.¹²² Bruce Barton’s collection of essays on various theatre companies in Canada is the only current book-length source exclusively dedicated to devised and collaborative theatre in North America. While most books on devising offer some theoretical background on the praxes they do not engage in sustained theoretical exploration of acting techniques specifically.

This project does not directly investigate the relations and correlations between acting techniques and the observable aesthetics of staged performance. Indeed, as Zarrilli posits, a performer on stage embodies sets of “assumptions about conventions and style, the structure of actions which he or she performs, the shape that those actions take [...], and the relationship to the audience.”¹²³ However, while in many staged performances we may be able to detect the manifestation of the prevalent “psychological bias” or the use of a particular physically based technique, it might be hard to differentiate between the actor’s work, the director’s influence and their encounter with text, style and genre within

¹²² Other books on devising include Mermikides and Smart’s edited collection about the devising processes of eight companies in the UK and Graham and Hoggett’s depiction of their company The Frantic Assembly.

¹²³ Zarrilli, *Acting* 3.

the particular cultural and artistic context.¹²⁴ Moreover, even if we were able to separate the actor's own work from all other influences, it remains unclear what part of all we can perceive of the actor's work (and not only what we can *see*) stems from the sustained parts of the actor's technique.¹²⁵ It is important to make a clear distinction between the training methods used by companies and their creative work. In North America, for example, both the Viewpoints and Suzuki techniques are identified with the SITI Company. However, the training "shouldn't be confused with performance itself."¹²⁶ As Bogart claims, "it's not about doing a play in the style of Viewpoints or Suzuki or whatever it is."¹²⁷

Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq, as well as other psychophysical techniques, are a part of the broad markets of actor training programs all over the world. Their growing inclusion within 'mainstream' actor-training programs in North America suggests that they are on the verge of becoming part of this mainstream. In their edited volume *The Politics of American Actor Training*, Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud claim that actor training in the USA "becomes less centered on the Stanislavsky Legacy of psychological realism."¹²⁸ The problematic equation of Stanislavsky with psychological realism, an issue Sharon Carnicke tackles in the first chapter of Margolis and Renaud's book, can only be settled if we take the word "Legacy" to mean "the mid twentieth century (bastardized) Americanized interpretation of Stanislavsky." Nevertheless,

¹²⁴ For similar reasons, I also refrain from integrating my observations of creative processes with these techniques into this project.

¹²⁵ Lecoq's use the term *permanences* (Bradby and Delgado 92) to describe the sustained aspects of his training that enable communication and access to the *universal poetic sense* (*Moving* 46, 168).

¹²⁶ Climenhaga, Royd. "Anne Bogart and SITI Company: Creating the Moment." In Hodge 290.

¹²⁷ Qt. in Climenhaga 290.

¹²⁸ 5.

Margolis and Renaud's statement seems to reflect the growing presence of "physical theatre" courses, workshops and companies all over North America. As another example, the inclusion of a chapter by Mary Overlie, the originator of the Viewpoints technique, in the compilation *Training of the American Actor*¹²⁹ is but one indication of the growing influence of this technique on training programs in the USA.¹³⁰

In his 2001 survey of actor training in the USA, Ian Watson claims that most training approaches are traditionally based on an "Americanized Stanislavsky" understanding of acting, focusing on the interpretation of text through a psychological analysis of story and character.¹³¹ "Americanized Stanislavsky," then, like Margolis and Tyler's "Stanislavsky's legacy," is directly related to some of the early North American (mis)interpretations of Stanislavsky which resulted in the privileging of 'psychological realism.' However, it is important to note that Stanislavsky's approach was essentially psychophysical, claiming that "in every physical action there is something psychological, and in the psychological, something physical."¹³² His system is based on techniques of various kinds, including both text-based and non-textual exercises as well as spiritual/contemplative or purely physical exercises. Hence, we may imagine that if he were alive today, he might have explored the use of exercises from Viewpoints or Suzuki as part of his training program for actors.

¹²⁹ Bartow 2006.

¹³⁰ This same book includes also a chapter by Stephen Wangh about his psychophysical training approach influenced by Grotowski.

¹³¹ *Performer Training* 78.

¹³² Qt. in Carnicke, Sharon. "Stanislavsky's System: Pathways for the Actor." In Hodge, 7.

Watson recognizes “four areas [of training]: acting, voice, speech and movement.”¹³³ Most acting technique courses focus on the study of “text analysis, character, creating and controlling emotions, motivation and psychological action” as well as “scene study” and “styles.”¹³⁴ While courses in voice, speech, and movement are often seen as necessary preparation, acting technique classes are naturally given primary importance as the place where students learn *how* to act. These acting technique classes Watson mentions might be conceived of as prescriptive, steeped in the particular behavioral and aesthetic agendas of psychological realism.

Movement, voice, and speech classes are often perceived to teach skills that enable the actor to better use the mechanics of standing, walking, sitting, dancing, articulating words, singing, and projecting their voice when onstage. This purely mechanical understanding and the separation of these techniques from acting technique courses create a dissociation between these embodied skills and acting. Thus, in many programs Viewpoints, Suzuki, and some parts of Lecoq training are considered movement techniques rather than acting techniques. Other parts of Lecoq training often fall under the definition of style acting (such as *commedia dell’arte* or melodrama), although the original intention behind the teachings of these styles is not necessarily for the sake of performing them as such.¹³⁵

¹³³ Ibid. 71.

¹³⁴ Watson adds that at the early stages of acting courses, some classes usually include theatre games, improvisations and working on “freeing [the actor’s] expressive instrument” (*Performer Training* 71). These classes, however, tend to be regarded as preparatory and usually take a small part of the syllabus.

¹³⁵ For further explanation of the Lecoq technique see below.

Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq

Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq are indeed preparatory techniques insofar as they help the actor develop certain skills that can be used in any type of performance. However, unlike many movement-based techniques that do not originate in theatre praxis, such as Yoga, Feldenkrais, or Martial Arts, these techniques are first and foremost acting techniques. Anne Bogart's assertion that "as training, the Viewpoints function much as scales do for a pianist or working at the barre does for the ballet dancer"¹³⁶ can also be true for Suzuki and Lecoq. In other words, through repeated practice with these techniques an actor develops essential skills that serve them on the stage but does not directly determine what actions they will do or the aesthetics and structure of these actions. Similarly, practicing the scales for the musician, for example, does not determine the music she can play, its style and melodies, nor does it teach a way to interpret music. It is, however, considered working on technique. A professional dancer or a classical musician would practice their technique daily, whether they have a performance that day or not; and the practice would not necessarily include any part of a coming performance, be it a musical piece or a choreographed dance.

In each of the techniques I investigate the practice of presentness is done with the use of different frameworks: an embodied character or a mask (Lecoq); a specific form of the body, the center's relationship to the floor through the structure of the feet (Suzuki); or, a deconstruction and redirection of perceptual attention (Viewpoints). Although the spatiotemporal containers and the focus of perceptual attention are different for each

¹³⁶ Qt. in Drukeman 34.

technique, all three techniques cultivate presentness as both an objective and a condition for other processes the techniques foster. That is, while Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq training endow the actor with various skills and abilities, presentness underlies most processes of training and continues to take part in the actor's work in processes of creation and on stage.

Training in Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq is a practice for repeatedly reaching momentary "state of being" rather than of the "doing" of actions. That is, although all three techniques are based on performing multiple movements, tasks, and actions, achieving them is not the final objective of the training. Rather, through the repeated forms, movements, and tasks, the practitioners experience presentness and develop it as an emerging embodied state. Thus, the being/doing dialectic is explored and the privileging of doing as part of a linear progression of cause and effect, so dominant in Eurocentric acting approaches, is balanced.¹³⁷ This balancing act restructures the temporal elements of the actor's experience. Many traditional acting techniques focus on 'actions' that are part of reaching an 'objective,' an approach that requires a linear progression toward a desirable result in the future. Psychophysical techniques balance this forward looking tendency by focusing on developing a dynamic 'state' of playing that is connected to the present, a here and now that constantly emerges throughout the progression of dramatic fictions.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Zarrilli claims that in Kathakali the ideal state of the performer is being/doing (*Kathakali* 90-92).

¹³⁸ Zarrilli discusses this temporal difference between the habitual concept of acting as leading to a "There" as opposed to being "Here" (*Acting* 189-191).

As I delineate earlier in this chapter, there is a great variety of psychophysical acting techniques, whose popularity and spread among actor-training programs also varies. Each technique has its particular emphasis, cultural origin, and aesthetic affinity. The significance of the Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq techniques goes beyond their growing popularity in North American theatres and training programs. Indeed, companies such as the SITI Company in NYC¹³⁹ and Theatre De Complicité in London can be seen as the foremost proponents of the Viewpoints/Suzuki and Lecoq techniques respectively. Nevertheless, alongside the worldwide success of their most prominent practitioners, the popularity of these techniques stems from their applicability to the demands of live performance in the 21st century. Rather than training actors “how to act,” these techniques focus on “how to get ready to act.”¹⁴⁰ This distinction echoes the shift I mention above from linear, text-based, psychological/behavioral acting to psychophysical engagement. The shift, however, does not necessarily contradict the use of text and narrative or their psychological interpretation. For instance, although SITI Company’s training is strictly based on Viewpoints and Suzuki, their rehearsal processes and performances are highly text-based. Thus, on the one hand, these techniques pose an alternative to the prevalent approaches and, on the other hand, they can be practiced

¹³⁹ The name of the SITI Company was originally conceived as an acronym for Saratoga International Theatre Institute, invoking its original main activity base in Saratoga Springs, NY. Today the company is based in NYC and moves to Saratoga Springs only for its intensive summer program, which takes place in Skidmore College.

¹⁴⁰ Cummings 110. Cummings refers here specifically to the Viewpoints and Suzuki techniques. Although the Lecoq technique uses distinct styles of acting such as tragedy, commedia and clown, these *dramatic territories* (Lecoq, *Moving* 105-154) are primarily meant to develop the actor’s awareness to different psychophysical dynamics of play rather than to teach the styles for their own sake.

alongside mainstream practices, enriching and supporting the text-based narrative with a dose of embodied awareness to emerging real-life circumstances.

In addition to the influence of these techniques on training and the distinction between them and the current mainstream approaches, the differences among these three techniques is of particular interest. Although the Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq techniques keep evolving, they are initially the product of the place and time of their birth. They originate from the NYC postmodern dance scene in the 70s (Viewpoints), Japan's "small theatre" movement of the late 60s (Suzuki), and Jacques Copeau's legacy in post WWII Europe (Lecoq). The fact that each one of these techniques originates from distinct historical moments, cultural backgrounds and theatre traditions is significant for the various inter-, multi-, and cross-cultural contexts in which contemporary theatres exist. It also shows the significance of presentness for the actor's work in distinct cultural contexts.

Anne Bogart and Tina Landau consider the Viewpoints an especially 'American' approach, tracing its origins back to postmodern dance, particularly the Judson Church Theater.¹⁴¹ In *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*, the most comprehensive source on the Viewpoints, Bogart and Landau provide a valuable look into their approach as the technique's most well known innovators, reflecting on over three decades of development and work with the Viewpoints. The origin of the

¹⁴¹ Bogart and Landau 3-6.

Viewpoints technique is the work of dancer, teacher and choreographer Mary Overlie.¹⁴² Bogart adapted the technique to better suit theatre artists rather than dancers. Her development of the Viewpoints, in collaboration with Tina Landau and, later on, her collaborators in the SITI Company, have become the most well known and disseminated version of the technique. In the Viewpoints technique the actor's psychophysical awareness is developed through a deconstructionist approach to elements of space and time. Thus, the actor's perception and embodied responses are kinesthetically immersed in her environment.

Like *The Viewpoints Book*, most sources about the Viewpoints are geared toward practitioners, advanced acting/directing students or teachers. Herrington's article, "Directing with the Viewpoints," and Dixon and Smith's compilation, *Anne Bogart: Viewpoints*, mostly focus on Bogart's work as a director. Scott T. Cummings' book, *Remaking American Theater: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and the SITI Company*, is the most extensive and recent source about the work of Bogart and the SITI company. Based on a close, long term observation of their work, Cummings ties together the history and work of playwright Charles Mee, Bogart, and the SITI Company, creating a broad perspective on the ways in which their use of text, stage craft and acting techniques grow and develop to complement one another. Eelka Lampe's various articles and book chapters¹⁴³ analyze the praxes of Bogart and her company from an intercultural perspective. Completed in the first half of the 1990s, Lampe's research focuses on the

¹⁴² One of my first exposures to the Viewpoints was in a workshop I took with Wendell Beavers in NYC in 2002. Beavers had worked with Overlie when she developed her Six Viewpoints and his approach is very close to hers.

¹⁴³ In Hodge; and Watson, *Performer Training*.

early negotiations of using Viewpoints and Suzuki within a single company and should be read from this perspective. In her essay “Translating Theologies of the Body,” Julia Whitworth engages critically with the Viewpoints and Suzuki techniques through a phenomenological analysis of her own experience of training with the SITI Company. She thus provides a starting point for theorizing embodied experience in training as well as a compelling methodological model.¹⁴⁴ Overlie’s chapter in *Training of the American Actor*, mentioned earlier, sheds light on her particular approach to the *Six Viewpoints*, which differs from Bogart’s more well known nine Viewpoints.¹⁴⁵

The Suzuki technique originates from Tadashi Suzuki’s Company of Toga-Mora (SCOT) in Japan and its practice is influenced by Asian martial arts (such as Kendo) as well as various theatre and dance forms (ranging from Kabuki, Noh, and Kathakali to ballet and flamenco).¹⁴⁶ Suzuki started developing his approach by turning to traditional forms of performance as a reaction to the influence of European and American realism on Japanese theatre of his time. The technique was articulated by Suzuki based on his work with his company, developed over many years. Through the struggle to keep the body centered, grounded, and open within strict forms that force a state of strained imbalance, the actor learns to be psychophysically engaged with both structured and emerging

¹⁴⁴ I should mention that the majority of writings about the Viewpoints technique, including the sources I mention above and a number of dissertations (Cormier; Kilgard; Olsberg; Saari; Rodda), ties it with the work of Bogart and the SITI Company. The most recent publications, Cummings’ book which was published in 2006, concern work completed before 2003. Cormier’s dissertation includes his participation in a workshop in 2004. In addition to these publications, several interviews with Bogart, members of the SITI Company as well as other Viewpoints practitioners were published along the years (e.g. Coen; Potter 243-251).

¹⁴⁵ The difference is in more than the number of Viewpoints used. It is also a difference in definition and in gearing the Viewpoints to dancers (Overlie) rather than actors (Bogart).

¹⁴⁶ See Carruthers and Takahshi 91-94.

elements of performing. Ellen Lauren, co-artistic director of SITI Company and acknowledged by Suzuki himself as “best teacher of his approach,”¹⁴⁷ claims that “the real significance of Suzuki training lies in creating a vivid presence in stillness, and a sharpening of concentration to the present moment on stage.”¹⁴⁸ While a lot has been written about Suzuki’s staged work, the number of publications about the Suzuki technique in English is relatively small, even though its growth represents the influence it gained in North America along the years.

The first English publication concerning the technique was an article by James Brandon from 1978. Other early publications include William O. Beeman’s article and interview with Suzuki from 1982 and Suzuki’s article “Culture is the Body” from 1984, all published in *Performing Arts Journal*.¹⁴⁹ The 90s was the period in which Suzuki’s presence in the USA culminated in the co-founding of the SITI Company alongside Anne Bogart. The number of articles in English reflects his influence, including Lampe’s various publications as well as Paul Allain’s article in *TDR*, which later became the main chapter of *The Art of Stillness: The Theatre Practice of Tadashi Suzuki*, the first book in English about Tadashi Suzuki.¹⁵⁰ Carruthers and Takahashi’s book *The Theatre of Suzuki Tadashi* is the most complete source about the Suzuki technique and its development. The long chapter that focuses on the technique provides a descriptive account of the exercises, the philosophy and theory behind the technique. It also follows a comparative

¹⁴⁷ Allain, “Suzuki” 68.

¹⁴⁸ Lauren 63.

¹⁴⁹ See also Goto.

¹⁵⁰ The chapter concerning the Suzuki training is largely based on the earlier article. Allain’s recent publication of *The Theatre Practice of Tadashi Suzuki: A Critical Study with DVD Examples* is, in fact a new edition of *The Art of Stillness* with an added DVD.

summary of previous descriptions of this technique pointing to its constant development.¹⁵¹

Jacques Lecoq developed his technique under various influences.¹⁵² Originally trained as a physical education teacher and physiotherapist during the Nazi occupation of France, his interest in theatre became fully immersive after the Liberation and the consequent cultural freedom that followed. His participation in large, orchestrated, street performance/demonstrations celebrating the returning prisoners of war and his concurrent meeting with the likes of Jean Dasté and Jean-Louis Barrault, former students of Copeau, were defining influences on him. His consequent departure to Italy, which experienced a post-war cultural recovery of its own, contributed yet another layer to his approach. Culturally and historically attuned, Lecoq's approach kept evolving even after his school opened, by responding to changes in the world around him. A clear example of that occurred during the 1968 student uprising, which resulted in the inclusion of the *Auto-Cours* – self created students' work.

Today originating from the Jacques Lecoq Theatre School in Paris, the Lecoq technique is based on movement analysis and traditional forms of European theatre – commedia dell'arte, melodrama, tragedy, bouffon and clown.¹⁵³ In this elaborate technique the actors learn to negotiate between pre-established forms and a state of improvisatory play. Lecoq's book *The Moving Body* outlines main parts of his school's two-year program's pedagogical structure at the time of writing. *Theatre of Movement*

¹⁵¹ The rest of the book is an in-depth historical account of Suzuki's theatrical work.

¹⁵² He delineates the development of his approach in various part of *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*.

¹⁵³ Lecoq, *Moving* 15.

and Gesture compiles essays from various epochs in the development of his approach. The two books provide various perspectives on core elements in Lecoq's pedagogy and are written for readers familiar with his work. Murray's *Jacques Lecoq* is a basic introduction to Lecoq's life and work written for beginning students. Eldredge and Huston's chapter "Actor Training in the Neutral Mask"¹⁵⁴ is one of the first and only attempts at in depth analysis of a single aspect of this elaborate approach. In *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre*, Franc Chamberlain and Ralph Yarrow assembled essays by and about various British Lecoq practitioners. Though concise and geo-culturally focused, it is currently the only book-length secondary source about the praxis of the Lecoq technique, including essays about contemporary uses of Lecoq's approach outside of his school.¹⁵⁵ Giovanni Fusetti's interview in the edited book *The Paris Jigsaw: Internationalism and the City's Stages* adds his perspective as an internationally known Lecoq teacher. Jon Sherman's recent article and his yet unpublished dissertation mark a more recent perspective on Lecoq's work. Laura Purcell Gates' dissertation (and related article) is another recent source, giving an account of two workshops with Philippe Gaulier: a Neutral Mask¹⁵⁶ workshop and a clown workshop. The relatively short list of

¹⁵⁴ In Zarrilli, *Acting* 140-7.

¹⁵⁵ The influence of Lecoq practitioners on British theatre has grown over the past three decades through the work of teachers and performers such as Philippe Gaulier, Theatre de Complicité, and Thomas Prattki among others.

¹⁵⁶ Because of the problematic use of the adjective 'neutral', particularly when used in the context of actor-training, I choose to capitalize the Neutral Mask and regard it as the name given to this type of mask rather than the description of the mask as being objectively neutral. I discuss the idea of neutrality in Lecoq training in chapter 3.

sources I provide here does not reflect the immense influence of Lecoq's pedagogy on theatre praxis all over the world.¹⁵⁷

Observing similar principles in these three different techniques locates my research in the context of three different aesthetic, political, and philosophical systems all practiced in Anglophone North American theatre. However, Suzuki's assertion that "Culture is the Body"¹⁵⁸ helps to reveal these seemingly disparate elements within actual moments of psychophysical practice: the embodiment of aesthetics, ideologies, and cultural practices. They are embodied through the meeting of the set forms and structures of each technique and the individual bodies of the actors. The emergence of presentness in each technique relies on a particular relationship between the set forms, on the one hand, and free improvisation, on the other hand.

Practitioners of the Viewpoints, Suzuki and Lecoq techniques attempt to strike such balance by constantly oscillating the focus of their work between spontaneity and form, although they each approach it in emphatically different ways. While the Suzuki technique is based on a set of highly codified and rigid forms, postures, and movement sequences, the Viewpoints technique is highly improvisatory, developing the actor's awareness and response to emerging elements in time and space. These two techniques approach presentness from two extremely different stances that might be positioned on the two far ends of the continuum between rigid form and free improvisation (two

¹⁵⁷ In addition to these sources there are a number of articles about companies like Mummenschantz and Complicité, to name just two examples, whose actors are all Lecoq trained.

¹⁵⁸ In Zarrilli, *Acting* 163.

opposites that are never entirely free of their Other). The Lecoq technique can be positioned in between, balancing between improvisation and form.¹⁵⁹

The Suzuki technique is based on an extremely precise form to the extent that, in the SITI Intensive Workshop in Chicago, Leon Ingulsrud stressed the impossibility of successfully performing the form with all of its detail: “You will fail! [...] This technique is based on failure.”¹⁶⁰ As I argue in chapter 5, the kind of failure in practice Ingulsrud mentions is one of the principal ways for training in presentness.¹⁶¹ In the Suzuki technique, *pursuing* exact execution of form (while keeping attention on a fictional partner), rather than achieving it, is the vehicle for discovery and development of presentness. This is evident in Suzuki’s claim that “it’s not whether the outer form is right or wrong. [But does] the outer form express the emotion or feeling? And does it do so fully, with power?”¹⁶² Allain claims that “if the state of mind fostered by the training is paramount, the form is paradoxically almost irrelevant, yet it is only through the form that you can affect and change mental states.”¹⁶³ While technically the form of each exercise or its choreography can be learned quite quickly, the rigor of the Suzuki technique, through which presentness can be developed, lies in constantly “pushing the envelope” beyond the individual ability for perfectly executing the form. As Cummings notes, the technique can be viewed as “a series of diagnostic tests that help the actor, on any given day and over time, to assess the mind-body connection, the command and

¹⁵⁹ In some ways, the continuum between set form and free improvisation echoes Michael Kirby’s continuum of acting and non-acting. His article was written well before the surge of performance studies. Kirby’s argument follows different styles of acting, conflating technique and performance.

¹⁶⁰ For a more detailed account of my various sites of research see Chapter 2.

¹⁶¹ Some of my main sources on failure include Bales, Ridout, and Le Feuvre.

¹⁶² Carruthers and Takuhashi 72.

¹⁶³ Allain 125.

control of energy, and the integrity of his focus on his fellow actors, the stage environment, and his so called ‘fiction’.”¹⁶⁴ In the Suzuki technique, the moment an actor feels at ease and forgets to pay attention to her body/self within a form is the moment she stops working. The forms are designed to be challenging. However, by performing the exercises faster or slower, stronger or softer, lower or higher than the individual place of comfort or habit, the actors risk failure, keep themselves on alert and continue developing their psychophysical engagement through the form.

While the Suzuki technique develops presentness by pushing the body into a rigid form and a state of imbalance, the Viewpoints philosophy attempts to do the exact opposite. As opposed to promoting a set form, the Viewpoints technique is focused on improvisation in which perception of emerging elements of time and space sparks spontaneous psychophysical responses of any kind. In Viewpoints the form of the body and the elements that participate in affecting it are anything but set. Bogart and Landau claim that “it is no longer for you [the actor in training] to choose what is right or wrong, good or bad—but to *use everything*.”¹⁶⁵ This inclusiveness means that there is no prescriptive structure of movement to follow, no hierarchy or judgment of the emerging forms. Even the Viewpoints themselves, the elements of time and space on which the actors focus their awareness, are open-ended in the way they affect the actor’s body as always structured in relation to its environment. Structure emerges in Viewpoints training through improvisation, and is usually found, discovered or agreed upon in the moment.

¹⁶⁴ Cummings 118.

¹⁶⁵ Bogart and Landau 42.

In Suzuki technique when first learning the forms the main focus of attention inevitably goes to the actor's own body and only once the form is learned can the actor's attention be directed outwardly. In Viewpoints the *initial* aim is to direct attention outwards to the extent of risking in forgetting one's own body. This is done for the sake of getting rid of some people's tendency for overly introverted self-awareness.¹⁶⁶ However, in both techniques the practitioners eventually are brought full circle to embody what Bogart and Landau call "Feedforward and Feedback."¹⁶⁷ In this sense, working with both the Viewpoints and Suzuki restructures the traditional divide between acting 'from the inside out' and 'from the outside in'.¹⁶⁸ Rather than creating a linear direction from/to, both techniques create a circular reciprocity. The Suzuki practitioner must overcome the strong attention given to the form of her body in order to perceive and respond to both inside and outside stimuli. For the same reason the Viewpoints practitioner must overcome the tendency to focus her attention solely on everything that unfolds around her. Hence, although both techniques pursue heightened presentness—psychophysical awareness that enables responsiveness and readiness—they approach it from somewhat opposing angles and develop different ways of using it. Presentness in the Viewpoints is used for the discovery of form in the broad sense of the word. In Viewpoints improvisations emergent forms become containers for communication and meaning.

¹⁶⁶ See for example Bogart and Landau.

¹⁶⁷ Bogart and Landau 34.

¹⁶⁸ See also Cummings 125.

Ofer: There was a moment when the L-Train passed by the window.¹⁶⁹

Laura Beth: The threesome, yes.

Ofer: The threesome. There were three of you working: Carolina and Hannah and you [referring to Cathy]. You were doing an open Viewpoints improvisation.

Cathy: And what was the moment?

Ofer: The train was passing and everyone started hearing the train and then the three of you responded, but very differently: you were moving [downstage] on all fours along the wall, Carolina was...

Laura Beth: she was waving...

Ofer: Right, Carolina was waving and Hannah was moving upstage.

Cathy: you see, that's my thing! I was a part of that but I didn't know exactly what was happening. How can I learn from that? It escaped me completely.

Ofer: But you were in that moment. Each one of the three of you was there in that moment even without knowing it. I don't know, for example, if Carolina even saw you; I don't know if she knew what you were doing, but you were so connected, you and her. It was as if you were the train and she was waving to you although she was looking the other way. To me there's someone on the train [pointing to Cathy] lying on the floor, she's waving [Carolina]. And then Hannah was doing—I don't remember exactly what—but she was also a part of the same motion, as if the view from the window was passing by. I was creating this very mundane image from an abstract one. It was kind of fluctuating between the world of those movements that you were doing and some real

¹⁶⁹ This dialogue was recorded during the SITI Viewpoints and Suzuki intensive workshop in Link's Hall, Chicago where the L-Train red line passes very close to the studio window.

*image or narrative. So that was a great moment of: Yeah! Really satisfying. The room was there [gesturing a radiating ball of energy with hands and sound].*¹⁷⁰

The Lecoq technique is much more varied and elaborate than both Suzuki and Viewpoints. The entire training includes the exploration of a variety of movement dynamics, masks, and styles.¹⁷¹ By embodying various forms and playing with/in them, the actor develops acute sensibility to a variety of relationships with space and thus to different ways of being spatially present. Although it relies heavily on form, it is also based on play (*jeu*) as perhaps the most sought after element in acting. The use of masks with which Lecoq is highly identified goes beyond the technical study of a corporeal form that gives life to an inanimate object that covers the face. Fusetti, former teacher at the Lecoq School in Paris and founder and current director of Hèlikos School of Theatre Creation, claims that a mask is “a structure of movement. In theatre everything is a mask. A character is a mask, a costume is a mask [...] even scenography is a mask – a mask of space. A mask is something that reveals a body that is other than the body of the performer. It is an architecture, a shape, and I would say it’s an energy field.”¹⁷² Through improvisation with masks, which are initially rigid structures, actors need to constantly balance between form and spontaneity.

¹⁷⁰ This conversation took place immediately following the Viewpoints session described as part of a SITI Company intensive workshop held at Link’s Hall in Chicago in August 2009.

¹⁷¹ Mimodynamic technique trains the actor to transpose into movement the specific impressions and sensations of colors, sounds, and music as well as elements of nature, materials, and objects (Lecoq *Moving*). It is a method for embodying what Lecoq names *the universal poetic sense of things* and expressing it through the body. According to this concept, humanity “share[s] the sense of an abstract dimension” (*Moving* 166).

¹⁷² In Fusetti and Willson 96.

It should be clear, then, that the use of theatrical styles in Lecoq training, or *dramatic territories* as he calls them, is not meant for their performance as such but rather as an exploration of the particular spatiotemporal dynamics that come to life in each territory.¹⁷³ In this sense, it is similar to the Suzuki technique which uses specific physical forms (“masks” in the Lecoq lingo) to challenge the actor to engage psychophysically in the act of performance. For example, the use of the Neutral Mask is an attempt to throw the subjective body into a rigid “objective” form in order to reveal the individual body’s tendencies and habits. At the same time, the attempt at a “neutrality” of the actor’s perception and responses, as well as the improvisatory nature of Lecoq’s training, echoes the non-judgmental, non-hierarchical stance of the Viewpoints. The similarity with the Viewpoints appears in the description of the neutral state as opening up the actor “to the space around him. It puts him in a state of discovery, of openness, of freedom to receive. It allows him to watch, to hear, to feel, to touch elementary things with the freshness of beginnings.”¹⁷⁴

It is the end of the Intensive Mask Workshop and we are presenting some of the masks to an invited audience of family and friends. Apart from necessary explanations before each exercise, this is a direct continuation of the workshop. I am about to start an improvisation with one of the primitive masks I haven’t worked with before.¹⁷⁵ The mask covers the face from the upper lip and up over the head but leaves the lower lip, chin and

¹⁷³ See Bradby’s “The Legacy of Jacques Lecoq” in Bradby and Delgado 86, 91.

¹⁷⁴ *Moving* 37.

¹⁷⁵ I explain more about the primitive masks in chapter 2.

jaw exposed. The actor in this mask can make sounds and perhaps utter a word or two but not more; it is primitive, after all. It has its own eyes and only tiny peep holes for me to see, around where its nostrils are. I look at the mask before putting it on and try to let its lines and shapes affect my body. I move with it for a few seconds to let my body experience a spatial communication with the mask, as does Diane who holds another mask and will be my partner in this improvisation. The situation we agreed on is a waiting room at the doctor's office. I put the mask on and wait behind a curtain upstage for Diane to start the improvisation. I can barely see through the tiny holes but I hear and sense the audience's responses to Diane. I take the shape of the mask and enter. I don't do anything except walk downstage in the mask. I can vaguely see Diane's back and some of the spectators. My first two steps reveal to me that my mask is very slow and its movement tentative. Each footstep in this mask is a struggle, and in each step the audience's response reaffirms the dynamic relationship of my body to the mask and through it to Diane and the space between us. From this state I try to do as little as possible and let the mask simply be there as it enters the space where the other mask, Diane's, is. I try to "surf" the moment, as Paola calls it. Not to push the mask's embodiment too far and not to let it recede. It takes constant adjustments with each step. I no longer see Diane and I doubt she sees me, yet we somehow communicate and create a relationship, or so I gather from the audience's laughter. Our communication flows through them. My mask stops walking and looks at where I assume Diane is sitting; I

*can't see her. The audience responds. I stay there, being the mask, doing nothing. The scene goes on for a minute more until Paola calls "end."*¹⁷⁶

Exploring presentness in the practice of the Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq techniques allows me to detect its emergence as part of different relationships between form and spontaneity. Like to Stanislavsky's *experiencing*, presentness also corresponds to Vsevolod Meyerhold's notion of *pre-acting*¹⁷⁷ and Eugenio Barba's *Sats*¹⁷⁸ as well as his notion of *pre-expressivity*.¹⁷⁹ However, in spite of the repeated appearance of the prefix *pre*, presentness does not precede form. That is, it does not reside temporally or ontologically prior to action or expression. Rather, it emerges and filters through the expressive form, through the outer representation of what becomes action/behavior/gesture. If the form of the body, movement and voice, a certain expression of the body through space and time, is what creates meaning and signification, then presentness exists through, within and around them. Within a single lived moment of practice, presentness and form, whether predetermined or emerging form, are intertwined and inseparable. As the case of the Viewpoints technique reveals, the form is not

¹⁷⁶ Paola Coletto is a Lecoq teacher with whom I did this workshop. See also chapter 2.

¹⁷⁷ Meyerhold 205-6.

¹⁷⁸ Barba 40; see also Bogart and Landau 73.

¹⁷⁹ Sats and the pre-expressive are two separate ideas and both relate to presentness though in different ways. "Sats can be translated with the words 'impulse' or 'preparation', 'to be ready to...'" (Barba 40). It is, then, a preparatory instant preceding any action. The pre-expressive, however, is a broader term that refers to the state required for the investigation processes of training or creating.

necessarily a given rigid structure of the body's movement, a predetermined aesthetics or "a way of acting."¹⁸⁰ Rather, it is a container for psychophysical attention and response.

Heightened presentness requires the practitioner to develop heightened awareness and responsiveness to the unfolding of the here and now in the practice. Thus the presentness of each moment of performance, its "here-ness and now-ness", should be highlighted in some way that differentiates it from presentness in the everyday. Lutterbie defines this difference thus:

In acting, ['being in the present moment'] is used as a metaphor to define a quality of being: one that privileges an active engagement with others without conscious evaluation of what is taking place, that responds to what happens without premeditation or by recalling what happened previously and that allows the direction of events to shift without comment. These may seem like stringent regulations, but they are no different from how we interact with one another every day. [...] The difference is that in the everyday, these changes happen as a matter of course, while in the theatre, there is a *conscious choice* to be open to changes in the environment. *We are aware that this is what we are going to do.*¹⁸¹

Presentness in performance depends on the actor's ability to make the conscious choice to allow changes to affect the course of what happens and respond to them even within the confines of a tightly set and rehearsed play. It is a learned ability that requires training because, unlike in everyday life, most aspects of experience in performance are premeditated including text, behavior, movement etc.

¹⁸⁰ This phrase is also the title of the only book-length English translation of Suzuki's writings. As Carruthers and Takahashi note, the English language publication includes only parts of the Japanese origin and its title, *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writing of Tadashi Suzuki*, does not reflect the meaning or intention of the Japanese title, literally translated as *Selected Theatre Writing: Energy that Knows no Boundaries* (55).

¹⁸¹ Lutterbie 168, my italics.

* * *

In this chapter I introduced presentness within the various related historical, theoretical, and practical aspects of my research. Using presentness as the focus of analysis and theorization appears within and as an alternative to the prevalent discourse about presence in theatre and performance studies. Arguably, this alternative discourse of presentness, backed by a theoretical methodology based in phenomenology and cognitive studies, enables the demystification and concretization of this charged topic. Moreover, suggesting a brief genealogy of psychophysical acting techniques in the 20th century, this chapter offers a rationale for focusing specifically on Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq. Training processes with these praxes in specific, documented sites serve as the Petri dish, so to speak, upon which I examine the emergence of presentness. The next chapter, then, includes a close investigation of these specific sites of practice-based research. In it I outline the complexities that my practice-based research entailed including the intricacies of my positionality within the various sites and the rest of the participants.

Chapter 2

Various Positions: Locating Practices

Writing about presentness calls for a particular strategy because mere description of what is seen and heard often misses the mark. When writing about presentness we can only attempt to hit the mark, the bull's-eye in the center of the target, by focusing on the concentric circles around it. Thus, in order to write about presentness we must first write around it, describe the contexts of its appearance, the conditions that lead to its emergence and the ways practitioners prepare for and process this experience. In this chapter I delineate some of the outer circles, providing specific contextual framework for the rest of this dissertation. These contexts are paramount for my attempt to reveal what Susan Kozel claims is the porous “membrane between the linear logic of written language and the spatio-kinaesthetic logic of the body [in order to find] intertwined and overlapped physical and discursive spaces.”¹

This chapter focuses on the sites of training with the Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq techniques in which I conducted my practice-based research. In addition, I engage with methodologies and epistemologies that are pertinent to current research in theatre and performance studies in order to clarify the ways my experience, knowledge, and

¹ Kozel 158.

understanding of the praxes participate in (trans/re)forming my theoretical perspective. Both my methodologies in the sites and my methods of expression, i.e. my ways of writing, take part in constructing the types of knowledge and experiences I bring forth and develop. The significance of this chapter, then, is not only in framing the following chapters, but in relating the research that I pursue in those chapters to broader questions concerning issues of knowledge, power, ethics and more. I discuss these topics mostly in this chapter, and may only briefly return to them in the rest of the chapters.

In an article published in *TDR* Dwight Conquergood claims:

The dominant way of knowing in the academy is that of empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective: ‘knowing that,’ and ‘knowing about.’ This is a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print. This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: ‘knowing how,’ and ‘knowing who.’ This is a view from ground level, in the thick of things.²

In an attempt to flesh out my engagement in the latter type of knowledge I tell parts of the stories of myself in each of the sites, contextualizing the “how” and the “who” and lay down the foundations, set the “ground level” for my entire research. I expound the ways in which the subjects and objects of this research as well as my ways of writing about them are entangled in the intimacy of my personal engagement in each site, with the people in them and with the different praxes.³

² 146.

³ In *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement: The Last Human Venue*, Alan Read explores the intimate relations between humans and non humans, society and nature as they appear in performance. Although I use similar terminology, my project does not resemble Read’s.

In my discussion I take the position that not only can actor-training be examined as performance, but that it is a performance in itself. The conditions of training are similar to those of performance, particularly in the centrality of the act of spectating. However, the reshuffling and (re)inscription of roles and representational hierarchies that emerge in training processes are often more complex than those that emerge in a context that is 'a performance' by definition. In plain sight, the instructor performs the role of instructor to her audience, the students, using specific texts and embodied techniques to stir them in the desired directions. However, the level of participation on the part of the students/audience threatens to reverse this equation and make an audience out of the performer/instructor. The students perform to the teacher, representing their apprehension and in-corporation of the teacher's performance. This constant oscillation in the location of the representational activity opens a possibility for radical shifts in the location of knowledge and power. This potential and its fulfillment depend on the instructor, the praxis being taught, and the students. In both the SITI Company workshops and Lecoq training (including in Lecoq's school in Paris) there is tension between the authority of the 'master teachers' and attempts at complicating the power/knowledge structure that implicates the participants. By declared empowerment of the students as well as latent processes that are imbedded in the techniques being used, these traditional structures of authority and power are being challenged.

My research sites, all located in Chicago, can be roughly divided into three main parts: (1) the Training Group; (2) the SITI Company workshops; and (3) several workshops in Lecoq techniques with Paola Coletto. In each site I observe and participate

in processes of training with one or two of these techniques. This exploration builds on my previous practical experience, which includes over twelve years of training and creating with Lecoq-based techniques and over a decade of ongoing practice with the Viewpoints and Suzuki techniques.⁴

Locating my multi-sited research in Chicago, famously American Theatre’s “Second City,” proved advantageous for this research. It allowed me many opportunities to train with master teachers and to collaborate with experienced practitioners of Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq. Moreover, the large theatre community in Chicago is not overshadowed by commercial theatre and is thus accessible and allows room for exploration and experimentation. Most significantly, Chicago is home to a number of well known “physical theatre” companies and training programs whose practice is heavily influenced by one or more of the three techniques I consider.⁵ However large and established, I found the size of the Chicago theatre community, especially the artists involved in independent, non-mainstream theatre, to be manageable and inclusive. This helped me to insert myself into it relatively quickly. Thus, less than two months after arriving in Chicago I was able to establish the Training Group, composed of actors all previously trained in both Suzuki and Viewpoints, mostly with the SITI Company. This group has served as one of my main exploration grounds for close to three years, and its participants were happy to collaborate in the process. I found this type of openness to

⁴ Since 1996 I have trained in Israel, Europe, Argentina and the USA with several teachers and graduates of the Lecoq School in Paris, including Zvika Fishzon, Noam Meiri, Giovanni Fuzetti, and Thomas Prattki, to name a few. My experience with the Viewpoints and Suzuki techniques (starting 2002) includes training with Wendell Beavers and the SITI Company among others. In addition to training, I directed, acted, taught and led processes of exploration with the use of these techniques. In addition, I have collaborated for over a decade with numerous practitioners experienced in one or more of these techniques.

⁵ For a discussion of the problematic term “physical theatre” see chapter 1.

exploration and experimentation to be characteristic of many Chicago theatre artists. Further, as in the case of the SITI Company, many artists and teachers come to Chicago from around the world to perform and teach. Taking the Suzuki/Viewpoints SITI workshops in Chicago, on two occasions, as opposed to New York City or Saratoga Springs allowed me to train under these master teachers while still within the Chicago theatre community.⁶

It is the first day of a two week intensive Suzuki and Viewpoints workshop with the SITI Company at Links Hall in Chicago. I arrive early. As I approach the entrance on Sheffield Avenue I see two young women who seem to be looking for the place. "Are you here for the workshop?" I ask. "Yes," they reply. I show them the way and we wait on the sidewalk for the door to open. In the conversation that follows I learn that Laura Beth is studying in a theatre program near Cleveland and Eliza recently graduated with a BFA from a school in upstate NY. They both have had previous experience with Suzuki and Viewpoints. I briefly explain that I am a graduate student doing research on the two techniques and that I trained with the SITI Company before. They both seem interested in the fact that I'm conducting practice-based research but they don't ask me about it. The conversation continues; we talk about Chicago and where everyone is staying. As other people arrive and the doors open the conversation fades. We all enter the building, change to movement clothes and begin to warm up. I always find first days in workshops exciting: the promise of new discoveries and new encounters. This time, though, there's

⁶ Although the participants in this workshop came from a diversity of places there was a large number of local artists, including some who were part of my other research sites. I further develop this point in my discussion of this site below.

also the expectation of meeting two teachers with whom I've worked in the past and whose approach I appreciate.

At 9:00AM Leon Ingsrud and Barney O'Hanlon, the two instructors from the SITI Company, ask us to sit in a circle on the studio floor. We begin the usual opening ritual. Leon asks us to each present ourselves one after the other in the circle: our names, how we define ourselves professionally, and our relation to the practice. I'm glad I'm not among the first to talk. The first person, a woman in her early 20s, says her name and then proclaims confidently: "I'm an actor." She recently graduated from a well-known acting program in Chicago, she tells us, where she learned about the Viewpoints through random exercises with several teachers. Other people around the circle present themselves; many easily say "I'm an actor," while others try to be more specific using terms like "physical actor," "actor-creator," "actor and director," "mover," "dancer," and "performer." A woman in her late thirties says: "I'm..." she stops to think for a minute then continues resolutely, "I guess I can say that I'm a teacher."

My turn gets closer and I become more and more uneasy, unsure. Although I am originally trained as an actor and have been acting and developing my craft continuously for over 15 years, I have also directed, facilitated and participated in devising processes, written plays, created performance pieces, and taught various approaches to acting both in a professional acting school and in a liberal arts theatre program. To top it off, this workshop is a site of research for my dissertation project. Which one of these do I present? How do I define myself at this particular place and time? What is my primary position, the leading role among all the possible roles I can play as a participant in this

workshop? Should I just say that I'm a graduate student? And how would what I say be interpreted by this group of people, with their varied experiences and origins? (In addition to me, the group includes quite a few other people who are not American: from Australia, Brazil, UK, and Sweden.) I am acutely aware that what I say will affect how I am initially perceived and this, in turn, might affect the dynamics in the practice as well as the cooperation I hope to receive. Mentioning my research at this point might create a charged power relationship with both the other participants and the instructors; I am not sure that this is the thing I want to stress right now. But I know that I will have to mention it early on. In addition, when presenting my relationship to the practice, I should probably include the most relevant details from my professional history with Viewpoints and Suzuki. How much of my long and diverse practical and theoretical engagement with these techniques should I bring up in this context? What do I include and what do I omit? As these thoughts rush through my head, it is now my turn to speak: "hi, my name is Ofer Ravid and eh... I'm originally from Israel..."

Presenting a brief professional I.D. at the beginning of a workshop seems to be common practice. Indeed, a similar procedure has taken place at almost any other workshop I have ever attended. The questions that raced through my head (and, possibly others') as I struggled to find the appropriate self-definition, the right way to present myself to the instructors and the rest of the participants, are acutely relevant for most practice-based research of training processes. The significance of these initial definitions goes beyond the presentation of an individual's professional identity. Positioning the self,

both my self and those of the other participants in my sites of research, in relationship to others and/in the practice is crucial for understanding each site of praxis as a set of emerging intersubjective processes. It is only in the intersubjective space, in the specific encounter with other practitioners within a particular space and time, that my positionality and role emerge.⁷ Therefore, in order to discuss the site I also need to discuss the ways in which my positions, roles and relationships with the praxes and the other practitioners develop in each site. My positionality and those of the other participants are initially expressed through the “practiced roles” we play in each site – i.e. student, actor, teacher or observer. Committing to the practice often entails committing to the specific (temporary) role each participant plays in each specific site. These roles incorporate predetermined personal and professional histories, experiences and knowledge, expectations, assumptions, hopes, and biases that underlie my participation. Even these roles, however, are relational and unstable, and are revealed within the intersubjective space of practice.

These broad professional definitions (actor, teacher, etc.) fail to fully capture the complexity of live encounters within the different sites. The socio-cultural origins of practitioners, for example, may be as relevant to the understanding of their experience of the practice as their “practiced role” or professional self-definition. As anthropologist Jennifer Robertson warns, “[n]ot only can positionality become a form of self-stereotyping, it can also effectively stereotype others.”⁸ One might assume, for example,

⁷ Both Amelia Jones, in her analysis of Body Art, and Alice Rayner, in her discussion of stage objects, demonstrate this point with regards to performance.

⁸ Robertson 789.

that a group of North American actors with similar professional backgrounds who take a workshop would seek to learn similar things and understand things in similar ways. However, even simply saying “I’m an actor” may mean different things to different people. This common and simplistic self-definition always comes with a specific subtext, such as: I’m [just] an actor; I’m [proud of being] an actor; I’m an actor [in spite of everything]; I’m an actor [among other things]; I’m an [aspiring] actor. Added to these subtexts are various individual outlooks on acting or on being an actor such as: an art, a profession, a status within/outside institutional theatre, a utopian ideal and more.

Nevertheless, even recognizing these subtexts and perspectives is not sufficient, as they are always laden with distinct personal histories. My encounter with Jeremy Sher is a good example. I met Jeremy in the preliminary meeting of the Training Group, when several of the people interested in training met for the first time to discuss our goals and ways of working. There were about ten of us, sitting at the back of a bar/restaurant in a cool Chicago fall afternoon. We started with presenting ourselves. I shared a couch with two other people and Jeremy sat on a chair across the table from me. His first sentence after presenting his name was a nonchalant utterance: “I’m an actor in town.” He later told us of his long experience of working with the Suzuki and Viewpoints techniques, but the first impression was created by the short clear sentence with which he began. I later heard him use this phrase on several other occasions. His tone was assertive but humble, as if knowing that he does not need to say any more than that because it encapsulates the extent of his accomplishments. After getting to know him I found out he is an award winning actor who works regularly with several established, though “alternative,” theatre

companies in Chicago including Redmoon Theatre, Collaboraction, The Neo-Futurists, Next Theatre, and others.⁹

My main methodology in the various sites of research is participant observation accompanied by personal narrative interviews and informal group conversations, all of which documented with the participants' prior consent. Using participant observation as my main field methodology positions my research within wider debates about qualitative research in the humanities and social sciences, as discussed by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln.¹⁰ In *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, D. Soyini Madison steers these debates toward the particularities of research in theatre and performance studies, proposing a methodological outline for critical field research while surveying various prevalent approaches in our discipline. As I have already begun to show, my research entails acknowledging my position as an "embodied researcher, who bears social, historical, socialized, and biographical characteristics and who interacts with and intervenes in his or her research object (participants, research field)."¹¹ My involvement within each site, with the practice and other participants, is explored throughout this chapter examining notions of positionality and reflexivity.¹²

⁹ The histories and work of each of these companies form a particular context that this chapter cannot fully unfold; each occupies a distinct rubric within the Chicago non-commercial Theatre scene. The Redmoon Theatre, for example, is currently established in terms of its reputation, financial stability, working space and educational outreach. Its performances are often seen as events of highly visual style, including the use of puppets, masks, machinery and various other stage paraphernalia. The Neo-Futurists (known for featuring the longest running play on Chicago stages, their signature play *Too Much Light Makes The Baby Go Blind*) focus on devised work directed by Greg Allen, with a distinct over-naturalistic aesthetics.

¹⁰ Beyond Denzin and Lincoln's introduction, the various chapters in this volume further examine this and other issues in qualitative research, creating a complex and diverse outlook. See also Hume and Mulcock.

¹¹ Breuer and Roth.

¹² See also my discussion of Conquergood; Robertson; Jacobs-Huey; Mckinley Bradboy and Deyhle.

Through this combination of methods I develop a phenomenological narrative of my experience of participating and of observing other participants. While the interviews and conversations that I conducted afford varied points of view on the practices from a third person perspective, the first person knowledge I bring forth as a participant-observer is of paramount importance. My observation relies on being a participant myself and requires my immersion in the practice, echoing the ways of knowing Conquergood advocates.¹³ As Pierre Bourdieu posits,

The ‘knowing subject’, as the idealist tradition rightly calls him [sic], inflicts on practice a much more fundamental and pernicious alteration which, being a constituent condition of the cognitive operation, is bound to pass unnoticed: in taking up a point of view on the action, withdrawing from it in order to observe it from above and from a distance, he constitutes practical activity as an object of observation and analysis, a representation.¹⁴

Getting access to the kind of knowledge that goes beyond representation, i.e. knowledge *of* the practice rather than knowledge *about* the practice, requires my participation as practitioner. It requires the method of inquiry to go beyond observation and into the experiential. Invoking the equation participant-observation, then, becomes problematic insofar as the word observation connotes sight-oriented gathering of information. Observation becomes, for me, the process of articulating or putting in words that which I have just experienced.

It should be clear that whatever practiced-roles or positionalities emerge in any specific site of research, they are emphatically different from my role and positionality

¹³ See quote above.

¹⁴ Bourdieu 2.

when writing. The gap between live experience, its documentation and its analysis is inevitable. As Matthew Reason notes, “in the choices of *what* to record, in the manner of *how* to record and indeed in what *can* be recorded, the act of representation defines its subject.”¹⁵ Even notes taken immediately after a practice session are based on memories and psychophysical residues of the recent lived experience. These are immediately filtered through the role I choose/remember/forget to occupy, by the circumstances surrounding me. At the same time the circumstances and my position in them are influenced by the recent lived experience I try to capture in words. Later, when reading my notes, I might be able to detect which role I privileged at the moment of documentation. Moreover, my attempts at theorizing aspects of presentness throughout this dissertation requires the use of various discourses, documentations, and representations in order to expose traces of presentness that has passed—(re)trace their presence—while acknowledging there is always something lost in the process.

Partly contradictory, partly mirroring, each of these discourses of documentation and disappearance drives and motivates the other. They are mutually entangled, mutually dependent, with ideas of disappearance depending on the continued existence of some manner of trace or presence and acts of documentation always involving some degree of fragmentation and absence.¹⁶

Interestingly, the notes that I took from the practitioner’s role often seem more removed from the freshness of experience than those taken strictly for the sake of my research. As a practitioner I was interested in some kind of causal rendition of the

¹⁵ Reason 4.

¹⁶ Reason 231.

practice, a translation of the experience into a practical, technical explanation.

Conversely, when documenting as a researcher interested in the phenomenology of practice my notes seem rawer, delineating perceptions, sensations and reflections. In both cases, reading my notes came with a sense of lack, a feeling that there is something missing, or not exactly correct. I had to restrain myself from correcting, changing or writing them all over again.

October 1st 2008. Today was the very first training session of the Training Group. It took us more than a month to finally find a space and a time that would be convenient for more than two people. There are five of us here today: me, Megan, James, Valerie and Kate. I'm disappointed that so many of the people who had shown up to the preliminary meeting we had at the bar to discuss this group and its objectives did not come today. I let Megan lead the Suzuki session. I think it's good that I'm sharing the leadership right from the start.

Trying to get back into the body, to remember the moves and physical responses, the places where it hurts or feels comfortable. It's going to take time till we can actually be creative within this form. We are now searching and probing, rebuilding the vocabulary and each one of us is finding his/her own body in it... I am feeling fit at the beginning, as if this is an easy routine for me. This surprises me, I expected to struggle. I realize that I am not challenged in these circumstances, or maybe I don't feel the need to challenge myself, since I'm not being watched by a 'master teacher.' I shouldn't let my

guard down, and I should find a way to be pushed further. I should also find a way, when I lead, to be as challenging as the SITI people, especially in Suzuki.

I lead the second part of the session, the Viewpoints part. It starts with a lot of caution and testing. The Sun Salutation exercise was not free and the group could not find unity together with freedom.¹⁷ I should let this be, and give it much more time, especially at such an early stage of the process. I'm glad I didn't give notes on that to the others. And it was hard for me to both lead and take part in the exercise. Maybe I shouldn't participate when I lead? The Flow exercise:¹⁸ I think we went through a good and steady process of learning each other's responses. I should be watching more from the outside, at least at the beginning of the session; I need to find the balance between watching and participating. Nothing exceptionally exciting happened in the training today except for the training itself.

Being a theatre artist, teacher and researcher may easily result in professional schizophrenia. Both in training and in creating, each position or role comes with distinct goals, demands a different focus and a different stance toward the praxes. The schism might become even greater when conducting multi-sited research that includes such various practiced roles as student, actor in training, and teacher.¹⁹ While my practiced

¹⁷ As part of the early exercises in Viewpoints the sequence of movements that is based on the Sun Salutation from yoga is practiced in unison, slowly at first and then in an increasing pace. This exercise is meant to train in group listening while moving. (see Bogart and Landau 23)

¹⁸ See Bogart and Landau 66.

¹⁹ The distinction I make between being a student and being an actor in training is in the purpose of the process and the relationship of the practitioner to the practice. A student is a novice who learns the basic elements of the practice. An actor in training may be positioned in the range between basic competence and expertise and the training process is meant to deepen or maintain the level of competency.

role in each site, which defines my relationship both to the work and to the other participants, is primarily constructed through one of these categories, my position as researcher, which I declared at the beginning of the process in each site, came to the fore only in specific moments before or after sessions of practice. In the work itself, when practicing an exercise, rehearsing a scene, or teaching a technique, I was often compelled to let go of the researcher's position and let another primary position take the lead so as to be immersed in the present of practice. And yet I tried to keep the researcher's awareness alive to a certain extent.

As an actor in training I am required to be immersed in the practice so that I can experience fully each fleeting moment and be affected by it. This is particularly true when trying to go through specific moments of heightened awareness, moments of emerging presentness. On the other hand, as a scholar conducting research of praxis my job is to keep record of the processes that I go through so that I can acknowledge these heightened moments and document them with as thick a description as possible. These two tasks initially seem to contradict one another: how can I be fully immersed in the practice and document it, even take mental notes, at the same time; find a way to be fully engaged, while at the same time being observant and attentive for the sake of documentation? The answer comes from acting theory. Stanislavsky's double consciousness,²⁰ Meyerhold's famous formula of the actor's double roles ($A_1+A_2=N$),²¹ Micahel Chekhov's Divided Consciousness and Higher Ego²² and Grotowski's I-I²³ all

²⁰ See Roach, *Player* 214.

²¹ Meyerhold 198.

²² Chekhov 155-8.

speak of the ability an actor should have to be aware of her performance, observe it, while in its midst. The actor, then, maintains both first person knowledge (of) and third person knowledge (about).

This doubling, which echoes Conquergood's depiction of the two distinct ways of knowing,²⁴ can naturally be traced within the common divide in our field between theory and practice. This divide is reflected in the assumption that researchers are meant to first and foremost think *about* performance, whereas practitioners' are meant to perform, i.e. to be within performance. In her book *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*, Shannon Jackson expounds a genealogy of the development of this rift in theatre and performance studies and shows how it has become one of the discipline's dominant features. She follows "an investigation of the vexed relationship between art-making and art-theorizing"²⁵ in a critique of the stance that theatre-and-performance-scholars, on the one hand, and theatre practitioners, on the other hand, tend to take toward the praxis of the other group. On this same disciplinary conflict, Rhonda Blair claims that "there is something true in many 'practice-centered' and 'theory-centered' perspectives, and there is also something missing, and this missing thing is located in a more thorough investigation of the integration of these perspectives. Or perhaps it is located in the gap—the synapse?—waiting to be leapt between the

²³ Schechner and Wolford 378

²⁴ See p.75.

²⁵ 114.

two.”²⁶ While there have been many attempts to ‘bridge the gap’ between the two sides, I suggest a different approach, one that follows Blair’s leap into the gap.

If we are to examine the spatial metaphor of the gap as that which, to a great extent, determines the ways we conceptualize and understand our reality in the field, then we should consider all the relationships this metaphor affords.²⁷ With two static sides and a gap in between, the act of ‘bridging’ implies a crossing-over from one side to the other while passing over the void, a no-man’s land. Through this metaphor we are, in effect, embracing a dichotomous point of view while disregarding the terrain that exists within the gap itself. But the gap, I argue, more than the bridge, is a place of great creative potential. If indeed theory and practice are bound together then I would rather let go of the metaphor of building a bridge between two rigid positions and metaphorically enter the liminal space within the metaphorical gap, always in-between. In other words, rather than oscillating between the two opposing poles of practice and research over and above ‘the problem’, I locate my work as an ambiguous place on a continuum, never completely on either side. In a sense this was my experience throughout this research. I would like to argue further that though we might not be cognizant of it, on a tacit level we are all always in the mix of practice and theory, never just theorizing and never only engaged in practice, always somewhere in between.²⁸

²⁶ Blair xi.

²⁷ My analysis of this metaphor is tied to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s analysis of embodied metaphors (1980, 1999).

²⁸ Expanding this argument is a matter for another paper.

“hi, my name is Ofer Ravid and eh... I’m originally from Israel... living in Chicago... {thinking what to say next} I’m an actor-creator, recently involved mostly in devising processes, I’m also a graduate student, doing research of practice, specifically on Viewpoints and Suzuki {uh-oh, now I said the ‘R’ word, I should go back to talking about practice, quickly, before they notice and think I’m not a real practitioner}. I took the second level Viewpoints/Suzuki fall training with SITI in New York City about three years ago, in 2006, I think; before that I trained with Wendell Beavers when he was still at NYU and worked with some other people...”

Conducting my research as a participant in the different sites marked my return to practice outside of academia after over a year of dedicating my time to coursework and other scholarly requirements. It signified a kind of return to (or resurrection of) my practitioner-self. However, to a certain extent doing research of practice deprived me of focusing solely on the practice. It implies both an added motive and a different end product beyond the practice as such. This sense of loss might be familiar to many theatre artists who do not constantly work in the theatre. However, it has a particular twist when it comes to what can be defined as (if we temporarily accept the dichotomy) ‘converting from practiciness to theoreticism.’ Within the culture of theatre as discipline and art, this move carries guilt for leaving the pursuit of art-for-its-own-sake and choosing ‘institutionalization’ in its stead.

Creating theatre as a researcher means that I observe my colleagues, collaborators, students and even teachers from a stance privileged by outside knowledge

and a particular institutional affiliation. From this stance I ask different kinds of questions than my peers and pay allegiance to a different, foreign hierarchical order. Indeed, my positionality might be seen as triply foreign: professionally, institutionally, and nationally/culturally. As a result of the first two assumptions, my practice has often been seen by other practitioners as impure, as a mere vehicle to get to another goal rather than the ‘real’ thing.²⁹ This was exacerbated by the fact that I got used to defining my main occupation during this time as ‘a graduate student, doing research of practice.’ As a result, I constantly felt the need to overcompensate to the side of practice by explaining, reiterating and emphasizing my background as a practitioner. I also felt an urge to involve myself in as many projects or workshops as possible, as a way to reclaim my position as a practitioner. “After all,” I hear the actor in me say, “how can I call myself an actor if I am not involved in, or trying to get involved in, production? How can I claim to be a practitioner without practicing?”

This inner conflict is embedded in the paradoxes of practice research. However, it can be resolved within the work itself. That is, by practicing and researching my practice I can make this conflict a place of discovery and creativity. Furthermore, this particular conflict between positionalities is but one among many others that may emerge. For example, when I assisted Coletto in the storytelling workshop, leading to a performance at Link’s Hall, we encountered a conflict between our teacher sensibilities and our directorial instincts. We worked with an actor on a part she had created in which her physical characterization was lacking specificity. We pointed it out and tried to lead her

²⁹ This relates, again, to the disciplinary biases delineated by Shannon Jackson.

through making clear and effective choices, but her skill was not yet at a point at which she could translate her ideas and images into a specific physical portrayal by her own volition. This also meant that she was unable to reach and sustain her presentness. At that point, which was quite close to the end of the process and the scheduled performance, we had two choices. As teachers, we could let her keep trying and failing until she found her way to reach the desired specificity, even if that did not happen before the performance. As directors, we could look for shortcuts by showing her what to do or leading her through certain moves, in order for her to do the best she could on stage in that performance and tell the story effectively. We chose the teacher's position. Although we were leading a process of performance creation, it was part of a workshop meant to teach the participants about the process of devising with this technique. Rather than being the primary goal of the process, the performance at the end of the workshop served more as a showcase and its climactic end point. Clearly we wanted her performance to be as successful as possible, but our aim was to facilitate a process of learning which, in her case, might have been blocked by successful execution without the ability to repeat such a success on her own in another context.

Positionalities and roles intersect within the work of actors in training. For the actor I mention above, as well as for other participants in this process, there was a constant fluctuation between their positionality as actors in training and that of actors in rehearsal. While an actor in training expects a process of learning and development of skills, regardless of how polished and effective the final presentation is, an actor in rehearsal (at least in the vast majority of Western theatre) expects a more result-oriented

process leading to the performance as its set product. Here again we encounter the complexity and problematics of denoting any positionality as fixed. Defining an individual as an actor means very little, not only for understanding her self but also for understanding her engagement in the praxis. Looking for the points of conflict among different positionalities may help avert this inevitable trap. Thus, through my depiction of each site I hope to expose some of these conflicts as a way of complicating the roles I and others play in them.

A significant part of these conflicts stems from the power dynamics among the different positionalities within prevailing institutional structures. From this perspective, the usual introduction at the beginning of workshops positions individuals on hierarchical scales determined by how the different participants privilege each role. As a scholar I enter an already complex power structure to which I am considered an outsider. As an outsider who may be in a position to publicly expose and critique anything that happens in the praxis, I should be aware of the power I hold over other participants. These power relations are complicated by the fact that in sites of praxis, academic knowledge is often seen as inferior to practiced experience.³⁰ And yet, my previous practical experience and personal encounters with other participants helped me balance these complex relations. They positioned me as an ‘insider’ in spite of my research.³¹

To the professional histories and their significance in the praxis I should add my cultural origins. It is not a random fact that the first thing I mentioned in my presentation

³⁰ See also Jackson.

³¹ For examples of discussions about the insider/outsider dilemma in ethnographic research see McKinley and Deyhle; and Jacobs-Huey.

of myself was “I’m originally from Israel.” Although I am not exactly a complete foreigner, as I have been living in the USA and Canada for over eight years, the minute I start speaking my slight accent marks my foreignness which, in turn, affects the ways in which I am perceived both personally and professionally. My ‘incomplete foreignness’ becomes even murkier thanks to my familiarity with the praxes and many of the local sites and people related to them. It is further complicated by my own sense of multiple origins, having lived away from my place of birth between the middle of 2001 and the summer of 2011 – in upstate NY, Buenos Aires, Toronto and Chicago. These years and those places, in which I worked intensively, were formative for my professional and academic identities. They thus left traces that changed the way I position myself from “Israeli” to “*originally* from Israel.” In other words, Israel is for me the origin, but not the only place I am from. The traces of all those other places I lived and worked have become just as significant, and at times more so, than my Israeli roots. Depending on the site, however, my marked origins played different parts in constructing my positionality.

The SITI workshop included participants from all over the world, as well as from different American states. Because I live in Chicago, I felt less a foreigner than most of the participants, even those coming from other cities in the USA. My previous acquaintance with the instructors, the fact that other participants in the workshop were part of the Training Group, and my prior work in Link’s Hall played an important role in locating me as an ‘insider.’³² In the sites where I worked with Coletto, her foreignness and heavy accent (much more so than my own) made me seem, in a peculiar way, more

³² I return to these points more elaborately below, when discussing this site in detail.

‘American.’ After a short period of work with Coletto I became a kind of translator, helping her to articulate some of the more convoluted notions of Lecoq-based praxis. Moreover, because Lecoq is seen as a foreign technique, many participants assumed that I graduated from the school in Paris merely because I am a foreigner. In the Training Group, at least at the very beginning, I felt the need to explain what I was doing there. Why would an Israeli come to Chicago to start and lead a training group that focuses on techniques originating from Japan and the USA? After several sessions of working together and getting to know one another, these questions became less pertinent. What did require reiteration was my research and documentation of the training sessions, especially because of the changing composition of the group and my use of a digital video camera during some of the sessions.

The material conditions that I encountered in the sites of investigation are also pertinent for my concerns in this chapter. As Ric Knowles shows in his book *Reading the Material Theatre*, we cannot ignore the conditions that might seem peripheral to theatre but that nevertheless determine its production, reception and experience.³³ A case in point is the SITI Company workshop. I originally intended to attend the SITI summer intensive in Skidmore College (in Saratoga Springs) as one of my research sites. I eventually did not go to Skidmore and ended up doing the two week intensive in Chicago instead. As I explain below, this choice significantly changed my perception of the way SITI Company members teach and explore the praxes of Viewpoints and Suzuki and helped me focus my research.

³³ See also my discussion of Knowles’ book in chapter 1.

When did this research begin? I have been a theatre practitioner for over 15 years: a student in a professional acting conservatory, an actor, a director, an acting teacher, a collaborator in group creations, a researcher. And I've participated in various specialized activities similar to those I'm going through now. Why should I treat this period, these experiences as exemplary? Is it simply because they belong to a nearer and more heavily documented past? What parts of my and my collaborators' histories are relevant here? Is the fact that at the age of 13 I performed professionally as a dancer relevant for a reflexive research on embodied techniques? How is it not?

Sites of Practice/Research

In the rest of this chapter I describe the various sites of research in which I conducted participant observation. Into these descriptions I weave discussions about my particular positionalities as they emerged in each site. As part of the attempt to tackle this issue I include my past experience with the praxis, personal engagement, intentions as well as some of the material conditions that I encountered and that most affected the process. The discussions do not necessarily create a chronologically coherent depiction of the research; therefore, Appendix I provides a clear time line including all the sites in chronological order.

The Training Group

In the beginning of fall 2008 I posted a message on the SEE (SITI Extended Ensemble) website,³⁴ inviting Chicago theatre artists who had previous training in both Viewpoints and Suzuki to join me for a long term training process in these two techniques. The idea behind this call for artists was to create a community of practitioners who share specific working vocabularies and praxes, and to delve further into processes of exploring these practices. It was not meant as a space for teaching Viewpoints or Suzuki, but rather as a gym for maintaining and elaborating the skill that these techniques can offer performers, and a laboratory for exploring new ways of using and understanding the techniques. For my own needs, I also hoped that this site would provide a fertile ground for examining and exploring my research questions and would thus serve as a site for both practice-based-research and practice-as-research. My call received many enthusiastic responses. We had a planning meeting in late September and our first training session on October 1st, 2008. Since then, with several inevitable breaks, the Training Group has met weekly for three hours to advance participants' knowledge and skill with Suzuki and Viewpoints techniques. The group consisted of five core members who participated regularly and a larger group of members (around 25 people) who participated sporadically.

Since the work of the Training Group spanned more than 34 months and continued as I was writing the first draft of this chapter, it is my most dynamic and diverse site of research. The fact that it kept evolving made it harder to write about as a contained site. The period of work with the group can be roughly divided into two phases

³⁴ <http://siti.groupsite.com/main/>

defined by changes in the place of training and the human composition of the core group. Phase one took place from October 2008 to the end of May 2009; phase two began in September 2009 and continued until July 2011. In both phases the fall months were months of instability and (re)organization; in both phases only after the December Holidays did things settle down and the group enter a stretch of ongoing training that lasted most of the winter and spring months.

In the first three months (Oct.-Dec. 2008), we rented different studio spaces around Chicago and shared the costs. Because the people who showed up for training varied from meeting to meeting, there was a sense of the group probing and searching for its identity and place. This sense was enhanced by the constant change of location and time of training. From January to May 2009, the Red Tape Theatre Company generously allowed us to use their space for free every Saturday morning. Their space, a big gym hall located inside the Episcopalian Church on Belmont Street, became our home. We quickly got accustomed to stomping on the parquet floor marked as a basketball court, to the high ceiling with buzzing fluorescent bulbs and the loud radiators along the walls. (These little “quirks” of the space were especially helpful during Viewpoints improvisations because they supplied us with various and ever changing stimuli). This stable home enabled us to set a consistent time slot, allowing a constant group to emerge. The core group at this stage comprised seven people (including myself) all of whom had previously trained with the SITI Company and most of whom had substantial experience as actors.³⁵ During that

³⁵ The group included: Meghan Schutt (MFA in acting, trained with SITI in Saratoga), Amber Robinson (BFA in acting, trained with SITI at Links Hall, Chicago), James Holbrook (BA in theatre, trained in

period this group practiced on a regular basis and was occasionally joined by others from the extended group. Although I was leading the majority of the sessions, I made sure that all the other core members participated in leading sessions either wholly or in part. I was hoping that at a certain point I would be able to share some of the organizational responsibilities as well, but found that was less likely to happen.

The early Suzuki sessions resembled introductory classes rather than advanced training because most of the group members' previous practice of Suzuki techniques came more than a year before we started and we all needed to have our memory of the various exercises refreshed. This was true for all the participants but particularly significant for the people who led sessions and needed to build confidence. After a few weeks, however, we started exploring more advanced exercises, seeking higher levels of execution and experimenting with various elements of the practice. The Viewpoints sessions, on the other hand, became exploratory much sooner and the leading of sessions was shared by more members of the group. I believe this happened both because of the nature of the technique, which does not require the same level of exactitude in movement as Suzuki, and because the Viewpoints technique is practiced by more companies and theatre programs than the Suzuki technique. It is quite common to find companies that incorporate elements of the Viewpoints into their rehearsal process, but much less so with Suzuki.

Louisville, Kentucky), Kat Evans (MFA in acting, trained in Saratoga), Jenny Montgomery (BFA in acting and directing, trained in Saratoga) and Dennis Grimes (BA in theatre, trained in Saratoga).

By the end of May 2009 James Palmer, then artistic director of the Red Tape Theatre Company and the person who originally gave us the space to train, asked us to look for a new place. His company had decided to start renting their space and could not let us use it anymore for our training. I and several other members of the group tried to find alternative spaces that would be both reasonably priced and available on a regular basis at the times we were able to train together. However, as June arrived the majority of the group was too busy with plans for the summer and we dispersed. Toward the end of summer 2009 I sent out email calls to regroup and start training again. With the help of Erica Mott, a well known performer in Chicago and then a staff member at Link's Hall, the Group found a new home. Since September 2009 the Group has been working at The Japanese Culture Center on Belmont Street. This new location marks the second phase of the Training Group.

Another change that marks this second phase is my decision to let go of previous attempts to share the decision-making, leadership, and organization of the group. Although I founded the Training Group, continuously coordinated its activities, and led the majority of the sessions, I originally refrained from claiming authority or 'ownership' over the group. I refused at first to treat it as 'my group.' After I had realized that my previous attempts at sharing the Group's leadership had failed I decided to simplify the process. As I compare my early emails to the group with those written since fall 2009, I can detect a clear change in tone. At the early stages, when I was expecting more people to share ownership of and responsibility for the group, my emails read as more suggestive. I tried to maintain the group as a democratic community in which any

decision, including those concerning the time and space of training and the choice of leading sessions, was open to all. It worked as long as the initial core group remained involved, even though none of them committed to a leadership role. In the second phase of the group, however, my tone had changed significantly. Although I still tried to get everybody involved, I eventually made final decisions without the appearance of a democratic procedure. My hopes that the Training Group would operate even without my presence and organizational efforts were replaced with an acceptance of my role as its prime mover.

It took me a few months to reassemble a group, and throughout fall 2009 the training sessions were inconsistent. From the original core group only Dennis Grimes continued to attend the training regularly and occasionally shared the leading of sessions. As part of my efforts to enlarge the community of practitioners involved in the Training Group I decided to offer an introductory workshop in Suzuki and Viewpoints techniques. It took place over two weekends in March 2010, and after it the core group was joined by four new members and training went back on course. The new members are younger, less experienced actors, some of whom never trained with the SITI Company but with other teachers in their undergraduate programs. This workshop created an opportunity for me to explore some of the research questions within a site in which I am the sole teacher.

I am writing these lines at the beginning of summer 2010. As happened a year before, the group is once again dwindling as summer kicks in. In spite of my attempts to

create a living space for actors to train on a regular basis, the Training Group never truly sustained itself as a continuous group for more than four or five months.

Gathering and maintaining such a group is a difficult task. As the founder and leader of the group, I found myself spending increasing amounts of time coordinating training schedules, looking for a space to train and making sure people actually showed up. The most frustrating and difficult task was trying to get the members of the group to commit to training on a weekly basis. Even those actors who showed enthusiastic interest in joining the group often participated only once a month and positioned the training quite low on their priority list. Most actors would vouch for the importance of ongoing practice as more beneficial to their level of artistry than most common rehearsal processes, and would acknowledge that the majority of available production work for actors does not provide a learning experience. However, most of them would still invest much more in an unpaid ‘performance gig’ over training sessions, even knowing that it would not necessarily advance their art or career. At a certain point I did consider scheduling a periodic performance or presentation of the work as a way to set an objective to the open process, but realized that it would change the process completely.³⁶

Unlike dance companies or orchestras that train/practice regularly, the majority of theatre companies in Canada and USA do not follow any training regime. The ongoing praxis of the SITI Company is a rare example in the culture of contemporary North

³⁶ It would make the Training Group operate similarly to Paola Coletto’s workshops when they become creation processes; see more below.

American theatre praxis.³⁷ Hence, the material reality of forming a group solely for the sake of long term training poses great challenges. It goes against the grain of the current culture of practice and training in American theatre. The prevalent culture privileges the type of training that can produce immediate results in a short time. Within a specified amount of time, and for a specified amount of money, practitioners expect to receive a bounded package of knowledge and skill that they can claim they have acquired and put on their CV. Praxis, then, is like any commodity that can be transferred from the provider, the teacher, to the client, the practitioner. Praxes are seen as sets of knowledge that a practitioner can acquire and then simply possess – once you learn it, you know and own it and you can move on. Thus, training is not part of the everyday praxis, which exists only in production – in rehearsals and performances. In fact, training is seen as an event outside and beyond the habitual.

Conversely, according to the SITI Company's philosophy, both the Viewpoints and Suzuki techniques require ongoing practice and constant exploration and development in order to maintain and grow the abilities and skills they grant the actor. The SITI Company regards their workshops as an invitation to start an immersion in the praxis rather than as a standalone course.³⁸ The Training Group follows this philosophy and thus poses an alternative to the prevalent paradigm. For little to no money, we train in order to sustain and develop our personal abilities as performers. This takes time and there is no assurance of results. In addition, the members of the group already 'know the

³⁷ Other examples are Suzuki's SCOT and the Australian Frank Oz and Zen, Zen, Zo who train with the Suzuki technique.

³⁸ Anne Bogart supports this position in her book *And Then, You Act*.

techniques.’ That is, from the inception of the Group, I made sure that we do not teach each other the technique, hence my insistence on accepting only people with previous training. What we offer is a training ground, allowing participants to deepen the embodied knowledge they have previously acquired, reaching a deeper understanding that can be achieved only by long term practice.

I left Chicago in August 2011. I had talked to several of the members of the training group about continuing the weekly meetings and sustaining the group’s activity. It did not happen.

Viewpoints/Suzuki Intensives

First Workshop: Leon Ingulsrud and Barney O’Hanlon (SITI)
August 3-14, 2009

As I describe at the beginning of this chapter, already at the opening of this two week workshop my assumptions about these practices and my place in them were challenged. I entered this site with low expectations about the possibilities of truly learning something new about the Suzuki or Viewpoints techniques. To be more precise, I did expect to go through personal discoveries *within* the work, but did not expect the teaching approach and the sequence of exercises to surprise or challenge me. In a sense, I expected and perhaps wanted it to be a workshop I might consider introductory, a kind of ‘Suzuki and Viewpoints 101’ that would take participants step-by-step and teach us the two techniques ‘by the book.’ Coming to this workshop after years of experience with both techniques, including previously training with the SITI Company, I imagined this

workshop would be a repetition of elements of the SITI praxis I had already experienced. The fact that I had trained and led training on a weekly basis in the months prior to this workshop added to my sense of 'knowing.' Contrary to my expectations, rather than feeling repetitious, my learning deepened thanks to my prior immersion in this praxis.

As mentioned earlier, I originally intended to attend the month-long summer intensive in Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY. However, I was not accepted to this workshop, most likely because I have already had substantial prior training. The advantages of the longer summer intensive seemed clear: I would get a chance to work for five weeks with all or most of the SITI Company members, including taking Composition classes with Anne Bogart, the artistic director. The Chicago intensive workshop, on the other hand, was much shorter and allowed me to work with only two members of SITI. I could not foresee the advantages of that particular workshop.

As I mention earlier, training in Link's Hall, a space in which the Training Group had worked several times before, made me feel like I was on home turf. My body felt at ease in the space. My feet recognized the particular patterns on the floor as they stomped on the same wooden boards and made the same places in the room creak as I shifted my weight from one foot to the other. I was not surprised by the Red Line of the L-train but rather expected it to pass by the studio window several times every hour and thus could choose whether to use it as a sensory stimulus like any other element in the space. In addition to the particular sounds, sights, smells and textures encountered during the workshop, Link's Hall's location influenced the ways I perceived the training. Being familiar with the neighborhood enabled me to meet with participants for interviews after

sessions in places that I knew were convenient and appropriate. It positioned me as a host when the people I interviewed were unfamiliar with the city.

Furthermore, going back home at the end of the day meant that this workshop was not entirely outside of my daily life but was integrated into it. This stands in opposition to the workshop in Skidmore, which is located far from any large urban area and to which the vast majority of the participants have to travel.³⁹ In addition, the training at Skidmore College lasts throughout the day and participants usually stay around the college campus for dinner and lodge in the accommodation provided, so even the time outside the workshop is shared. This creates a sense of a retreat from the mundane and a total immersion in the techniques and the philosophy behind them. This seclusion, which was missing from the Chicago workshop, might create a fetishization of the workshop as a special space away from anything else, a sacred time that is supposedly required for truly acquiring the learned skills. I do not wish to argue here against the value of such retreats, but I do believe that the perception of the Skidmore College training as the definitive SITI Company training goes hand in hand with the privileging of single, short and intensive training over long term routine practice.

This Chicago intensive training was led by Barney O'Hanlon and Leon Ingulsrud. Training with these two instructors, away from the rest of the company and their traditional home, exposed me to their distinct personal approaches, which at that point seemed to divert from the "official line" that I would expect to experience when training

³⁹ I compare the workshop that I took with the Saratoga workshop because the latter follows the original model of training for the SITI Company and is still considered the most sought after workshop of all the year round training they offer.

with the entire company at Skidmore College. Both instructors took some liberties in bringing more exploration and experimentation into what was defined as introductory training. Barney, who taught most of the Viewpoints training sessions, took a particularly untraditional approach to teaching the Viewpoints. He combined elements from other approaches he practiced such as Mind-Body Centering, and went quickly through the nine Viewpoints only on the last day of first week, half way through the workshop. His teaching approach openly countered teaching Viewpoints ‘by the book,’ diverging from the actual book (Bogart and Landau’s *The Viewpoints Book*) as well as any schematic way in which Viewpoints ‘should’ be taught. He openly critiqued the ways in which it is usually taught and practiced as well as the *Viewpoints Book* itself. While for me and several of the more experienced practitioners this proved to be interesting and evocative, I heard at least one of the novice participants wishing for a more methodical exposition of the technique.⁴⁰

This experience was enhanced by the tendency of both O’Hanlon and Inglsrud to make theoretical, philosophical, and interdisciplinary artistic connections to the practice. It is usual in SITI workshops to talk through exercises. However, the type of discourse led by the instructors depends on their interests. The connotations and connections that Inglsrud evoked, for example, included references to quantum mechanics, cognitive science, philosophy of art, and other theoretical and philosophical realms that may seem to be unrelated to the actual exercise discussed.

⁴⁰ This workshop was advertised as open to all levels.

The fact that the group included participants with various levels of experience in Viewpoints and Suzuki created a particular dynamic in the workshop. For instance, after briefly presenting the Stomping Shakuhachi exercise in words, Leon asked the experienced participants to simply demonstrate it to the rest of the group. As I stood up to ‘demonstrate’ the exercise I had a revelation. I felt a heightened sensation, an excitement that reminded me of an audition or the feeling on an opening night. I had to demonstrate my expertise, to perform the best possible presentation of the Stomping Shakuhachi exercise. Although in almost all the Suzuki exercises half of the group is watching (as well as the instructors), demonstrating how this exercise works was different. Somehow the stakes were higher because of the way it was framed and because, as in performance, there was nothing else for me to do but perform and be watched. I later realized that the stakes should always be as high as they were in those moments. It fleshed out one of the essential elements of the Suzuki technique – to bring the crisis of live performance into each and every moment of presentness in practice.

Second workshop: J. Ed Araiza and Akiko Aizawa (SITI)
May 30 – June 10, 2011

Two years later, toward the end of my research period in Chicago, I found myself again in Link’s Hall taking another two-week intensive with the SITI Company. This time the instructors were J. Ed Araiza and Akiko Aizawa. The differences between this workshop and the previous one were striking, stemming from the instructors’ personalities, the change in the group’s composition, and the changes in my personal perspective.

Many of the elements of positionality I describe above were strengthened and changed with two more years in Chicago. There was a different significance to my sense of belonging and familiarity with the city and the theatre community in it, as well as with Link's Hall. As opposed to my apparent awareness to the contrast between this local familiarity and my cultural foreignness, this time my local affinity came naturally. It was not an issue any more and therefore did not receive attention in my notes. Further, the majority of the group in this workshop had less experience than the previous group and included less people I knew from before. This resulted in less doubt about the practitioners' professional positionalities and may have influenced the instructors' approach as well.

The instructors this time seemed to be less inclined to experiment and stretch the boundaries of the techniques. Araiza's approach in the Viewpoints sessions, in contrast to O'Hanlon's clearly alternative attitude, seemed more familiar and less adventurous, using more classical exercises and constantly referring directly to the Viewpoints jargon. This may have been a combination of his personal tendency and of the group's lack of experience. Similarly, Aizawa's approach was much more practical in contrast with Ingsrud's tendency to ruminate and philosophize. Aizawa's difficulty to express herself in English, her clear foreignness despite many years of living in the USA, added to her no-nonsense, extremely practical approach to the training.

August 2009-May 2010

The first time I met Paola Coletto was summer 2003 in Padua, Italy. I was spending a few weeks observing the work of the (now closed) Kiklos Theatre School, co-founded by Giovanni Fusetti and Coletto. Both Coletto and Fusetti are graduates of the Lecoq Theatre School in Paris, and both were part of only about 40 selected graduates who were certified as teachers by Jacques Lecoq in the school's pedagogical year.⁴¹ That summer I spent most of my time with Giovanni and the students in his clown workshop. I met Coletto only for a brief five minutes during the end-of-the-year presentation of the school's recent graduates. Five years later in September 2008, about two weeks after I moved to Chicago, someone who overheard in a conversation that I am interested in 'physical theatre' told me I should probably contact a person she knows named Paola Coletto. I contacted her soon after, but it took nearly a year before we finally met and started working together. This fortuitous encounter led to a number of collaborations, affording me several research sites and a way into the 'physical theatre' community in Chicago.⁴² The various sites of work with Coletto can be seen as a part of a chain of encounters with various Lecoq-based practices.

In Chicago, Coletto taught workshops in mask, clown, bouffon, and storytelling throughout the year in various places including Link's Hall and Red Moon Theatre. She also taught regularly in the theatre programs of University of Illinois in Chicago and

⁴¹ Until Lecoq's death in 1999 the pedagogical year at his School included few selected participants, all graduates who spent some time outside the school and were invited to return for a year and to be certified in Lecoq's pedagogy.

⁴² This community includes various well-known theatre companies such as Red Moon Theatre, and 500 Clowns, to name a few.

DePaul University as well as consulted for and collaborated with local theatre companies such as Plastiscene and 500 Clowns.⁴³

My previous experience in Lecoq techniques played an important role in creating a strong professional connection with Coletto. Although I did not study at the Lecoq Theatre School in Paris or any of the other full programs that follow its pedagogical route, since 1996 I have trained and created theatre with several teachers and practitioners of Lecoq in Israel, Europe, Argentina and the USA. Particularly significant was training for three years with Zvika Fishzon as part of my studies at the Nissan Nativ Acting Studio in Jerusalem.⁴⁴ Others I trained or created with include Noam Meiri (Tel Aviv, Israel), Cristina Ferreira (Buenos Aires, Argentina), Thomas Prattki (London, UK), and Davide Giovanzana (Ithaca, NY), to name a few. In addition, as part of my MA thesis, I researched the Lecoq pedagogy and the relatively scarce written sources about it in English. This prior experience set me apart from most of the other participants in Coletto's workshops.

The intensive Mask workshop that Coletto taught at Link's Hall over a long weekend in August 2009 was an introduction to Lecoq's approach to mask work – from the Neutral Mask through the larval and primitive masks to character masks. I joined the workshop eager to go back to basics in mask work in which I have extensive experience, particularly with commedia dell'arte. I originally trained for a year at the Nissan Nativ Acting Studio with Pierre Tuviana (1996-7), a commedia dell'arte actor, teacher and

⁴³ Today Coletto directs and teaches at The School for Theatre Creators in Chicago; see <http://www.paolacoletto.com/theschool/>

⁴⁴ The Nissan Nativ Acting Studio is an intensive three years acting conservatory with a unique approach to actor training. For more information see www.nissan-nativ.co.il.

mask-maker who also worked with Ariane Mnouchkine. Since then I have continued to train, devise and perform with masks with other teachers and collaborators, mostly Lecoq trained, in Israel, the USA, and Argentina. My training in Lecoq mask work included the neutral, expressive and commedia dell'arte masks but did not include the larval. The larval masks “are large, simplified masks which have not quite resolved themselves into real human features.”⁴⁵ Another type of masks that I did not work with before are the ‘primitive masks.’ These masks are not originally taught at the Lecoq School; they were developed to be located in between the larval and the character masks by Mateo Destro, a Lecoq-based actor, teacher and mask-maker. He felt that in the pedagogical journey from form to character the gap between the almost geometric features of the larval masks and the fully developed character masks was too great and needed to be filled by masks that are not fully developed characters. He called his new masks primitive masks to signify that. Incidentally, Mateo lived in Padua and developed the first primitive masks for the Kiklos School at the exact same time I visited there in 2003. I was among the first to see them before he even painted them, when they were still completely white. The masks Coletto is using are the exact same ones I saw years earlier and, as far as she knows, these are the only ones of their kind.

The first seven-hour day was dedicated almost exclusively to preparation and introduction to the Neutral Mask. In the second long day we were introduced to the larval and primitive masks. On the third day, when we trained for only three hours, we briefly explored some of the character masks (including commedia dell'arte). At the end of that

⁴⁵ Lecoq 56.

third and last day of the workshop, we presented an open demonstration to invited guests. Clearly, this type of workshop gives just a taste of the original process and Coletto was very clear about the limits of such a short workshop.

Coming back to Link's Hall merely two weeks after the first SITI workshop felt like going home, although Coletto's workshops have a very different atmosphere than that of the SITI workshop. In all the SITI workshops I attended, and from the way other people describe them, there is a clear sense of discipline. In Coletto's workshops, although they do not lack rigor, there is a greater sense of play. This is because the Lecoq-based techniques emphasize play (*le jeu*) but also because, unlike the teaching style at the Lecoq School in Paris which is known for being assertive and laconic, Coletto brings play into her pedagogical approach as well. Another important difference in teaching approach between the two sites is in the individual learning process. In the SITI workshop, exercises and improvisations were almost always performed in groups and notes were given to the cohort as a whole. In the Suzuki sessions, individual notes and adjustments were given only at the time of the exercise, but rarely afterward. In the Lecoq workshops, on the other hand, there were many individual exercises and most of the notes were given directly to individuals.

As in the previous sites Erica Mott was among the participants, as well as Anya Clingman whom I first met in the SITI Company workshop two weeks earlier. Both Erica and Anya participated in the second extensive mask workshop and in the red nose clown workshop and creative process. This is not rare, as many people tend to participate in more than one of Coletto's workshops and various people become a part of her regular

group of collaborators. This creates a sense of community of praxis in Chicago, which encompasses not only many of Coletto's students but also her peers and collaborators from various theatre institutions in town. Following the first mask workshop, Coletto invited me to a second, extensive mask workshop and to the clown workshop/creation. In the mask workshop I was unofficially declared her assistant, although I participated in most of the activities similarly to all the other participants. Nevertheless, in the individual work when each participant presented his or her work with a mask, Coletto opened a space for me to give notes. In addition, most days after the session was over, we stayed to discuss the work. My positionality as assistant enabled me to participate in any exercise I wanted but also to step aside and observe at any time.

In the clown workshop/creation, on the other hand, I was clearly positioned as one of the clown/actors. Although I have had some experience in clown work, it was nowhere near the level of experience I had in mask work. While I did take workshops in Lecoq's approach to clown, much of my original training was with Boris Svidansky, a leading teacher at the Nissan Nativ Acting Studio who comes from the Russian tradition of clowning. Because the clown form is considered by many, including in Lecoq, as the hardest and most 'pure' form of acting, I wanted to immerse myself in the process without assuming any privileged position. Some of the group members were experienced clowns and performers including Keland Scher, who taught clown at Roosevelt University, and Lea Pascal, a graduate of the Lecoq School in Paris.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ At the end of this process Lea was invited to join 500 Clowns and Keland was accepted as member of the Cirque De Soleil pool of clowns.

The one-day master class From Neutral to Clown enabled me to observe and videotape the most essential parts of the process in a condensed version. Because it came after I already worked quite extensively with Coletto on both masks and clown, I was able to recognize the key moments in the process and to make the best of the observation from outside of the training. It fleshed out the importance of being immersed in practice even while observing as an outside eye. My involvement with the other participants was minimal.⁴⁷

The objective of the physical storytelling creation process was for the students to learn how to transpose short written stories into physical storytelling. Coletto asked me to join the storytelling creation workshop to assist in guiding the actors through the process after the participants had already gone through some training and chosen the material they wanted to work with. Some of them had already worked individually on parts of the scenes they were creating, proposing a starting point for the work. In this site my role included working with the actors separately from Coletto on several scenes in different stages of their creative process and then working with Coletto to direct them in their final stages. Even though I came into the process relatively late, many of the participants already knew me from prior workshops with Coletto and my leadership was accepted quite naturally. However, because my role was mainly to observe the actors' work and guide them through the process, my directorial eye made it difficult for me to keep the researcher's eye open. In other words, it was hard for me to maintain the double

⁴⁷ Because of the uneven number of participants, Paola asked me to step in and participate on several occasions when she had the group work in pairs.

consciousness of two competing *analytical* perspectives. In addition, coming late into the process, I was not witness to the more improvisatory phase of the work.

The moments of emergence of presentness in the later stages of setting the material into structure were rarer. In some cases actors were struggling to assemble a coherent piece as late as the day before staged performance and were thus having difficulties ‘being fully there.’ This happens because initially heightened presentness is more easily achieved in improvisation, when everything the actor does is potentially spontaneous. In this process of discovery the actor may more readily open up to her environment. This type of presentness, however, is unsustainable. It disappears the moment the actor tries to repeat the same scene in the exact same way. In the process of editing the material that emerged through improvisation into a coherent performance and fine tuning it, presentness may be harder to sustain. That happens because the focus on repeating an existing structure is confused with an attempt to repeat or reconstruct a past experience. The attempt to repeat not only the action and its stylization but also the intersubjective experience that emerged in the improvisation goes against being present here and now. The struggle to incorporate an existing structural element within the newly created piece and have it ‘make sense’ turns the attention of most inexperienced actors away from what emerges in the present moment.

* * *

This multi-sited research afforded me ample opportunities to experience and observe moments of presentness within the practice of the Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq

techniques. Combining these varied sites in one research project helps to show the pervasive and essential nature of presentness as well as its complexity and multiplicity. Juxtaposing my different ways of engagement with both practice and practitioners presents a wide range of perspectives on presentness. In each site I was able to both recognize and develop presentness while at the same time observe my colleagues go through similar processes. However, in each process of training presentness emerged differently, under different circumstances and with varying responses. What, then, did I and the rest of the participants recognize as presentness? What were the ‘permanencies’ (in Paola Coletto’s words) that were shared among the different instances of presentness?

In the next two chapters I take a closer look at those instances of presentness, delving into a discussion about its operation in space and in time; that is, I examine spatial and temporal presentness through the ways in which they are practiced and experienced within the ‘nitty-gritty’ of Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq practice. I begin in chapter 3 by looking at spatial presentness, going on to doing the same with temporal presentness in chapter 4. Dealing with the minutiae of the spatial and temporal elements of presentness in each technique requires a change in focus and in tone. Therefore, my discourse may seem, at times, extremely technical in comparison with this chapter; somewhat removed from the specificity of the contexts I have just delineated. Nevertheless, it is only within the specificity of time and space of each particular research site that I could immerse myself to the extent of being able to reach these subtle understandings.

Chapter 3

Know Your Lines: The Vertical and Horizontal

We must give priority to the horizontal and the vertical, to whatever exists outside ourselves, however intangible. People discover themselves in relation to their grasp of the external world, and if the student has special qualities, these will show up in the reflection.

Jacques Lecoq¹

To be present is to be here now. It can only be approached and defined by a string of momentary experiences in and of space and time. As pointed out by Bert O. States, saying that something happens in the present is a tautology since an occurrence can only happen in its here and now.² This is true to any type of performance as well as to “any durational experience which, having passed, ceases being itself and assumes the ontological status of memory.”³ In other words, any type of performance happens in the present for the audience and, in the case of a live performance, to the performers. The question is, then, what are the qualities that define the present of performance from the

¹ Lecoq, *Moving* 17.

² See also Lutterbie, “Neuroscience” 155.

³ States “Performance” 10.

present of everyday life? One of the points stressed by most practitioners of techniques of presence and, indeed, most theatre and performance practitioners, is that being present onstage (being in the here and now of performance) is or at least should be different from the here and now experienced in daily life. The general consensus about the existence of an inherent difference between everyday and stage presentness does not result in an agreement about what exactly this difference is, nor does it result in similar practices among various practitioners. Each approach stresses different processes for achieving it and the result is similarly different. The commonalities that seem to cut across various psychophysical techniques operate on the level of awareness of the body in relationship to time and space.

There are varieties of presentness (to paraphrase Alva Noë's book title *Varieties of Presence*) that may spring out of different techniques. Clearly, presentness does not operate in an on/off mode. We are all present in each moment in the space we occupy to varying degrees and in a multiplicity of manners. It is exactly the degree and the manner—the particular quality and dynamics of one's *involvement* with the here and now—which make the difference between everyday experience and experience shaped by performative presentness. The particular psychophysical techniques an actor trains in shape the type of sensory-motor involvement s/he is practiced in and consequently make various levels, degrees, and forms of presentness available. While presentness is a matter of both space and time, as both are inseparable aspects of our world, exploring each separately is important for emphasizing our differing experience of each and the ways in which we articulate them differently.

Much of the discourse of presence and by extension of presentness in actor-training mainly focuses on its operation as a temporal aspect of experience. The phrases ‘being-in-the-moment’ and ‘acting moment-to-moment’ are merely on-the-surface indications of the predominant understanding of presentness as a type of being-in-time.⁴ Connoting being-present with ‘immediacy’ and ‘spontaneity’ highlights the temporal dimension of the present over the spatial one. The privileging of time can also be traced in many of the theoretical discussions of presence. Alice Rayner’s phenomenology, for example, focuses on presence that appears within temporal gaps, in the seams between the real and dreamt, the live and dead, the actual and the imagined.⁵ For her, heightened presence depends on a particular play of and in relationship to time. These and other considerations of temporal presentness are further discussed in chapter 4. This chapter deals with space as I try to isolate the most essential spatial elements of each technique, which, arguably, play a big part in shaping the actor’s embodied skill.

Before I delve into (the issue of) space, it is important to remember that underlying my discussion is Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, particularly his insistence on the entwinement of body and environment, that is, body in space and time. Merleau-Ponty stresses the inseparability of body/self and world and the existence within a unified phenomenological field of space and time:

In so far as I have a body through which I act in the world, space and time are not, for me, a collection of adjacent points nor are they a limitless number of relations synthesized by my consciousness, and into which it draws my body. I am not in

⁴ See also chapter 1.

⁵ See also chapter 1.

space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them. *The scope of this inclusion is the measure of that of my existence; but in any case it can never be all-embracing.* The space and time which I inhabit are always in their different ways indeterminate horizons which contain other points of view. The synthesis of both time and space is a task that always has to be performed afresh.⁶

Apart from the claim for a lived-body existing as part of space and time, the emphasized sentence alludes to the idea of presentness as a dynamic process of constant (re)entwinement with space and time rather than an “all embracing” presence. To what extent and in what way do I include space and time and they include me? For Merleau-Ponty this is “the measure of my existence.” Arguably, it may refer to the measure of my presentness. Moreover, creating a practice that brings the practitioners intimately close to the vertical and horizontal may turn Merleau-Ponty’s “indeterminate horizons” to more specific, determined, and shared spatial horizons for the entire group. It may be a way for synthesizing space and spatial experience through a shared dimensionality.⁷

This chapter focuses on practiced spatial presentness: the emerging experience of space as structured through psychophysical training. After setting my main argument in motion and exploring its theoretical underpinning, I examine the experience of space in the praxis of Suzuki, Viewpoints, and Lecoq. I specifically explore the ways in which heightening the practitioner’s relationship to the vertical line that crosses her body, i.e. to her own verticality, and to the horizontal plane between her body and its surrounding, i.e.

⁶ *Phenomenology* 162, italics added.

⁷ Although it is clear that besides space and time there might be various foci for performers’ psychophysical attention, such as weight distribution, breath, muscle tension, and more, I would argue, based on Merleau-Ponty, that these all operate within and as part of space and time.

to the horizontality or her perceptual field, form the basis for developing heightened spatial presentness. It should be clear, though, that not only is it impossible to have spatial experience apart from time, but also that the division of spatial experience itself into the vertical and horizontal does not mean they can each be experienced individually, since they are two inseparable aspects of the same phenomenon and the experience of one affects and is affected by the experience of the other.

Simplifying spatial experience into verticality and horizontality may be grasped as an essentialist approach and attract criticism. From the point of view of late 20th century post-structuralist theories, it may indeed be seen as sacrilege to claim for universal embodied principles. It is true that the *interpretation* of verticality and/or horizontality may vary according to culture, location, ideology, etc. For instance, social status in most capitalist modern countries is usually evaluated vertically through the spatial metaphor of upper/middle/lower classes.⁸ Although most performance theorists shy away from anything resembling universality or pre-cultural essentialism, there are distinct human universals or essential qualities that cannot be categorically ignored. The universality of basic traits in human-body morphology and physiology for example, cannot be disputed. The effect of the force of gravity on an upright human body, for example, determines the

⁸ This capitalist hierarchy replaced most traditional hierarchical orders of both state and religion. As another related example operating on an international level, the latest sky-scraper frenzy of several Asian and Middle-Eastern cities (originating at the beginning of the 20th century in cities in the USA) harness the power of verticality for a show of financial power.

vertical and horizontal as constant mutual spatial points of reference regardless of culture.⁹

The tension between the prevalent theoretical anti-essentialism and the practical attempt to pin-down essential embodied principles operates within some of the gaps I mention in chapter 2, such as, the nature/culture gap and the practice/theory gap. On the supposedly essentialist side of this gap we find some support from recent developments in cognitive studies. Ric Kemp claims that “Lecoq’s use of the word ‘essential’ can be troubling to contemporary scholars, with its implication of ‘universal’ experience that neglects differences of culture, race, gender, or orientation. However, one of the key aspects of a cognitive understanding of acting is that there are common biological experiences of perception, cognition, and expression that underlie, and interact with, multiple cultures.”¹⁰ In another example, Bruce McConachie raises an important point about the cultural specificity of a universally shared ‘verticality.’ McConachie claims that “Because humans walk upright and because many of the operations of our minds embody our physical orientation in the world, people in all cultures carry a concept of ‘verticality’ in their heads. This mental concept, like many others, is universal, even though its particular expression varies across cultures.”¹¹

⁹ Recent interest in non-normative, disabled bodies in performance stresses the particularity of a body that is physically Other to an extreme. Even this Otherness can be examined in relationship to the vertical and horizontal as they operate on both normative and Other bodies, though in different ways. Example of this can be seen in DV8’s film *The Cost of Living* (Newson) as well as in the discussion in Murray and Keefe, *Reader* 143-4.

¹⁰ Kemp 86.

¹¹ *Engaging* 4.

McConachie forcefully claims that current scientific evidence undermine the nature/culture divide, which underlies much foundational theoretical argumentation in cultural and performance studies (Judith Butler is one illustrious example). In her critique of Butler's prevalent gender theory, Iris Marion Young suggests that the way gender has been defined and theorized, though useful for understanding larger structures and social forces, is less helpful when looking at subjectivity and individual experience. According to her Merleau-Pontian approach, the definition of the lived-body pertains to concrete real life experience and includes a wider range of lived experiences than does the category *gender*: "The lived body is a unified idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context; it is body in situation."¹² Supporting this claim, recent discoveries in the field of cognitive studies show that understanding the operation of cultural phenomena such as language should take into account understandings of natural physiological/biological human processes.

Treating verticality and horizontality as, arguably, the *permanencies*¹³ of spatiality enables me to tease out the differences and similarities among their particular use in the Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq techniques. (I return to the apparent tension between the universal and particular further below, particularly in my discussion of Lecoq's Neutral.) In the next section I lay the ground for a phenomenological understanding of the vertical and horizontal.

¹² Young 16.

¹³ I discuss below the use of the term *permanency* specifically in the Lecoq terminology.

Introducing the Vertical and Horizontal

We live in a three dimensional space. Habitually, we humans are vertical beings living in a horizontal world.¹⁴ We relate differently to each spatial dimension. Throughout most of our waking time, regardless of what we actually do, we either stand or walk or sit and in all these activities our spine, along with our torso and head, seeks to remain in a close to vertical position. The outline of our body draws a vertical brush stroke in the space it occupies. In contrast, when we notice a person with their back bent forward, significantly breaking away from its verticality, we usually read this as a sign of health problems, deformity, or old age. In relationship to that, a vertical stance signals an active, conscious person while a horizontal body often signifies non-action or a state outside of normative social behavior: infancy, sleep, unconsciousness, sickness, death.¹⁵ A different divergent from the vertical happens when a person's back significantly arches backwards, which is perhaps less common. This arching may be a sign of a specific training regime one practices (such as young girls who practice ballet) or an embodiment of a particular attitude an individual takes toward the world, such as the case of machos thrusting their chest forward and, as a result, their back is arched backwards. Onstage as well, an actor spends most of her time walking, sitting or standing – in all of these physical activities the spine strives to remain vertical.

¹⁴ While the vertical is seen as a line, and therefore stands for one dimension (height), the horizontal is a plane, that is, it includes two spatial dimensions (depth and width). Thus, although I divide spatial experience into two main aspects, I include the three dimensions of space. What makes the vertical dimension unique is that it goes along the line of gravity while the two other dimensions are perpendicular to it.

¹⁵ A few common activities we habitually do horizontally include sex, crawling, or pretending to fly. Swimming is arguably one of the only activities in which we consider it normative to stay in a horizontal position in public and even that is limited to a dedicated place and time.

Alignment, exercises for reinforcing the spine's verticality and raising awareness to the relationship of the rest of the body to it, is usually considered the starting point of most physical training for actors and is an important part of any warm-up before getting to work. As part of aligning the body, the torso, head, arms and legs are positioned vertically parallel in relation to the spine. Moreover, when actors have particular problems with their posture or having a hard time finding alignment they are often sent to do special training (or treatment) in techniques such as Alexander or Feldenkrais that are specifically designed for dealing with what is conceived as a problem.

In *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese clearly show how the body operates in relationship to the vertical line of gravity.¹⁶ As the body moves one of its parts away from this line it needs to compensate by moving another part of the body in opposition. This compensation occurs habitually; for example, a balancing tilt of the upper body to one side causes the pelvis to tilt to the other side. Another example happens when we send a leg forward to take a step when walking and our body naturally compensates by sending the same shoulder and arm backwards.¹⁷ We constantly undertake these adjustments when moving in our daily life. The body's verticality, then, is not maintained as a "pure" form but rather a constant reference point of equilibrium. In the *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*,

¹⁶ P. 38.

¹⁷ The system of compensating movements that our body performs when walking is in fact much more complex than what I describe here and includes various limb adjustments and weight shifts. While a complete description may take me astray from my main argument, I will touch on some characteristics of walking below in my discussion of elements of Suzuki walks.

phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone offers the following description considering the whole body's verticality:

The linear design of a moving human body might be most readily described in the course of everyday life as upright. That uprightness, however – that *verticality* – not only changes as the result of sitting down, but constantly shifts in the course of everyday walking, for example, when legs are bending and arms are swinging, bringing in diagonal and quasi-horizontal dimensions to what is taken as the vertical line of the body. The ever-changing linear design is indeed part of a total body-in-movement dynamics.¹⁸

Sheets-Johnstone's short description treats the vertical torso as the zero axis from which the rest of the body breaks away as it moves. As her description suggests, the limbs break away from verticality more often and regularly than the parts of the body that are directly attached to the spine. Separating the limbs from the torso in their relationship to the vertical is appropriate and will become clearer further in this chapter, particularly in the discussion about the center of the body.

We move on horizontal planes. Our body strives towards horizontal movement across spaces to the extent that we build flat surfaces where the landscape doesn't allow us to move horizontally over time. When vertical movement upward or downward is desirable, we build stairs, step-size horizontal planes, to fit the flatness of our feet; or elevators, another type of horizontal plateau, to take us on a vertical journey while keeping the habitual horizontal sensory-motor relationships with our immediate surrounding. The skeletal and muscular structure of our feet and legs operate optimally when we move on flat horizontal surfaces.

¹⁸ 223, italics in origin.

Our most dominant senses (at least on a conscious level) operate optimally on the horizontal forward-facing line: our face is comfortably directed to enable a horizontal sensorial encounter with the world through the eyes, ears, and nose. It seems that from this narrow ‘base-line’ we perceive and orient ourselves in relationship to the entire horizontal plane, which opens laterally to the sides and, possibly, all the way to the back. Looking up or down requires us to strain our neck muscle or change our posture from its habitual verticality. Our sense of balance, monitored by the vestibular system located in the inner ear, helps us maintain the body vertical while the head faces the horizontal plane around us. Merleau-Ponty, referencing experimental psychologists of his time, claims that “it is generally true of our field of vision that the apparent size of objects on the horizontal plane is remarkably constant, whereas they very quickly get smaller on the vertical plane. This is most likely to be because, for us as beings who walk upon the earth, the horizontal plane is where our most important movements and activities take place.”¹⁹

The modern traditional stage is for the most part a horizontal plane on which relationships unfold and from which the performer, ideally, faces the spectator horizontally.²⁰ (That is most likely the reason for lowering the ticket prices for balcony seats, where the horizontal stage-audience relationship is not at its best.)²¹ Moreover, the

¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *World* 55-6.

²⁰ See McAuley 245.

²¹ Even when it is raked, the stage is made to signify a horizontal plane for the audience. Considering, for example, environmental theatre and circus acts that may use verticality as an ingrained feature, it seems to me that their particular appeal is exactly in the alternative they pose to the habitual “horizontal forms.” Performance that is built around a vertical relationship between audience and performers challenge the normative forms of human body behavior and sensorial communication thus giving more focus to the element of verticality over most other elements.

basic spatial structure of the modern dialogue and conflict in contemporary acting, the give and take or push-pull that generate human relationships all occur on a horizontal plane. The horizontality of the relationships developed through the modern dialogue can be attributed to the changes into modernity as societies broke down traditional hierarchical divisions. Onstage this meant positioning ‘real people’ as the subject of drama. That is, with the rise and dominance of realism horizontal relationships in which people spoke to each other literally “at eye level” became the zero point of reference. This was not always the case. Over the history of theatre various forms of drama had developed and focused on different relationships onstage.²² Ancient Greek theatre, for example, is highly vertical in its hierarchical order among the various characters and, perhaps more significantly, in the constant relationship with fate and the gods who are up on Mount Olympus. The body of the actor in Greek tragedy, according to Lecoq, enters this heightened vertical connection as part of the tension created with the gods.

The centrality of verticality and horizontality in human spatial experience can be detected in Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of embodied metaphors.²³ According to them “our conceptual system is grounded in, neurally makes use of, and is crucially shaped by our perceptual and motor systems.”²⁴ In their analysis of the use of embodied metaphor in language, which can be traced even in some of the most abstract concepts, they refer to embodied experience as the basis for our way of understanding, conceiving, and talking about things. Some of the primary metaphors upon which other more complex metaphors

²² For a discussion on this issue see also Lecoq *Moving*.

²³ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*; Johnson, *The Body*.

²⁴ 555.

are built appear in various world languages. These primary metaphors emanate from the way we spatially orient ourselves in the world, particularly, “vertical orientation, horizontal orientation, and front-back orientation.”²⁵ Significantly, orientation and our spatial-relation to the surrounding depend on our sensory-motor capabilities – on our innate sensorial ability that is interrelated to our ability to move in the world. The implication of using such prime metaphors as the main prism through which practice is perceived, i.e. directly embodying vertical and horizontal orientation and spatial-relations, enables an unmediated shared understanding of space through both language and embodied experience.

According to Sheets-Johnstone’s phenomenology, our embodied being-in-the-world is correlated to the dynamics of movement we learn to inhabit throughout our life. Further, the investigation of the dynamics of movement teaches us about our habits and enables us to “change any habitual qualitative dynamic if we wish and instantiate a different dynamic. We can in fact make the familiar strange, and in so doing, discover [...] ‘degrees of freedom’ in human movement.”²⁶

Investigating the vertical and horizontal in on-going training, then, touches upon an essential element of our habitual movement dynamics and may, in time, enable us to control and change these dynamics. Further, developing heightened awareness of the vertical line, for instance, as well as control of the relationship of the body and its parts to this line, enables a performer to physically create dramatic tension. The embodied tension

²⁵ Lakoff and Johnson *Metaphors* 35. In my analysis I regard the front-back orientation as part of the spatial-relation operating on the horizontal plane.

²⁶ 227. Sheets-Johnstone specifically mentions space, time and force as the three dynamic elements at play in body movement.

can be reached by practicing the dynamics of oppositions: balance and imbalance, tension and release, stillness and movement. This embodied tension, not to be confused with the type of muscular tension that impedes the actor's expression and availability, is one of the most significant consequences of training leading to heightened presentness.²⁷ The connection between the embodiment of opposing forces and presence has been given attention by theatre and performance scholars. As Jane Goodall claims, stage presence "is often bound up with paradox, a holding together of contraries, as if the one who embodies it is a convergence point for opposing forces."²⁸ These oppositions, or the tension created by them, operate most strongly on the horizontal and vertical planes.²⁹

In his book *Action in Perception* Alva Noë develops his enactive approach to perception, in which one of the main premises is that perception and action (movement) are essentially intertwined. He defines perception as knowledge of the world that is made available to us depending on our ability to act and move in the world and through the sensorial experience we accumulate in the process. The claim for interdependency between, even intertwining of, action and perception positions movement, including unfulfilled *potential* movement in a particular context, as an essential form of learning about the world and ourselves in it. Noë's theory may confirm that specific patterns of movement accompanied by a specifically directed sensorial focus may teach us new ways of perceiving the world and responding to it.

²⁷ See also Anna Fenemore's articulation of presence in chapter 1, p. 19-20.

²⁸ Goodall 188.

²⁹ See also Watson, *Toward* 33-5.

Continuing in this line, Barbara Sellers-Young claims that “Different movement forms can teach distinctive images and ways of experiencing the world. These frames then become ‘modes of thinking’ that influence perceptions of experience. Dance and movement teachers are not only teaching a technical skill—ballet, combat, tai chi—but a set of somatic skills and images that will influence how their students perceive the world.”³⁰ Nonetheless, while the development and maintenance of extra-daily patterns is crucial for much traditional coded forms of performance, such as Noh or Ballet, it is important to remember that contemporary acting requires a different skill set. Entering a long-term immersion into a strict form indeed teaches non-habitual patterns, but this heightened form may create a new fixed habit, restricting the flexibility and openness required. As Barba puts it, “The principle is that you have to break the functional way of being natural, and through this apparent being un-natural you must get a new spontaneity. You are building new conditioned reflexes, but this new automatism shouldn’t have such a particularity that you can at once recognize a Noh actor or a ballet dancer.”³¹ For an actor, the type of non-habitual embodied presence of a ballet dancer may restrict the operation of the body. The world as embodied by a Noh actor, to take another example, is quite specific and can become restrictive for the needs of the 21st century theatre stage.

John Lutterbie discusses at length the efforts that famous dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov had to undergo when he decided to move from strictly performing classical ballet to the world of modern dance.³² The difficulties he had and the amount of training

³⁰ Sellers-Young 182.

³¹ 16.

³² *Toward* 154-9

time he needed to invest in order to re-learn how to dance in a form that was new to him, resulted in transforming his ‘pure’ classical habits into a sort of hybrid form. This confluence of styles resulted, on the one hand, in enriching Baryshnikov’s abilities as well as the modern dance he engaged in and, on the other hand, the new acquired forms ‘diluted’ the purity of Baryshnikov’s classical training, possibly moving him away from the complete mastery in classical form he had achieved and maintained before hand.

Most contemporary theatre does not require the type of single-genre specialty that classical ballet requires. In fact, contemporary performance requires more flexibility from the actor than ever before as s/he moves, for example, from stage to screen, from realism to absurd, from text-based to movement-based theatre. As Lutterbie puts it:

Actors are *bricoleurs*. They pick up techniques wherever they can and add them to their storehouse of ‘I cans’ if they prove to be productive and supply an efficient means for resolving a problem. Insofar as they continue to be productive, each technique modifies the relations among neural networks, allowing for new resonations and new ways of engaging in performance, as an actor or dancer.³³

In other words, rather than developing a single heightened form of performance, which may develop the kind of physicality and presence suitable for a specific style or genre, the contemporary actor needs to develop the ability to constantly challenge her habitual ways of being in the world, no matter the form or style of the actual performance.

Shaun Gallagher’s theory of body image and body schema is an influential neuro-cognitive theory of the body that may help explain the operation of training on body and self. In his book *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Gallagher posits a clear distinction

³³ *Toward* 156.

between body image, the conscious knowledge of the body, and body schema, which structures the subconscious operation of the body. A body image “consists of a system of perceptions, attitudes and beliefs pertaining to one’s own body.”³⁴ Body image includes perceptual, conceptual and emotional content of our body in the world that “originates in intersubjective perceptual experience.”³⁵ Body Schema, on the other hand, is

a system of sensory-motor functions that operate below the level of self-referential intentionality. It involves a set of tacit performances – preconscious, subpersonal processes that play a dynamic role in governing posture and movement. In most instances, movement and the maintenance of posture are accomplished by the *close to automatic* performances of the body schema, and for this very reason the normal adult subject, in order to move around the world, neither needs nor has a constant body precept.³⁶

According to this understanding, psychophysical techniques initially operate on the level of body image, but this work may correspond with the body schema latently. That is, by heightening ones awareness of one’s body, “by monitoring or directing perceptual attention to limb position, movement, or posture, then such awareness helps to constitute the perceptual aspect of a body image. Such awareness may then interact with a body schema in complex ways, but it is not equivalent to a body schema itself.”³⁷ By promoting on-going training, then, teachers of psychophysical techniques such as Suzuki, Lecoq, and Viewpoints seek to shape the practitioners’ body image and through it to influence their body schema.

³⁴ 24.

³⁵ 26.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Gallagher articulates the entwinement of body and space in a particular way: “Perceiving subjects move through a space that is already pragmatically organized by the construction, the very shape, of the body. This space is neither isotropic nor absolute; it is defined relative to the perceiving body.”³⁸ If space operates for us as a pragmatic reflection of the way our body operates in the world,³⁹ and since verticality and horizontality are seen as essential aspects of human morphology, then heightening the body’s relationship to the horizontal and vertical creates heightened behavior through space. Thus, when attended from a heightened non-habitual stance, the vertical and horizontal intensify the specific ‘hereness’ of each moment. Through reiteration of varied relationships to the vertical and horizontal over extended periods of training, each technique enables the practitioner to develop heightened awareness of their body in/and space.

The importance of long-term training cannot be stressed enough as it is the only way of taking engagement with the vertical and horizontal beyond the operation of body image and instilling them to the level of body schema. Gallagher claims that

The various limitations involved in the conscious control of movement based on body image support the idea that the body image involves an abstract and partial perception of the body. Conscious attention can focus on only one part or area of the body at a time. One cannot attend to all aspects of bodily movement, and if one is forced to control movement by means of the body image, motility is slowed. The more complex the movement, that is, the more aspects of

³⁸ Gallagher, *How the Body* 140.

³⁹ An echo of this idea can also be found in Martin Heidegger’s “The Age of the World Picture.”

simultaneous bodily adjustments that require monitoring, the more difficult it is to perform.⁴⁰

By training in extreme vertical and horizontal spatial engagement, the practitioners first engage each one of them at a time. Through long-term training the vertical and horizontal engagement eventually become available without the need to attend to the body consciously – they sink into the level of body schema. In the learning of a new skill we first practice it consciously and later it becomes second nature. This frees the practitioners to attend to the particularities of the role they play, the *mise-en-scène*, their partners while still maintaining spatial presentness.

Before I go on to examine in practice what I have just articulated, some specific contextualization of space and of particular spaces is in order. The spaces in which I conducted my research, as any space would be, are specific studios, located in specific neighborhoods in Chicago. These are not neutral spaces; no space is. In this sense, and as my descriptions in the previous chapter show, each space framed the work itself, positioned it within a particular context and took part in shaping the praxis.⁴¹ The particularities of each space—the height of the ceiling, the light coming from the windows, the amount of space in relation to the number of participants in each session, the feel of the floor under my feet, the color of the walls and more—all shaped spatial experience and were partners in the various processes of training. Further, the experience

⁴⁰ 56.

⁴¹ Ric Knowles *Reading the Material Theatre* provides insight into the significant influence of these issues to any artistic or pedagogical process.

of a working space depends on the individuals working in it and their cultural, social, and artistic perspective.

Understanding the specific cultural origins of the techniques I use to examine presentness reveal some of the complexities that shape the perception of spatiality in practice. As I already established in chapter 1, all three techniques emerge out of clearly defined cultural contexts. That is, each technique shapes spatial engagement in its own culturally specific way. Suzuki is a particularly Japanese practice located at the seams of traditional and innovative theatre. Tadashi Suzuki claims that there is a particularly “tight relationship in Japanese culture between the body and space.”⁴² In the traditional Noh theatre, for example, the unchanged structure of the stage, the actors’ set and precise location and movement on the stage, and the dramatic structure of the play are all inseparable and synthesized. The relationship between the actor’s body and space remains, therefore, constant to the extent that, supposedly, the only element that differs between two productions of the same play lies in the invisible aspects of the performer’s self as revealed in the moment of performance – the performer’s presentness. In addition, Suzuki technique stresses the body’s connection to the ground as part of extreme verticality and linear shaping of the body. This connection among space, time, and the particular energy used by the actor, is seen as a central aspect of the practice; as explained by Leon Inglsrud: “The idea of the connection down and finding how to get the energy out of the ground almost literally, that you’re sucking energy out of your feet, is a really rich and interesting thing to explore. You’re placing yourself on the ground and the

⁴² In Sant 149.

way you connect to the ground – that’s the present moment.”⁴³ The particular and diverse connections to the ground being practiced, what Suzuki termed as the “Grammar of the Feet,”⁴⁴ draw on various cultural sources including Noh, Kabuki, ballet, flamenco, Kathakali, and Kendo, to name but a few.

Viewpoints, in contrast, has emerged in postmodern New-York art scene. Accordingly, its main spatial feature is horizontality and replacement of the centrality of the single individual body by the dispersion of several points of focus. I explore the “horizontal bias” in Viewpoints further below. The Lecoq approach, based on historical European styles that were developed into technique, cannot be spatially defined as clearly as Suzuki and Viewpoints since verticality and horizontality as well as the oblique, form a complex system of spatial references. Nevertheless, the Neutral Mask training bears some similarity to Suzuki in its relationship to verticality. Interestingly, the original design of the Neutral Mask itself “was inspired by the young girl mask from the Japanese Noh theatre: *Ko omote*.”⁴⁵ The expression on the Noh mask, particularly when the person wearing it holds his head vertically, is often described as being between two emotions. Curiously, the expression changes as the head is lowered or lifted up.⁴⁶

In the rest of this chapter I examine the horizontal and the vertical in the praxis of Suzuki, Viewpoints, and Lecoq, beginning with an examination of the Suzuki technique which provides the most clear-cut example of the use of the vertical and horizontal for

⁴³ Suzuki/Viewpoints Workshop, Link’s Hall, 6 Aug. 2009.

⁴⁴ See the first chapter of Suzuki’s *The Way of Acting*, p. 3-24.

⁴⁵ Wright, John. “The Masks of Jacques Lecoq.” In Chamberlain and Yarrow 76.

⁴⁶ I was given a demonstration of this effect by Donato Sartori (son of Amleto Sartori who designed the original Neutral Mask) in his studio at Abano Terme, Italy, in July 2003.

developing presentness. I then turn to a comparison and analysis of the work on the neutral state in Lecoq technique, particularly when including the Neutral Mask. Neutrality in movement, I intend to show, is linked to verticality of the body and to developing horizontal attention, a link that can be vividly traced in both Suzuki and Lecoq practices. In this comparison I also apply some of the cognitive theories I mention above. Verticality is less apparently codified into the Viewpoints technique where a non-habitual sensory-motor focus on the horizontal takes the fore to enable a different kind of presentness.

Suzuki

In the Suzuki technique, the practitioner trains in strict forms of standing, walking and sitting. In this section I focus on the way Suzuki practitioners train in vertically positioning the body in tandem with developing a clear horizontal attention. These two elements become the constant embodied reference point, anchors to which the actor pays attention no matter the exercise or form s/he performs. In fact, each movement sequence acts as a particular obstacle to this specific attention, forcing the actor to sharpen and heighten their connection to the vertical and horizontal.

Suzuki is certainly a codified technique. However, in its use outside of Suzuki's company (SCOT) it does not supply a codified system of performance, only of training. In SCOT, many exercises that have become an integral part of the technique were initially developed as movement sequences for specific productions and were later

adapted for training purposes. The technique, then, serves as the aesthetic platform for SCOT and not only as a training regime. In contrast, in the SITI training and most Suzuki training outside of SCOT, a practitioner is not expected to use onstage the forms s/he learns in training. While SCOT actors do not use any other technique for the creation of their plays, most Suzuki practitioners elsewhere combine the Suzuki with other techniques and approaches. As Scott T. Cummings notes, in the SITI Company Viewpoints and Suzuki “are not fused into one; they are taught side by side, establishing a kind of synaptic gap that asks to be bridged by the individual actor, who in the process must take increased responsibility for what he or she does, in mastering the work or in creating a performance.”⁴⁷ The SITI Company Viewpoints training balances and interacts with the influence of the Suzuki training on the actor’s body. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that SITI’s creative process is closely related to the practice of Viewpoints, while the Suzuki technique, in the context of the creative process, is used primarily to examine text on an individual psychophysical level.⁴⁸ In addition, almost all the SITI actors⁴⁹ have been previously trained in more mainstream North American approaches and incorporate them in the creative process.

The codification and exactitude of form in Suzuki is used to heighten psychophysical awareness, gaining precision and specificity in the sensory-motor

⁴⁷ 108.

⁴⁸ I witnessed this process when training with the SITI Company in NYC in fall 2006. As part of the company’s preparation for work on “Radio Macbeth” they incorporated into the training texts from the Scottish play and were keen on discovering possibilities that emerged by passing the text through bodies in practice.

⁴⁹ Akiko Aizawa is the only SITI member who never trained in any Stanislavsky originated technique.

apparatus. Invoking Peter Brook's model for the essential theatrical act,⁵⁰ Barba adds the heightened aspect to Brooks' equation, exemplifying how this may be implemented:

It's enough that the actor is still walking from one place to another on the stage, but can he be so precise that each step he takes is one centimeter shorter than the previous one. If he can do this, then he must be present in his action. What makes a codified technique so important is that each action obliges the actor to be present at all times, not to anticipate these actions. The mind must be in the action. It doesn't even have to be a great stylization; perhaps you wouldn't even notice it.⁵¹

Barba correlates the actor's physical exactitude to her presentness. He implies that for such a precise movement to occur, body and mind connection must be firmly established and take part in the execution. How, then, is this achieved in the Suzuki training?

At the beginning of the SITI Company workshop held at Link's Hall in Chicago the Suzuki instructor, Akiko Aizawa⁵², demonstrated the first stance.⁵³ In this position the heels touch one another, the toes are apart in about a 90 degree angle, the inside of the legs touch one another to create slight muscular tension and the body is straight.⁵⁴ The hands are held at the side of the hips, forming an unclosed fist, as if holding two poles. These imaginary poles are held parallel to the floor and to one another and the arms should be relaxed but energized, not flabby.⁵⁵ To demonstrate the essence of this position Aizawa took a 3 foot long dowel and first positioned it close to the front of her body,

⁵⁰ See chapter 1.

⁵¹ Barba 15-16.

⁵² Aizawa is a member of the SITI Company and a former member of the Suzuki Company.

⁵³ Workshop, Link's Hall, 2011.

⁵⁴ See also Allain 102. In his description, Allain claims that "[t]his is ballet's 'first position.'" While Suzuki himself attests to the influence of ballet, among other codified styles, on his technique, it would be more accurate to say that Suzuki's first stance is a variation based on ballet's first position.

⁵⁵ For other descriptions of the First Stance see Allain 102.

pointing from below the navel straight down to the floor. She explained that in this stance, and in Suzuki technique generally, we try to position our body along a vertical straight line that connects the gravitational center of the body to the center of the earth. The center is a place in the body located “between the hips [...] just below the bellybutton.”⁵⁶ In a correct First Stance this vertical line goes down through the point on the floor where the heels meet and continues up through the center of the body along the spine and through the top of the head. With the stick Aizawa showed us how this line cuts through the front of her body, then turned her full body profile to us and marked this line along the side of her body, connecting her heels, center and the top of her head. Maintaining this line in training and working in relationship to it is at the core of the technique because, among other things, it develops the actor’s awareness of exactly where s/he is in space and for fully committing to being there. In other words, this essential aspect of Suzuki training leads the practitioner to be in constant and direct contact with a precise ‘here’; it is the practice of an embodied spatial present.

The vertical line is defined by the gravitational center of the body while the rest of the body operates and is structured in relationship to it.⁵⁷ According to this definition, then, an actor is where the center of her body is and as long as there is a vertical line connecting her center to a known location on the floor—e.g. where the heels meet in the First Stance—this position is also precisely marked in space. Leon Ingsrud’s explanation illustrates this point vividly: “When you’re standing on a balcony and extend your arm outside *you* are still on the balcony. If you lean over slightly, you’d still be on the balcony

⁵⁶ Carruthers and Takahashi 80.

⁵⁷ See also, Barba and Savarese 38.

up until the point when the center of your body, the balancing point, moves and crosses over to the other side. At that point *you* are no longer on the balcony, even if your feet still are. In a way, you are then off the balcony, holding on to it.”⁵⁸ As implied by Inglsrud, the location of the center indicates a singular locus for the individual, who can only be in one precise point at one time. This uncompromising commitment to one’s precise location, to a specific spatial presentness that is embodied and attended to, recur in most of the Suzuki exercises and is one of the most important and basic elements of the technique.

Traditionally, the first exercise in the first stance requires the actor to move the center of her body down and then up along the vertical line s/he had established when standing. By letting their knees bend to the sides and the heels rise from the floor, the actors move their center down to the lowest point they are able to reach without releasing the weight of the body onto the raised heels. The structure of the upper body, from the center and up, should remain unaffected by this movement, maintaining the same energized yet relaxed posture it had in relationship to the vertical line. This movement is done in unison with the entire group to the instructor’s count; the duration of the count is proclaimed just before s/he gives the cue.⁵⁹ After going down and reaching a moment of stillness in the lower position, the same sequence of queuing and counting is used for going back up to standing with straight legs. Going up and down in the first stance is practiced with various durations as the instructor may count to ten, fifteen, five, two and one, as well as give an abrupt vocal cue, a clap or a bang of a stick on the floor, to signal

⁵⁸ Workshop, Link’s Hall, 2009.

⁵⁹ It sounds something like this: “going down on a count to [...] One, two, three, four, [...]”

an immediate motion.⁶⁰ In all of these instances the upper body should sustain its vertical, still, energized, and relaxed structure.

Maintaining the upper body in relaxed alignment while the legs strain to move the center up and down along the vertical line threatens to throw the actor off balance and away from that vertical line. The struggle to keep the center and the upper body still and vertical against the challenge of the exercise, all the muscular and postural adjustments the actor needs to do when trying to remain vertical, reaffirm the clarity and exactitude of the actor's spatial presentness. In other words, in this exercise, as in many of the Suzuki exercises, the actor tries to sustain a definite and still 'here' against strong forces enacted by the non-habitual movements of the exercises. The forces against which the actor attempts to stay vertically still are created mainly by movements of the legs and feet. These forces blur the actor's sense of spatial presentness forcing her to constantly refocus her attention and awareness of her exact 'here'.

As mentioned, alignment and elongation are usually considered the starting point of most physical training for actors and are an important part of most warm-ups. Yet the centrality of the vertical in Suzuki training goes beyond serving as a starting point or a relaxation and focusing positioning in preparation for work. Suzuki takes the commitment to the vertical to an extreme in an attempt to instill it in the performer as a constant "zero point of orientation"⁶¹ for the actor in her body. The entire structure of the body is constantly examined in relationship to this line. This uncompromising stance

⁶⁰ As with all the instances I will discuss, experience of time cannot truly be separate from space. Still, by focusing solely on the spatial aspects of the training I am able to reveal their particular influence on practitioners.

⁶¹ Husserl 12.

towards the vertical body takes into account the inevitability of the body's failure to constantly achieve such pure verticality.⁶² The Suzuki exercises create a shared objective embodied reference that is experienced individually through each practitioner's personal struggle. Verticality, thus, becomes the individual's gateway into a universal sense of human experience, a notion that relates strongly to Lecoq's idea of permanency.⁶³ From this vertical body, which in time becomes a habitual embodied reference for the work, the actor's heightened attention and responsiveness to her surrounding can be developed on the horizontal plane.

After her explanation and demonstration of the body's relationship to the vertical, Aizawa went on to position another stick pointing straight from her center forward to demonstrate where the focus point of her attention was. The eyes and face, she explains, rather than lead our focus of attention, should join this horizontal straight line connecting the center of the body and a point straight in front of it. The imaginary poles the actors hold in their hands also take part in marking this horizontal relationship to their surrounding by being parallel to the floor and pointing straight forward. Habitually, Aizawa argues, we direct our attention and therefore our action according to the direction of the face, detached from the connection our center has to the space around us. In this type of quotidian attention the nexus of the person's interaction with the surrounding, the place in our body that affects our environment and is affected by it, is in the head, specifically the face. However, the head is a peripheral part of our body mass, quite removed from the gravitational center. The center is not only considered the pinpoint

⁶² See Inglsrud's quote in chapter 1, p. 36. I explore the idea of failure in training in chapter 5.

⁶³ See below.

location of the individual, as we have seen, but also the point from which all movement originates. The habitual ‘heady’ interaction is weak because it often excludes the rest of the body.⁶⁴ In opposition, an interaction originating from the center inevitably includes the entire body, making it spatially stronger. Linking the head, particularly the focus of our gaze, with the center of the body in fact connects the site of our main sensory apparatus—including sight, hearing, smell, taste as well as the balance system in the inner ear—with the entire body, thus heightening the actor’s ability for a fully embodied sensory-motor responsiveness.

The connection made with the focus point on the horizon and the ‘fiction’ is of immense importance in Suzuki training.⁶⁵ Cummings’ short explanation represents the common understanding of this issue in the North American context:

Newcomers to Suzuki work are often coached to put their attention outside of themselves, on some point on the horizon or an imagined other [fiction], both as a way of building a kind of mental toughness and of reminding them that, even at the earliest stages, this is a practice for performance and therefore a form of interaction intended to be watched by others.⁶⁶

Cummings understates the importance of the particular gaze practiced in Suzuki training and its connection to the horizontal. This understatement likely originates from an understanding of the Suzuki technique as practiced in tandem with the Viewpoints and therefore completing Suzuki’s physical accuracy with training that focuses on developing

⁶⁴ I should stress that by “heady” I mean that the head physically leads. Describing an actor’s behavior as “heady” in a different context may refer to too much thinking and conscious deliberation as opposed to being responsive. For example, Tina Landau uses it in opposition to Viewpoints work: “By using the Viewpoints fully, we give up our own heady decisions and judgments.” (24)

⁶⁵ See also chapter 1.

⁶⁶ Cummings 118.

other abilities. It can be argued that for a novice practitioner the work of imagination and partnering in Suzuki might not be of the same importance as focusing on her center and on the form the body takes during the exercise. Achieving and maintaining the form in Suzuki often seem to be the most challenging part for any practitioner. This could also be the result of the fact that this technique is learned in short term workshops and is rarely integrated as ongoing training in actor-training programs and theatre companies.

Therefore, going deeper to involve conscious imaginative and communicative aspects of the technique is limited as long as the practitioner struggles with the initial challenges of the form. However, the form is there precisely as an obstacle and a challenge to what is arguably of utter importance – the non-habitual connection between the actor (who is here, in the vertical) and the fiction/other (who is there, on the horizontal).

The Fiction is placed in a precise focus point in front of the actor's eyes, usually at eye level or a bit above it on the studio wall. As its name suggests, the fiction is an imaginary partner on which the actor's eyes and center are focused "in a soft but intense focus which allows use of peripheral vision without turning the head."⁶⁷ This gaze seems similar to the soft focus practiced in Viewpoints.⁶⁸ In more advanced training the participants are instructed to play with the fiction's distance, focusing on close, medium and far fictional partners. Using a fictional partner who is positioned in a specific spatial relationship to the practitioner while performing precise physical routines helps to develop strong psychophysical engagement while reinforcing the synthesis of the sensory-motor apparatus.

⁶⁷ Carruthers and Takahashi 79.

⁶⁸ Bogart and Landau 31. I discuss the soft focus below.

In order to embody the connection between the center and the sensorial “headquarters” located in the head, Aizawa led an exercise in which we were to move our point of focus on cue from being straight in front of us slightly to the right and back, then to the left and back. This should happen without changing the position of the feet on the floor, while the center leads rather than the eyes or head. That is, we are to move the horizontal line that crosses our center while the rest of the upper body, head and eyes included, joins the movement by simply resting upon the center and following it.

It is not my first Suzuki workshop with SITI Company, yet it is the first time I had ever encountered this exercise. It immediately forced me to pay attention not only to where I am exactly—to the location of the center and the vertical line—but also to my relationship to the space around me and most importantly to my embodied connection with my point of focus. Initially, I was still bound by my habits – my movement was led by my gaze, leaving the center and most of my body behind. My center did shift but my gaze went even further to the side. I didn’t shift the focus of my embodied interaction with the ‘fiction’ but simply looked to the side. My body was left behind. I wanted the shift in the focus point, there, on the horizon, to be large and noticeable. But as a result my embodied shift was diminished. I think we were all trapped in this mode of casual, easy, uncommitted interaction.

After being made aware of this disconnect, I slowly worked toward reconnecting my gaze and my center. Trying to let go of my need to lead with the eyes, I was letting go of the need to see the shift and control it; trying not to decide on the point where I’m

going to stop. I found that when the center is leading the movement to the side is restricted by the connection of the lower body to the unmoving feet. Initially, then, the shift seemed too subtle in comparison with the flexibility of the neck to move further to the side. But in those few moments I was able to truly let the center take the lead, this subtle movement felt like it was moving the space around me; it didn't need to be big for it to have a strong spatial effect.⁶⁹

I have since then used this exercise often when teaching Suzuki workshops and it proves to be particularly challenging, even though it is comparatively easy on the body. The challenge to our way of relating to the world around us, creating a change in our acquired sensory-motor skill, is different from challenges posed by physically difficult exercises that require strength and coordination. Rather than teaching the body either to perform new movement forms or, on the other hand, to explore fresh sensorial modalities, this exercise stresses the experience of a heightened synthesis of the two. It thus reinforces the seams connecting these entwined aspects of our embodied experience, the psycho-physical as well as the sensory-motor. Among the various skills developed through Suzuki training, reinforcing psychophysical awareness is a base line that crosses through all the exercises.

The vertical and horizontal lines meet at the center of the body. According to Carruthers and Takahashi “to create a sense of ‘presence,’ the actor needs at all times an artificial sense of resistance in the *hara* [center]. It is the home of the breath, the platform

⁶⁹ Personal notes, 30 May 2011.

on which we place our torso, the center of gravity.”⁷⁰ Mere awareness of the center, then, is not enough. Resistance is created by making the center the fulcrum point of various opposing forces. On the vertical line, the constant opposition between gravity’s pull downward and the torso’s pull upwards to maintain verticality creates a natural up-down tension which the training heightens and intensifies, as the example of going up and down in the First Stance demonstrates. Further, the attempt to keep the upper body vertical and its basic structure still and relaxed while the feet perform strong abrupt motions up, down, forward, backwards or sideways, creates resistance on the horizontal plane. Another tension implied is between strong lower body and relaxed upper body. Suzuki terms the upper body, from the center and up, the expressive body; and the lower body below the center, the animal body. The expressive body, sometimes referred to as the ‘lyrical body’ by SITI members, must remain relaxed and available at all times when acting. It is where the expressiveness of emotion, voice, and breathe is manifest – that is why it must release any muscular tension downwards. The lower body, on the other hand, is strong enough to take-on all the tension that is compressed around the center and direct it into the ground.

Eugenio Barba demonstrates how the tension of oppositions appears in various heightened performance forms, such as ballet or Kathakali, operating not only between the upper and lower body, but also among spatial elements, between art and life as well as aspects of techniques.⁷¹ The “split body” of ballet can serve as an example of a similar use of the center as dividing the body into upper and lower parts that operate spatially in

⁷⁰ Carruthers and Takahashi 80.

⁷¹ *Paper* 22-24.

ostensibly different ways. However, while ballet, even when practiced merely for attaining certain physical skills, is seen first and foremost as a dance style, Suzuki is not practiced as an acting or movement style. It has been repeatedly stressed in training by SITI members that one does not go onstage and performs Suzuki exercises. In fact, the only place one can find elements from Suzuki training methodically implemented into performance is the Suzuki Company.⁷² In ballet training one maintains the split body in performance, making it part of the aesthetics of the genre, while Suzuki trained actors are not expected to actively pursue it onstage.

If we were to explore all the different ways in which the center may be affected by Suzuki exercises (and with it the vertical and horizontal), we would have to analyze and examine each and every motion in minute detail to uncover the play of forces in operation against the vertical and the horizontal. For example, learning the exercise called Basic number 1 begins with a quick motion of the center to the right on a horizontal line while the right foot stomps on the floor at the stopping point and the upper body remains vertical and relaxed on top of it.⁷³ This abrupt motion and immediate stop challenge vertical stillness on the right-left axis. In addition, the stomp at the end of the movement creates an up-down tension on the vertical line. In contrast, in the Basic number 2 there is a similar motion of the center on the horizontal with a sliding of one foot underneath it,

⁷² While we assume that technique feeds performance, in the case of Suzuki it is often the opposite. Through the year-long, on-going process of assimilating and (re)structuring his technique, Suzuki often borrowed particular staged moments that were created in rehearsals and formed them into an exercise. An example of that is the duck-walk which was created by one of the actors as a solution for the way of walking of a particularly small role with several quick entrances and exits.

⁷³ I learned this exercise in two versions. In the early version, the starting position was with straight legs and the movement of the center to the side meant the center moves down a bit. In the second version, the starting position was with bent knees so that with the movement of the center to the side, it could maintain the same height. I usually teach the second version and this is the one I am referring to.

this time forward. The forward sliding motion followed by a stop, creates a completely different set of forces, operating on the front-back axis, affecting both the body's verticality and the horizontal focus in a particular way. Since attempting to follow a deep analysis of all the forms in Suzuki is beyond the scope of this research, I analyze in more detail one of the 'signature' elements of Suzuki technique – the stomp. With this analysis I hope to uncover some of the ways in which the stomp affects the center: the kinetic forces applied to it; the bio-mechanics of the body as the actor struggles to maintain its stillness; and how this affects the actor's spatial presentness. The stomp presents one of the clearest examples of the way Suzuki technique heightens the embodied present of the body in space. It forces the practitioner to mark the 'hereness' of the body, awakening spatial presentness.

In the starting position for stomping the feet are close together, the legs are slightly bent, pressed lightly against one another, and the upper body is in its usual vertical position. Stomping in place, each segment of motion should be performed quickly while only the legs move. The first part of the stomp is a simple lifting of one knee in a quick upward-forward motion. When done habitually outside of Suzuki training, it would engage various parts of the body: the arms, back and pelvis as well as the standing leg will all participate in the act. For instance, the opposing shoulder and arm would move forward as the knee rises, and the standing leg would probably slightly straighten up with the upward motion of the knee. These movements are the body's way of balancing itself and compensating for the forces that operate in one part of the body by moving another part. In the Suzuki stomp this lifting of the knee is immediately followed

by quickly lowering of the foot to the ground. This quick opposing movement naturally creates an opposing response in the rest of the body. And, when the foot hits the ground in a clap yet another change happens. The first instinct of the body is to go down with the foot that is dropping to the floor, like punctuation. Once the contact with floor is complete, the energy the foot sends down is received and sent back up through the now standing leg. This may straighten the legs up resulting in a large motion of the center. All this complex sequence, however, should not affect the upper body, from the center up. That is, these changing physical forces are all stopped at the center of the body, which should remain unmoved, allowing the upper body to be in ‘relaxed readiness.’⁷⁴ The opposition of forces at work charges the center with energy which, according to Suzuki, creates presence. It creates a strong spatial engagement of the pelvic area, in spite of its stillness. Physically, we can talk about kinetic energy created by the movement in the lower body and operating along the vertical line of the body. This energy is held at the center so that it does not affect the upper body. Holding the energy in the center enables the practitioner to resist the adjustments that the upper body would naturally do in response to such abrupt movements.

One of the ways in which the stomp has been described in the practice is as marking the actor’s location in space. When an actor stomps in place, the center of her body apparently remains unmoved, both in relation to the floor and to the rest of the space around her. The upper body which rests upon the center should likewise be physically unaffected and remain still. However, if we take a closer look at the

⁷⁴ The term “relaxed readiness” is often used without explanation in actor training. Various approaches suggest different ways of achieving it; see Barton 32-60, Loui 44, Zinder 74.

distribution of weight we see that even if a practitioner manages to hold in her center the shifting up-down forces occurring on the vertical, there is movement on the horizontal plane that cannot be completely avoided. Standing in preparation to stomp, the weight of the body is distributed between the two feet. When the stomping foot is raised, 100% of the weight naturally has to go on the standing foot. For that to happen there has to be a horizontal shift in the center's location from being straight above the point between the feet, weight distributed 50% to each foot, to being fully above the standing foot. As the stomping foot comes down to the floor the weight is immediately distributed again, as it takes the weight of the body onto it. This happens by moving the center of the body as the foot lands, reestablishing the location of the vertical. This process goes on as the stomping continues. Through the process of training in this form, these minor shifts in the location of the center and with it the vertical become noticeable to the actor with each stomp. Attempting to minimize and control these inevitable shifts in order to make them unnoticeable to an observer enhances the actor's awareness to her center's location. In a way, it can be seen as training to perform 'inner movement'. The inner movement is in effect spatial engagement by which the actor can affect her surrounding even without apparently being in motion.

According to Suzuki's philosophy, stomping in place can be seen as training in charged stillness. The movement of the legs and feet is regarded as the invisible aspect of one's presence while the (attempted) complete stillness of the center and upper body is the visible and expressive part. Training in this way enables the actor to simply stand motionless and still be spatially active by maintaining a kind of 'inner' movement. By

charging the center in vertical resistance to the up-down motion of the legs and feet, it becomes the center of opposing forces which is translated in time into presence.

When stomping is done as a walk across space or as part of the Stomping Shakuhachi exercise,⁷⁵ the actor faces yet another challenge that increases the embodied punctuation of her spatial presentness. As the music plays and the actor crosses the space with the stomps, once again each stomp marks a specific 'here'. O'Hanlon states that "in stomping, because it's continuous, one thing that might be helpful is that the reason that you stomp, is the confirmation of where you are in space. I'm here, [he stomp] I'm here [he stomps]."⁷⁶ As opposed to stomping in one place, this time each here marks an apparent new location. In the Suzuki walks,

While the movement across the floor may appear steady and smooth to an observer, each step is approached independently with the same start-and-stop action that defines [the stationary exercises]. Motion is initiated and then halted, initiated and halted. The momentary break between steps is not a rest or a release. The flow of energy is continuous through the flicker of stillness.⁷⁷

Unlike stomping in place, this time each 'here' is marked not only by a subtly new position of the center shifting from one foot to another, but also by an observable new position in space. With each stomp, the surge of energy sent from the floor through the body awakens the practitioner's sensory-motor awareness of each new spatial present. At the same time, the center moves in a flow toward the focus point with unchanging speed and height, as if drawing a continuous straight line across space. This is the same

⁷⁵ This exercise is described in chapter 4, p. 211.

⁷⁶ SITI workshop, Link's Hall, Chicago, 12 August, 2009.

⁷⁷ Cummings 121.

horizontal line that connects both the gaze and the center to the fiction. The upper body should move along with the center as if floating above it even as the feet bang on the floor underneath. The constant tension between the continuous flow of movement of the center along with the vertical upper body and the strong punctuation of each spatial present in each stomp reaffirms the connection between the horizontal and the vertical to a fully embodied spatial presentness.

Similarly, in the stomping exercise the actor practices the tension between movement and stillness, enabling them to exist alongside one another. A still body affords a stronger singular focus, better stability and control, while a moving body is more dynamic, changing. There is a distinct quality of presence to each. By practicing stillness in movement and movement in stillness the practitioner develops her ability to have the quality of one type of presentness enrich an activity from which it is usually absent. It may help a practitioner to stay dynamic and responsive, affecting the space around her, even when s/he is merely standing motionless onstage. At the same time an actor who ‘merely’ walks across the stage may gain greater engagement with the space in each point on the way, infusing every step with presentness. The various tensions I describe here are essential principles that recur in all Suzuki exercises. Each different exercise is designed to “ask the body [a different] question”⁷⁸ by challenging the vertical and horizontal in different ways.

Stomping, like all other Suzuki walks, is done to the sound of loud music with a fast repeatable stressed beat. As the actor stomps to the music, each stomp also marks a

⁷⁸ Inglisrud, workshop, 5 Aug. 2009.

specific now, stressing each moment as a distinct temporal present. As with any experience, the experience of time in Suzuki training cannot truly be divided from that of space. The discussion about the practice of temporal presentness is elaborated in the next chapter. In the next section of this chapter I turn to examine spatial presentness of the vertical and horizontal in Lecoq's training, focusing mostly on the Neutral Mask work. As part of the discussion I draw parallels between the underlying principles of the work on the neutral and Suzuki practice.

Lecoq's Neutral

The first year of Lecoq's two-year training program is focused on learning movement analysis. The neutral state is the starting point for this first year and what underlies the entire process of training. It thus becomes the most essential aspect of Lecoq's approach. It continues to inform the students' training processes in the second year and is regarded as a baseline for the actors' future creative work. According to Lecoq, "when a student has experienced this neutral starting point his body will be freed, like a blank page on which drama can be inscribed."⁷⁹ The neutral, however, should not be seen as a state in which nothing happens, a state of blankness. It is more like white light, which is perceived as having no color but in fact contains all the colors, all of which can be exposed through the right prisms. The neutral state, hence, holds the potential for discovering character as well as physical or dramatic situation. It is a state of high potential in which anything could happen, where the balance is always on the verge of

⁷⁹ Lecoq, *Moving* 36.

being broken: “a state of great readiness and energy, not a state of non-presence.”⁸⁰

Further, it is “the state in which you are most ready to react to the slightest stimulus, [...] a state in which your useful energy is free to move or react in any way required.”⁸¹

We can trace concepts similar to the neutral in the terminologies of other psychophysical practitioners. Like the neutral state, Barba’s *pre-expressive* state is meant to erase personal habits and idiosyncrasies.⁸² Another clear connection can be made between training in the neutral state and Grotowski’s *via negativa*. Grotowski describes the actor’s ideal state in the *via negativa* as “a passive readiness to realize as active role, a state in which one does not ‘*want to do that*’ but rather ‘*resigns from not doing it*’.”⁸³ In both the neutral work and the *via negativa* one attempts to shed one’s physical and mental habits, the inscription of cultural and societal norms on one’s body. Thus, in the quest for neutrality there is a step towards encountering the world without judgment or opinion, and responding to it from a place of “primal naïveté.”⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Lecoq foregrounds verticality and horizontality, connecting it directly to the neutral state and the Neutral Mask work, in comparison to both Barba and Grotowski’s respectively more metaphorical conception.

Lecoq claims that “The neutral mask puts one in touch with what belongs to everyone, and then the nuances appear all the more forcefully. These are not nuances of

⁸⁰ Martin 61.

⁸¹ Benedetti, Robert 43.

⁸² Barba, *Paper* 40.

⁸³ In Hayman 225

⁸⁴ Lecoq, *Moving* 29.

character, but all the little differences which separate one performer from another.”⁸⁵ Although “each person’s neutrality is his own”⁸⁶ there is a shared fulcrum point to which all individual practitioners strive in training. The actor responds to such shared spatial elements—the vertical body, the horizontal plane—by first discovering the distance the body has to go in order to get near such neutral, arguably non-human, elements. This is not meant as a form of erasing individuality. It is, rather, a form of cleaning the noise of the habitual and mundane in order to start creating from a clean slate. The noise comes in the form of tensions, habits, a particular walk, a twist of the pelvis. At first these aspects of behavior get magnified by the Neutral Mask, as if it focuses our attention on the quirks and particularities of the body, the stories it tells about us. Then, after moving closer to reducing this noise through training the actors can start telling stories they would not habitually be able to tell.

When talking about the universality of the vertical and horizontal as part of the neutral, an important element in Lecoq’s philosophy is *permanency*. Lecoq claims to have

a strong belief in permanency, in the ‘Tree of trees’, the ‘Mask of masks’, the balance that sums up perfect harmony. I realize that this tendency of mine may become an obstacle, but it is one that is necessary. Starting from an accepted reference point, which is neutral, the students discover their own point of view. Of course there is no such thing as absolute and universal neutrality, it is only a temptation.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Lecoq, *Moving* 41.

⁸⁶ Eldredge and Huston 143.

⁸⁷ Lecoq, *Moving* 20.

In this quote Lecoq raises, once again, the tension between the necessity for posing a permanent, universal horizon for the practitioners while acknowledging that this horizon, the permanency, cannot ever be reached. The vertical and horizontal are the impossible permanencies of space and spatial experience that serve to reveal individual neutrality.

Talking about neutral bodies may raise scholars' resistance and suspicion.

Neutrality suggests a possibility of a non- or pre-cultural state, or an essentialist, positivist, or primitivist approach that goes against most basic assumptions and beliefs of theorists in our discipline. Indeed, the discourse of many teachers who use the neutral in their work may point to notions such as a pre-cultural self that is to be discovered. Laura Purcell Gates, whose dissertation focuses on Philippe Gaulier's approach to Lecoq training, claims that "erasure of individual personality and physical or emotional past is central to the Neutral Mask."⁸⁸ Such an approach may indeed raise questions as to what remains of, for example, cultural specificity, agency, or intentionality. This clear-cut approach may be necessary for motivating practitioners to commit to the training. However, in Coletto's case this approach to practice often came with caveats such as "The floor is neutral, flat. Your body isn't. It is shaped by life, by injuries, by your encounter with the world."⁸⁹ Thus the essentialism that underlies the idea of neutrality is put in tension with idea more akin to the one fostered by performance scholars. Arguably, this tension between universal and individual aspects of embodiment is at the core of psychophysical praxis. It appeared repeatedly in Coletto's work when she denied the

⁸⁸ Purcell Gates "Tout" 124-5.

⁸⁹ Coletto, clown workshop, 27 Oct. 2010.

existence of the neutral state in the midst of work revolving around finding the neutral state.

Neutrality, the neutral state, and the work with the Neutral Mask, serve as shared reference points to which all practitioners can relate from their individual points of view. In the process of practicing neutrality “the student must look for the condition of neutrality within himself. Since bodies are unique, each person’s neutrality is his own: there is no single pattern.”⁹⁰ Verticality and horizontality are the zero axes of this embodied neutrality. By pushing against such commonly perceived sensory-motor references each distinct individual point of view, cultural bias, and personal history is stressed and each individual relationship to it becomes clearly apparent.

The Neutral Mask is alternatively named the mask of masks, mask of calmness, mask of humanity, mask of balance, mask of reference. Coletto claims that “the neutral mask asks for the vertical. I heard somewhere that according to Buddhism the present exists just on the vertical line. And the Neutral Mask works on the vertical. Only on the vertical.”⁹¹ John Wright claims that it “maintains a point of equilibrium. The mask captures an expression at the moment it is about to change;”⁹² and Toby Wilsher asserts that “a good neutral mask will portray a serenity, a stillness that can also suggest sudden or dynamic movement.”⁹³ The mask, then, maintains balanced tension between stillness

⁹⁰ Eldredge and Huston in Zarrilli, *Acting* 143.

⁹¹ Personal interview, 27 Apr. 2010.

⁹² Wright 76.

⁹³ Wilsher 157.

and movement, blankness and expressivity.⁹⁴ This tension is reminiscent of the actor's state in Suzuki training. The use of masks in Lecoq's pedagogy goes beyond the Neutral Mask. The concept of the mask itself, it should be clarified, is more than a name for an object put on the face:

A mask is a structure of movement. In theatre everything is a mask. A character is a mask, a costume is a mask, the clown is a mask, the red nose is a mask, even the scenography is a mask – a mask of the space. A mask is something that reveals a body that is other than the body of the performer. It is an architecture, a shape, and I would say an energy field [...] By learning how to move a mask, the actor learns how to be present in space and how to manipulate it towards a variety of theatrical genres.⁹⁵

The Neutral Mask, then, is a structure of movement that corresponds to the structure of the Neutral Mask in that it is built around balance. I now turn to examine some of the ways in which Coletto approaches verticality and horizontality in training.

One of the first steps in preparation to the work with the Neutral Mask in Paola Coletto's workshops includes the use of sticks (broomsticks or shorter similar diameter dowels). According to Coletto, "The work with the stick is designed to make us understand how far we are from the neutral. The purpose is to get close to that neutral and then you realize: Oh, from here I can create this range of 'non-neutrals.' But the body remembers that 'state'."⁹⁶ Each participant works with a stick, using it against her back in various ways. In the first step the actor lies on top of the stick that is put along the spine

⁹⁴ Lecoq claims that it is very difficult to manufacture a good neutral mask and makes it particularly clear that the plastic white masks cannot replace a well balanced mask. According to him a good neutral mask is "alive" while the white masks are usually "dead."

⁹⁵ Fusetti and Wilson 96.

⁹⁶ Coletto, personal interview, 27 Apr. 2010.

from the tail bone to the head. While lying, the actor pays attention to the gaps between her spine and the stick and starts awakening her awareness to the curvature of the body juxtaposed to the neutral straight line of the stick. The actors are then instructed to breathe into these gaps and un-forcefully minimize them thus shortening the distance between their naturally curved spine and a straight neutral stick. By gently pressing and relaxing into this objective shape the actor can discover the personal distance and difference between her body and a fixed, unattainable neutral verticality.⁹⁷ Later the participants move around the studio space with the stick held against their spine by a partner, noticing the sensation of the straight line in motion.

The vertical is then reiterated without the use of the stick. Standing in pairs, one person gently pulls up the head of another person by positioning one hand under the lower jaw bone and another hand on the bone structure above the back of the neck. The sensation of the spine lengthening is immediate. It feels as though the spine hangs from the upper vertebrae and is pulled up by the skull against gravity. From this standing position the person being elongated starts to walk while still held and pulled up by his or her partner. While walking, the partner who pulls the head up gently releases her grip as the person working tries to maintain the upward pull sensation.

As the participants attempt to maintain their verticality, the first thing that I notice is that their gaze becomes glazed, their awareness of their surrounding is minimal, and their entire attention directed inward to their own posture. In addition, muscular tension

⁹⁷ Similarly, the stick is placed across the body, under the shoulder line and under the tail bone. Pushing against it in these two places reveals the personal tendency of the shoulders and pelvic position respectively.

appears in the shoulders, chest, neck and arms. The body's response to its heightened verticality initially results in reduced attention to the environment and in muscular tension. The body-directed attention, which Coletto calls 'looking into your bellybutton,' is similar to what happens in the Suzuki technique when practitioners first practice one of the basics or formed walks. The attention naturally goes to the body and the outward attention almost disappears.

The restructuring of the body in training is not meant to permanently change the habitual body of the actor. As Coletto commented in one of her workshops right after the work with the sticks "we're not trying to fix anything. You're great as you are, there's nothing to fix."⁹⁸ However, the more a practitioner trains in the neutral, the more their body learns of the distance between her body and the vertical and trains in closing this gap as a *starting point* for the work, each time anew. According to Lecoq, from this vertical starting point the actor can then learn to move in ways that challenge her habitual body. In spite of Coletto's claim that she does not attempt to change the practitioners' habitual body, change is unavoidable. This happens because ongoing training first shapes our body image, but with time may affect the body schema as well. According to Gallagher, "body image sometimes has an effect on the postural or motor performances of body schemas. The dancer or Athlete who practices long and hard to make deliberate movements proficient so that movement is finally accomplished by the body without conscious reflection uses a consciousness of bodily movement to train body schematic

⁹⁸ Workshop, 17 Dec. 2009.

performance.”⁹⁹ Such an effect, then, can occur through long-term training in precise forms that penetrate to the level of body schema thus affecting habitual posture and movement.

Although, as Lecoq attests, the Neutral Mask has become the central training tool in his pedagogical journey, it is not the only part of Lecoq training designed to work on the neutral state. The twenty movements exercise, for example, is practiced without the mask. Although this part of the training culminates in creating dramatic justifications for a sequence of chosen structured movements, Coletto claims that by simply learning and perfecting the movements’ form, prior to their dramatic contextualization, the neutral is instilled in the body: “what the 20 movements do, and some of them more than others, is they work against the natural. The body wants to go somewhere because it’s natural for me because that’s my story and that’s how *I* walk. For example, I do a [habitual] movement that makes my bum sticks out. And the body wants to go there. By working against the natural tendencies of the body you find the neutral.”¹⁰⁰ The principle of working against the habitual tendencies toward a nearly geometrical clarity is similar to the way Suzuki training operates. In both approaches the actor encounters strict non-habitual forms and in the attempt to push against these forms s/he engages with space in a way that makes heightened presentness more readily available.

In a classic exercise, which is traditionally one of the early exercises with the Neutral Mask, the actor goes through a journey in nature. The actor wearing the mask

⁹⁹ Gallagher, *How the Body* 35.

¹⁰⁰ Personal interview, 27 April 2010.

takes a journey in various imagined landscapes while trying to let the changing surrounding affect her body without ‘having an opinion’ about it. It begins inside the sea, where the mask is covered with water. Then the mask walks towards the beach as its body is revealed from the water. Crossing the sandy beach, the mask enters a thick forest it has to go through. Coming out on the other side of the forest, the mask discovers a steep mountain slope and starts to climb. On the top of the mountain the mask takes a look at the view on the other side. It then has to run down that slope, cross a stream on stepping stones and cross the desert that lies on the other side of the stream. In the end of the journey the mask watches the sunset on the horizon. The challenge of this exercise is to embody the obstacles and landscapes along the way without expressing any emotional response and without telling a personal story about it – simply to inhabit the dynamics of the body’s encounter with its surrounding.

This journey begins and ends in particularly clear engagements with the vertical and horizontal. Standing in the water and letting the body be influenced by the currents and waves reinforces verticality against the forces inflicted by the imaginary water. At the same time, the resistance of the water as the mask walks forward to the beach creates a horizontal engagement. At the end of the journey a different kind of spatial engagement is experienced. Standing upright to watch the sunset on the horizon, there is no water to create resistance against which the body maintains its vertical and horizontal engagement. The spatial engagement at the end of the journey is internalized and the actor embodies the space around her through inner movement. In other words, this exercise awakens the

actor's awareness to the vertical and horizontal through movement as well as through clear sensorial awareness.

In this exercise the practitioner attempts to undergo a non-dramatic encounter with natural elements. It is non-dramatic because of the requirement to avert any display of opinion or conflict between the actor's body and the natural environment it encounters. Further, by going through a journey in nature the mask avoids social encounters, which helps in averting both conflict and culturally specific circumstances. Lecoq thus tries to create a common "universal" embodied point of reference to which any actor, from his or her culturally specific habituated body, can relate.

It is the "Body of Mask" workshop with Paola teaching and me assisting. We are working with the Neutral Mask today and Paola asks me if I'd like to participate like everyone else. I gladly agree; it has been a long time since I wore the Neutral Mask and I won't miss this opportunity. We're doing the Mask's Journey today and Paola asks me to go on first. I turn with my back to the other participants who are sitting along the wall. I put on the mask, straighten up, remembering the straight line of the broomstick that was put along my spine a few minutes ago. I take a deep breath, look to the imaginary horizon and turn. As I turn I try to keep this straight horizontal plane connecting my eyes and some imaginary line in front of me. I try to have the sensation of having people behind my back.¹⁰¹ Can my body tell no personal story? Can I let go of the inscriptions of my life over my body and simply embody both the fictional and actual space around me? I try to

¹⁰¹ This sensation comes from another exercise that is usually practiced earlier in the training. See p. 162.

connect my body to the mask, channel its neutrality through my body; I carry the mask and subject my body to its balanced architecture. It is a constant negotiation with the space as I move in it, as it shifts around me, as the fiction I portray is imprinted in space by my movement. I try to find the economy of movement to allow for an effortless yet energized and present journey. I am both in the forest and the forest, climbing the mountain and being the mountain. I try to let my body have no opinion on the things it creates along the way; it simply goes through spatial encounters. No past or future, no likes or dislikes, no tiredness or joy should be reflected in my actions and movement. As I come to the end of the journey I watch the sunset; or, rather, I let the mask watch the sunset. It's the end of the journey. I turn with my back to the class, my audience, take off the mask and turn back to look at them. I feel very calm although the journey was physically challenging. Paola looks at me with a smile and asks, "How was it?" I open my mouth and repeat the question, as if asking myself: "How was it?" I'm surprised. I hear my voice resonate in a specific way through my body. It's a familiar yet non-habitual sensation. I am still in front of the class, "performing" the usual post-exercise-debriefing, yet I'm acutely aware of my body, breath and voice. It feels as though I am both in my body and, at the same time, seeing and hearing myself from the outside. Why is this sensation so familiar? I am about to speak again. Will my voice resonate that way again? Is my consciousness still opened up the same way as before? "It was hard, but good." Here it is again. I recognize it. It's my "Suzuki body" resonating in my voice. It's that same connection of voice, breath and body that I get to at the end of an intensive Suzuki session.

There are several similarities among the Lecoq and Suzuki techniques in the structuring of spatial experience, some of which I have already alluded to above. Generally speaking, both the Neutral Mask work and Suzuki are described as a type of diagnostics for the actor's embodied habits. What it means is that by pushing against a strict form that uses the vertical as its zero axis, the body reveals its biases and tendencies. In Suzuki the challenge is in the struggle to perform the forms while maintaining the relaxed vertical upper body posture and the horizontal openness to the environment. In the beginning of the work the posture, the relaxation, the outward horizontal attention or all of them are challenged and severed by the form and movement. The form, then, is the obstacle for the vertical and horizontal. In the Neutral Mask work, as well as other Lecoq exercises, the form is not as prescribed, yet it is similarly challenged. For instance, the part in which the Neutral Mask walks out of the sea against the resistance of the water poses several challenges to the actor as she needs to move forward while creating the sense of being pushed backward by the water all the while keeping her perception open to the outside rather than focusing on her own actions. The spatial engagement that is created in the process is strikingly similar to the one resulting from Suzuki slow walk exercise.

While both Suzuki and Lecoq correspond spatially to the vertical and horizontal, they do so in different ways and for achieving different types of presentness. The practitioner in the neutral work seeks whole body balance between tension and relaxation. In Suzuki the work is highly defined by the contrast between the strong lower

body, which constantly breaks the balance by its movements, and the relaxed upper body, which should remain connected to the unmoved center. This division creates stronger visible and felt opposition in order to achieve high intensity and energy. The neutral state works in a more holistic way, requiring the entire body to keep the balance within the dynamic of opposition.

In the Neutral Mask work, similarly to the Suzuki technique, the horizontal appears as the essential part of perceptual awareness of, and engagement with space. Engaging with the space on the horizontal plane is neutral because it is literally at eye level, perpendicular to the vertical position of the body. As such, it helps to avoid expressing opinion, character, or emotional attitude toward space.

I now turn to focus on particular similarities in the horizontal engagement in Neutral Mask work and Suzuki by juxtaposing two exercises. In this discussion, following descriptions of the exercises from Lecoq and Suzuki, I include the Viewpoints technique, which is a particularly “horizontal” technique.

Vertical and Horizontal Connected

In the first exercise wearing the Neutral Mask in Coletto’s workshop, the actor with the mask is accompanied by five or six other participants.¹⁰² The actor who is with the mask leads the group who are slightly behind her to the right and to the left. The structure of the exercise is simple: the actor wearing the mask should face the group behind her, put on the mask, turn 180 degrees to face the observers, and walk forward to a point at the

¹⁰² This was true to both the Neutral to Clown master class and the Body of Mask workshop.

front of the space. Before trying it with the mask, the actor and the following group go through the motions without it. The second round is with the mask on:

The first to go on is Lydia. She stands at the far back end of the room. Behind her, Paola positions five people, telling them to form “an extension of Lydia’s body.” Instructing Lydia, Paola explains: “they are part of your body; you have to incorporate them and bring them with you.” As she explains this, Paola gestures with her fingers a motion that starts from her eyes, moves slightly forward, extends to the sides of the body, pointing to the left and to the right, and then moving diagonally to the back. “You walk normal,” she tells Lydia, “there’s no sign; you have to feel when they’re ready; and you (speaking to the group) have to feel her.” After the first trial with her face exposed, she is immediately sent to do it again with the mask. Lydia turns to the group behind her, puts on the mask, turns back to us and starts walking. Her steps are tentative and one side of her body seems to be pulled back even as she walks forward. The mask isn’t facing us directly – pulled back on one side, it seems as though it’s trying to look away from us. The rest of the group seems disconnected, as if each is walking alone.

Talking about it, Paola said: “You’re so worried about them. You’re terrified about them.” Lydia confirmed: “Literally I was trying to have eyes at the back of my head, I was watching them the whole time.” It seems to me that rather than trusting her awareness of the presence of the group behind her, Lydia literally (using her word) tried

*to see them. This kept her questioning her own position, keeping her away from it and from most of the space around her, diminishing her presentness.*¹⁰³

Lydia's experience is an example of a first unsuccessful attempt at engaging horizontally with space with the use of the Neutral Mask. Her body's response to the exercise exposed her tendencies and raised her awareness of them. It serves as the first step in encountering the horizontal and trying to engage with it from the neutral state. Using a group of people as an extension of the individual's body forces the actor to develop awareness of what occurs around her. In this exercise, as I walk forward, I keep my backwards attention alive through the connection to the participants behind me, which I need to "bring along with me." This metaphor of horizontal extension, rather than creating an awareness of the space around me as separate from my body, evokes a stronger involvement to the extent of becoming one with horizontal spatiality. This extension is meant to literally enhance my spatial presence, to make me bigger in space, as Coletto explains: "I extend my body and my presence, so when I move it's not my little body that moves but all this mass that moves with me, which definitely gives me a different presence. If I was 40 pounds more it would give me a different presence. But that doesn't get me closer to god."¹⁰⁴ Enhancing spatial presentness is thus grounded in a sizeable physical extension, rather than an idea that might be related to some kind of spirituality or a certain *je ne se quoi*. Since one's body does not really become bigger, the

¹⁰³ "Neutral to Clown" workshop, 17 Dec. 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Coletto, "Neutral to Clown" workshop, 17 Dec. 2009.

metaphor of enhanced spatial presentness is connected in this exercise to a felt experience of the group body.

A similar process can be seen in Suzuki training. One of the metaphors used in Suzuki training when practicing the slow walk (or *Tenteketen*) as well as when stomping freely in the working space in the Stomping Shakuuchi exercise is that rather than moving in space the actor takes space along with him or her. It is experienced most vividly when the practitioners turn or change direction and are instructed to feel as if they are turning a horizontal extension of their body into the space to the left and to the right. This image of taking the room along implies an nth level of engagement with space; the space around me becomes an extension of my body and I attempt to influence it directly and immediately. This extreme engagement is engrained in the structure of the exercise. The slow walk, for example, begins with two lines of practitioners facing one another on two ends of the space. With slow rhythmic music both lines start to slow-walk on the same musical cue. Initially the vertical body is maintained throughout the walk while the center's movement in space should be sustained as a continuous straight horizontal line toward the focus point on the horizon.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, each line of actors moving together should remain in structure. As the two lines approach one another, they cross at the center of the room and continue to slowly move toward the other end of space. The horizontal engagement in space is reiterated from the very first moment, when standing in a straight line of pairs facing another line. With the movement forward, the awareness of the horizontal front-back and left-right dimensions is further established as the

¹⁰⁵ In a more advanced version of the slow walk the actors may play with “free form.”

practitioners struggle to keep a steady pace while staying in a straight line. The spatial relationship with the other line of actors moving toward and then away from me, further opens my awareness of the horizontal plane. In this exercise we can clearly see the interdependency between, even inseparability of, awareness and movement in the space.

This extension into space corresponds with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. He claims that the body's spatiality extends beyond the contours of the physical body through perceptual and motor habits, as in the case of the blind holding a cane.¹⁰⁶ For the blind person, the cane is not an object but an extension of her or his perception and, hence, of the body, into the world. In his later book *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty further developed this idea to claim that perception functions as an extension of one's body into the world to the extent of intertwining with it. This intertwining happens in the thickness of perception, the *flesh*, which is

The coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, simultaneously, *as* tangible it descends among them, *as* touching it dominates them all and draws this relationship and even this double relationship from itself, by dehiscence or fission of its own mass.¹⁰⁷

More recent scientific evidence introduced by Andy Clark supports this possibility. Clark claims that "our brain can quite readily project feeling and sensation beyond the biological shell. In much the same way, the blind person's cane or the sports star's racket

¹⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*.

¹⁰⁷ *Visible* 146.

soon come to feel like genuine extensions of the user's body and senses."¹⁰⁸ This extension, according to Clark, requires training and results in momentarily developing a kind of body image which extends beyond the boundaries of the biological body.

The sensation in both the Lecoq exercise described above and in the Suzuki slow walk is often described as though the practitioner's back is extended into the space, from the spine to the left and to the right. This extension of the body changes the actor's awareness and responsiveness, a change that can also be detected by the observers from the outside. Concurrently, even as I move forward I am attentive to my back side and the space behind me. Thus, the horizontal plane's two axes—front-back and left-right—are both attended to. In this way, even though the actor's gaze and motion are directed forward, toward the habitual direction of our spatial engagement, the entire space is incorporated. It creates an immediate non-habitual spatial engagement, heightening presentness.

In contrast to the structured vertical and horizontal engagement predominant in Suzuki and Lecoq, the Viewpoints technique evokes spatial presentness by different means. Both Suzuki and Lecoq are, to an extent, codified techniques in the sense that the body is pushed against a strict structure both vertically and horizontally. In the Viewpoints technique there are no set structures for posture or movement. In the next section I examine the ways in which spatial presentness is achieved in Viewpoints training.

¹⁰⁸ Clark 62.

Viewpoints

The Viewpoints is seen as predominately a horizontal technique, or a technique that privileges horizontality.¹⁰⁹ Bogart compares Suzuki and Viewpoints respectively: “One is vertical; the other is horizontal. One is you and god; the other is you and the people around you.”¹¹⁰ The claim for horizontality often refers to the Viewpoints resistance to hierarchy among the various elements of performance such as text, objects, movement, sound, etc. Another non-hierarchical feature of the Viewpoints is the attempt at restructuring the director-actor relationships.¹¹¹ According to this spatial metaphor, hierarchical order is vertical and therefore horizontality stands for non-hierarchy, even a kind of equality. In the Viewpoints training this non-hierarchy does not mean that nothing is privileged but, rather, that there is an attempt to explore at different times the privileging of as many elements as possible, excluding none. In other words, the attempt is to enable as many stimuli as possible to potentially influence the actor and his/her choices. In place of succumbing to one element, for example, to the usual tyranny of the text with its common forms of analysis and behavioral enactment, training in the Viewpoints technique instills a spirit of exploration that may enable the practitioners to work from various points of departure over time.

The structuring of movement in Viewpoints training is mostly done through a loose set of “rules” for directing the practitioner’s attention. Each rule focuses the practitioners’ awareness to their surrounding in a particular way thus filtering the stimuli

¹⁰⁹ Leon Inglrud, for example, mentioned Edward de Bono’s term Lateral Thinking as an idea that supports the same philosophy as the Viewpoints (SITI Workshop, 7 Aug. 2009).

¹¹⁰ In Diamond 33.

¹¹¹ See Herrington, “Directing” 156.

to which they respond. Unlike Suzuki training, Viewpoints training does not supply a strict structure of movement that breaks the habitual sensory-motor being-in-the-world of the actor. The perceptual filter of the viewpoints and the high potentiality of possibilities open for response in each moment help the actor to find non-habitual patterns. Creativity, according to the Viewpoints philosophy, comes from the fresh, non-premeditated, unacculturated response to emerging circumstances. While working on the character and written situation create a clear path in shaping the line of action, they also restrict the actor's potential for exploration of responses in the here and now of performance beyond the world created by the text. The Viewpoints training enables the actor to train in being spatially engaged regardless of the character and story, to break away from the specific behavioral filter that restricts responses.

If in the Suzuki technique there is a clear sense of the individual's "here" through a strong emphasis on verticality, in Viewpoints there's a strong sense of relating to the group's here and now as part of a horizontal relationship to the environment. Since Suzuki and Viewpoints are often practiced in tandem, the different experience each technique promotes is made clearer, even emphasized at the expense of the similarities. Erica Mott's explanation, following a two-week workshop in Suzuki and Viewpoints, is a typical example of the way this difference is perceived:

I felt a real dichotomy between the internal awareness and that level of presence where you really know your *internal* landscape in a moment, which I get much more from the Suzuki work; and then the *external* awareness and that landscape which I get much more from the Viewpoints work. And where that gray 'push area' is between those and how pushing into those areas from both sides enriches

and enliven both practices and the room as a whole. That's something I got from this workshop this time, it was how to push deeper into that area between those two.¹¹²

Mott's description begins with the common dichotomous understanding of the two techniques: Suzuki dealing with the individual's internal space as opposed to Viewpoints, which supposedly deals with the external landscape. This form of articulation is reminiscent of the definition of acting techniques according to the dichotomy inside-out/outside-in. However, the "gray 'push area'" she describes is actually the target of both techniques and where presentness may be practiced and honed. That is, whereas in Suzuki the tendency to focus on the strict body structure pulls the practitioner's attention inward, leaving the surrounding in the background, Viewpoints training's focus on outside stimuli pulls the practitioners' attention away from the body to the extent of "losing their center." This can be observed, for example, in practitioners who always follow others and give up on their own responses for others. In these instances the practitioners tend to constantly repeat the movements of others yet seem disconnected to their own body and, thus ungrounded and "airy" in their movement. As a result of this diminished vertical engagement presentness is weakened.

Horizontality is prevalent in the ways in which the actor's sensory-motor apparatus is trained and primed in Viewpoints training. Particularly in the early stages of the training process there is a clear sense of being on a flat plane and exploring the surrounding horizontally. This may be because in most of the early exercises the practitioners mostly explore the space around them by simply standing, walking or

¹¹² Personal Interview, 21 Aug. 2009.

running around on their feet. Thus their bodies maintain their habitual verticality while they move and respond to one another horizontally. There is a clear initial focus on responding strictly to outside stimuli, especially to stimuli created by the bodies of others in the working space. In addition, the particular gaze the Viewpoints training promotes, the soft focus, operates optimally on the horizontal.

Soft focus is one of the most important principles in Viewpoints praxis. It is “the physical state in which we allow the eyes to soften and relax so that, rather than looking at one or two things in sharp focus, they can now take in many. By taking the pressure off the eyes to be the dominant and primary information gatherer, the whole body starts to listen and gather information in new and more sensitized ways.”¹¹³ Soft focus changes the actor’s perception and is intended to raise the level of awareness to others in time and space. This awareness is of the body as spatiotemporal phenomena in the space around me rather than as a result of psychological or social processes. Soft focus is also a way to “reverse our habitual, acculturated ways of looking and seeing.”¹¹⁴ By transforming the habitual direct gaze into a soft, all inclusive and unselective gaze, the Viewpoints technique creates a distinct experience of seeing and being seen. Two main distinctions between the habitual gaze and the soft focus should be noted. First, using soft focus disrupts our scopophilic processes of perception and diverts our awareness from being sight-oriented to rely on other senses as well. Notably, the senses of sound and touch, together with proprioception are raised to a higher level of awareness. These senses actively participate in the processes that construct the actors’ conception of

¹¹³ Bogart and Landau 31.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

spatiotemporal reality surrounding them and the relationships between that reality and each of their bodies. Although this does not take away from the primacy of sight as the most prevalent sense, it does re-habituate the actor's perception. Second, by softening the gaze to look at more than one or two things at each moment the amount of details perceived grows. This creates a situation in which at any given moment one sees many bodies in action, but they are all perceived, bodies and acts alike, as part of the same horizontal field of vision.

When teaching Viewpoints I start training in the soft focus early in the process. I instruct the participants to all walk continuously and individually around the working space, then choose one of their peers and follow their movement in the periphery of their field of vision. They are to look straight ahead at where they are going to but focus their attention on the person who is somewhere to the side, without turning their heads to look straight at that person. As the entire group walks and they get individually accustomed to focus their attention, rather than their gaze, on the movement of a body that is not in front of their eyes, I instruct them to follow one more person in the periphery of their field of vision. After they practice this for a while I instruct them to add a third and then a fourth person to keep track of. Naturally, each person followed walks in a particular movement pattern in space, thus the challenge of keeping one's attention to more people increases exponentially. From my experience, depending on the size of the group, the space, and the amount of time we can spend on this preliminary exercise, the number of people a participant can follow in their periphery may go up to seven. As they keep walking and looking straight ahead to where they are going while focusing their attention to several

people outside of the center of their field of vision they inadvertently develop their use of the soft focus. Optimizing the use of the soft focus usually requires the practitioner to keep the body vertical in order for the senses to be open and receptive to the surrounding. At the same time both the movement (walking) and the attention are kept horizontal.

The Flow exercise, another one of the early and arguably most effective exercises in Viewpoints training, may further exemplify the primacy of horizontality.¹¹⁵ In this exercise the actors start walking around the space as the five elements of the exercise are introduced gradually and cumulatively. The elements of the flow include: passing through the space that opens-up between two people, following someone, changing tempo, changing direction, and stopping and starting. These elements affect the actor's movement in space and should all come as a response to something that happens in the space.¹¹⁶ That is, just as I need to recognize a space opening between two people in order to pass between them, all the other elements as well should be explored as a response to outside stimulus. The actors' attention in this exercise, as well as their movement in the space, leads to a strong horizontal engagement.

Viewpoints training eventually takes the practitioners away from the vertical body to explore shape as well as movement in various levels such as kneeling or crawling. It also breaks the strict horizontal engagement by investigating, for example, architecture,

¹¹⁵ Bogart and Landau 66-8. There are some differences between the description of The Flow in *The Viewpoints Book* and the way it was introduced in all of the SITI Company workshops I attended. Several SITI Company members expressed their criticism of, or disagreement with the fact that *The Viewpoints Book* has set a definitive, often misleading, description of the practice. As with many Viewpoints exercises, the individual understanding and personal emphasis of each SITI member vary.

¹¹⁶ In my teaching of Viewpoints the Flow is a seminal exercise and I usually begin training sessions with at least ten minutes of Flow. In addition, I often lead the participants from the Flow into other Viewpoints exercises and improvisations.

including the floor, walls, and ceiling. However, the initial training phase serves as an essential point of departure for the rest of the training. Moreover, while Viewpoints is often seen as training that allows for exploration of movement, Barney O’Hanlon notes that movement itself is not always necessary for achieving presentness through Viewpoints. According to him Viewpoints involves working on the senses. He states that “the tendency of people in viewpoints training is to do all the time and to find movement prior to everything. What about just letting the senses recognize things in space?” In an exercise he led, which involved the possibility of movement, he also suggested the possibility of simply “being and noticing.”¹¹⁷ While watching and/or participating in this exercise it became clear that the choice for simply “be and notice” usually implies a certain verticality of the spine and horizontality of attention. As the exercise ended O’Hanlon pointed to the fact that the actor’s presence does not depend on the movement itself but on the engagement with space, the being in it, noticing things, and being affected, whether in movement or not.

* * *

The significance of the vertical and horizontal engagement in the praxis of Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq helps the actor train in the state of presentness outside the context of the work on a particular piece. Through long-term training the practitioners incorporate these two spatial elements as part of re-habituating their sensory-motor apparatus to

¹¹⁷ Workshop, 4 August 2009.

develop heightened presentness. The horizontal and vertical serve as the zero axes from which to explore space and the body in it. They are thus like the primary colors of space from which all the other more subtle colors can be created.

Space is inseparable from time. They are merged through the practitioner's body operating here and now. Nevertheless, there are elements of practice that emphasize the embodied experience of space and spatiality and the body's relationship to them. In this chapter I examined what I argue are the basic or "essential" spatial elements through which heightened spatial presentness can be practiced and honed – verticality and horizontality. In the next chapter I look at particular temporal relationships that are developed through the training of Suzuki, Viewpoints, and Lecoq in order to practice heightened presentness in time.

Chapter 4

Training Time: Temporal Presentness in Practice

The art experience is an intimate moment caught in the rush of time. To be conscious of how time works, to appreciate its pressure and flexibility, to recognize the objective and subjective varieties of time, is to begin to grasp how it functions in art. Even though much of the artistic process is unpredictable and erratic, you can choose an exact relationship and attitude toward time.

Anne Bogart¹

Much has been written about the operation of time in performance and of the ways in which performance plays with and in time. Although, as I suggest in chapter three, spatial experience plays a significant part in constructing presentness and presence it seems to raise less trenchant questions and debate than the experience of time. In part, this is due to the tangibility of space as opposed to the intangible, fleeting, possibly metaphysical experience of and in time. It may also stem from the fact that we can move in space intentionally as we wish but we cannot seem to be able to do the same in time. According to contemporary physics, time is a fourth dimension whose only difference from the three

¹ Bogart, *And Then* 127-8.

dimensions of space is that we move in it in one determined direction and speed.² While it is important to remember that the experience of time is inseparable from that of space—for us there is no ‘when’ without a ‘where’, and *vice versa*—we experience them differently. Therefore, although it is intimately related to spatial presentness, practicing and theorizing temporal presentness requires a different focus, a temporal viewpoint, if you like.

As Anne Bogart’s quote in the epigraph suggests, there is or should be a particular temporal experience to a performance different from the habitual experience of time. In order to achieve this difference from “the rush of [daily] time” the performer as stage artist needs to develop awareness and sensitivity to the flow of time and, in Bogart’s words, “an exact relationship and attitude toward time.” The relationship to time is important in most approaches to acting, and in the practice of Suzuki, Viewpoints, and parts of Lecoq training it moves to the fore and, alongside spatial awareness, becomes the center of attention. Focusing the training on the structure of the experience of time in practice develops temporal presentness and enables the actor to attend to “the intimate moment”³ of performance.

In this chapter I attempt to tease out specific ways in which temporal presentness is practiced, constructed, and developed through training. The discourse used in each particular practice coupled with the particular physical articulation in and through time create distinct experiences of and in relation to time, which may lead to the development

² See, for example, Hawking 15-36.

³ See epigraph.

of distinct temporal presentness. As I intend to show, temporal presentness enables the performer to experience and live-through the uniqueness of each emerging moment within a sequence of constructed, repeated, rehearsed moments. As framed by Joseph Roach's two types of spontaneity, it seems that the unique experience of the moment in performance requires it to be rehearsed and tightly structured so as to free the actor's attention to the momentary emerging aspects. This individual experience becomes shared experience when it is entwined with spatial presentness, thus including the entire space as well as the audience/viewers.

Temporal presentness can be approached in various ways. Bogart names some of the temporalities that exist in theatre: "from fictional time to real time, subjective time, linear time, nonlinear time, time suspended, time stopped, time sped up, a lifetime in an instant, rehearsal time, performance time."⁴ Throughout this chapter, then, I deal with various notions of time in relation to presentness in practice, such as, the perceived length of a moment, the experience of the flow of time, the fluctuation of a single event through time, and more. In addition, the experience of time is framed by cultural norms, conventions, and habits. For example, the flow of events in psychological realism, strongly affected by linear interpretation of story and "quasi-cinematic" acting style, may lead to a quotidian temporality. In Noh plays, on the other hand, traditionally "spiritual" construction of time leads the flow of stage action, creating sustained elongated rhythm that affects even simple action such as walking.

⁴ Bogart, *And Then* 132.

In the following section I begin with a brief survey of some of the main theoretical considerations I use concerning time and the experience of the present. These considerations originate from a cross-disciplinary approach using performance theory, phenomenology, and cognitive studies. I then turn to a closer examination of the way time is approached in acting praxis, particularly unfolding the idea of ‘the moment’. Next, I focus on exposing and comparing the ways in which temporal presentness is approached in the practice of Suzuki, Viewpoints, and Lecoq techniques. As in the previous chapter, I begin this section examining the Suzuki technique, in which the set forms create clear relationships to experience in and through time. I then explore the fluidity of the experience of time in the Viewpoints technique, using the particular terminology it offers. Finally, I briefly look at the ways in which the experience of the present is approached in the Lecoq technique, in both the Neutral Mask and clown training.

Present, Time

The fascination with time on the side of performance theoreticians often connects to the critique of presence that, as I show in the first chapter, occupies much discourse in our field. In her Derridean critique of the foregrounding of presence in theatre practice, Elinor Fuchs claims that

the assumption that it is within the power of human nature to enter a Now, to become entirely present to itself, has been powerfully challenged in the past two decades by Derrida. To Derrida, there is no primordial or self-same present that is

not already infiltrated by the trace – an opening of the ‘inside’ of the moment to the ‘outside’ of the interval.⁵

This assertion comes as a response to Thornton Wilder’s claim that “on the stage it is always now,”⁶ which seems to prefigure Peggy Phelan’s famous ontology of performance: “performance’s only life is in the present.”⁷ For Derrida, according to Fuchs, entering a now means becoming *entirely* present to oneself – an impossibility which brings us back to the critique of pure presence.⁸ Indeed, as I show in the first chapter, taking presence to mean some kind of perfect unadulterated exposure of the entire self in a single moment reeks of metaphysics. However, it is also true that by privileging disappearance and loss performance theorists “have lost our theoretical hold on the rather obvious fact that theatre engages forces of becoming as well as those of vanishing.”⁹ The present, then, can be seen as the locus of both becoming and disappearance. In this regard, the understanding of the ‘now’ is that of an instant within a dynamic process with multiple potentialities: now, in this moment, something presents itself and, at the same time, same moment, something also disappears.

In her article in *Theatre Journal*, Alexandra Wolska calls for a performance theory of becoming, claiming that more often than not

During rehearsals, neither actors, directors, nor designers are concerned with disappearance, but with its opposite—how to make things happen, appear, take place. For them time is anything but ephemeral, for it merges with the bodies of

⁵ Fuchs 165.

⁶ Qt. in Fuchs 165.

⁷ Phelan 146.

⁸ See chapter 1.

⁹ Wolska 85.

the actors and the elements of design. Functioning like a psychic substance, it can be stretched, contracted, immobilized, and accelerated; it shapes the performer's body and saturates the *mise-en-scène*.¹⁰

For Wolska time becomes something of a tangible substance through the bodies of the performers in the particular space. I would suggest that it is not time itself that is perceived, but time-ness, the temporal presentness of the performers, their involvement with the now-time as time unfolds. In this section of the chapter I delineate some of the ways in which the experience of the present moment is explained in phenomenology and cognitive studies, as well as by performance theorists whose writing is backed by these theoretical, philosophical and scientific grounds.

Alice Rayner's phenomenology of theatre articulates an attempt to come to terms with the loss of the never-completely-attained moments of theatrical performance, which she relates to the ghostly presence of theatrical experience. In the first chapter of *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre*, Rayner explores theatrical time and claims that the experience of the present moment of performance is similar to the experience we have when we are between dreaming and waking up. This experience of a "present that is always missed"¹¹ resides in the "gap or syncopation"¹² between perception and consciousness. Within the repetition of this structural syncopation, in this gap, is the presence of "a certain hollow, a certain interior, a certain absence, a negativity that is not nothing"¹³ whose constant loss is at the heart of theatrical experience.

¹⁰ 87.

¹¹ Rayner 11.

¹² Ibid 10.

¹³ *Visible* 151.

However, in contrast with this depiction of loss, in a later chapter she discusses theatre as a place where history is experienced as somatic memories of what was lost. Rayner relies on Michel de Certeau's formulation of historiography according to which non-Western (unwritten) history is experienced as the accumulation of "the legacy of ears" and "memory by mouth" that the dead leave behind.¹⁴ It is the repetitions that occur in theatre—of texts, actions, characters, and situations—that have the potential to summon the absent voices of the dead, what Rayner terms ghosts. Specifically, through the presence of the actors onstage, their bodies and (for Rayner, particularly) voices, an experience of a ghostly presence can be invoked as somatic memory.

Time seems to need to be attached to something tangible in order for it to be perceived. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Maurice Merleau-Ponty claims that "the problem is how to make time explicit as it comes into being and makes itself evident, time at all times underlying the *notion* of time, not as an object of our knowledge, but as a dimension of our being."¹⁵ In other words, we habitually do not perceive time in itself and we cannot know it, neither in thought nor as non-thetic knowledge of experience, because it is an element that enables and structures experience, and is a constitutive part of it. According to Merleau-Ponty time is the "transition-synthesis"¹⁶ of being: transition from one moment of being to another as future becomes present becomes past, as well as their synthesis within each moment of present. The synthesis of the past and future into the present also enables the synthesis of space and body. Time, then, is not a sequence of

¹⁴ Rayner 34.

¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 482-3.

¹⁶ 491.

present moments, but is the unified phenomena of past, present, and future coming together within the uniqueness of a single moment of being to form the subjective experience of/in the moment. Merleau-Ponty claims that for this reason any talk of temporality necessarily touches upon subjectivity, since the subject is a temporal being.

Because time is an element of being, theorizing time requires a special point of view or perspective towards it, constructs that enable us to conceptualize and make it somewhat tangible. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, because of the intangibility of the experience of time, we cannot conceptualize it directly. They contend that the concepts we use to verbally construct the experience of time are in fact metaphors of *spatial* embodied experience.¹⁷ If time and subjectivity are truly entangled and if, as Evan Thompson claims, “inner time-consciousness is thus nothing other than prereflective self awareness,”¹⁸ then experiencing time directly is as impossible as it is for someone to look directly into her own eyes.

The experience of time is actually the experience of the world and oneself in time; that is, time “arises from *my* relation to things.”¹⁹ This is similar to the way that the experience of seeing cannot be accessed separately from the thing being seen. In this sense, like perception, time is made of intentional acts toward the world and/in the body.

¹⁷ In *Philosophy in the Flesh* Lakoff and Johnson elaborate on the embodied nature of concepts and dedicate an entire chapter to show how the conceptualization of something as abstract as time relies on embodied spatial metaphors.

¹⁸ Thompson 328.

¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 478, italics in origin.

Specifically, in Merleau-Ponty's words, "time is not a line but a network of intentionalities."²⁰

Thompson's theory of temporal experience echoes and further develops Merleau-Ponty's "transition-synthesis." In his book *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*, Thompson relies on a phenomenological model that constructs the experience of the flow of time as "standing-streaming."²¹ This model points to the doubled experience of time as comprised of, on the one hand, individual moments that are experienced as 'stand-alone' present moments and, on the other hand, the streaming of time, experienced as ever moving forward in a sequence of events. The flow of time, then, is experienced as a dialectic. According to Thompson, following both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the structure of consciousness is in fact the structure of the "living present."²² That is, the dynamic structure of the experience of the present moment as well as its correspondence in the neural system, also give us access to the structure of consciousness, which can only exist in the present. Thompson stresses further that "temporal experience: temporal objects, the intentional act toward them and experience of the intentional act itself [...] all our familiar temporal concepts pertain to time as *constituted*, and hence they cannot apply literally to the time-*constituting* absolute flow."²³ As a consequence, measures of time and concepts defining the way things happen in time (such as musical rhythm, for example) are constituted constructs that help us relate to time from a shared perspective, but are not aspects of time itself. Further,

²⁰ Ibid 484.

²¹ 326.

²² Ibid.

²³ 325, italics in original.

experience of time which takes place in the present (as all experience does) is subjective and is in fact experience of occurrences in time from individual perspective.

The common understanding of the present is often that of a fleeting unattainable pin-point in time with no duration of its own and no existence besides connecting the immediate past and the immediate future. The present instant, according to this understanding, presents “the phenomenological paradox: an instant has no duration. And yet, despite the paradox, one might still speak of the duration of an instant.”²⁴ However, both phenomenological theory and scientific evidence suggest that the present is not a “knife edge” so thin it cannot be said to ‘take time.’ In fact, the present seems to have some thickness.

In a Husserlian model of the structure of the living present,²⁵ the present moment is comprised of three intertwined and inseparable intentional processes: primal impression, retention, and protention. Primal impression is the intention toward the changing or unchanging now, unrelated to any past or future. Retention is directed toward the immediate past moment, the fading occurrence that I just experienced. Protention is the openness toward what is just about to come and, unlike retention, its content is indeterminate. “The unified operation of protention, primal impression, and retention underlies our experience of the present moment as having temporal width.”²⁶ There is a difference between retention and recollection as well as between protention and expectation. While retention and protention are *structural* aspects of experience in time

²⁴ Hiebert 82.

²⁵ This model also appears in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (484), though not without criticism.

²⁶ Thompson 319.

(i.e. in the present) and are therefore presentational, recollection and expectation can be described as representational in the sense that they bring into consciousness something that is absent.²⁷

Each present moment in time can be defined as a differentiated event with a beginning, duration and end. The content of the moment, what the event as a singular unit of experience is, also define its structure and length. The opposite is also true. The structure of the moment, its length, its exact beginning and end, define its content. There are various predictable and unpredictable factors that take part in defining a moment. And the moment's definition, which may seem to be the result of the accumulation of these factors, affects the ways in which we experience each of the components. In the lingo of dynamical systems theory this is called *circular causality*. Because of this circular causality between components (such as the stimuli and response timing) and meaning of a moment, the moment in life can be seen as an unstable, dynamic temporal unit of being that is finally determined in retrospect, after its completion.

We can easily understand how the result of an occurrence can affect the way we conceive it from a simple example. The experience of rushing to the train at the last minute can be conceived in retrospect, depending on whether I got to it in time or not, either as a miserable attempt or as a lucky shot. The moment that followed determined its experiential content. However, this is not the type of retrospective experience I wish to discuss. Because of the temporal structure of experience, the emergent meaning of the moment in the present is also determined in a slight delay. This is true not only to things

²⁷ Ibid 320.

that happen *to* us but also to the meaning we give to our own actions, as Lutterbie explains:

Most often we make decisions without being aware of having made them... our logical processes are actually a rehashing of a choice that has already been made. Logic and analysis may merely be ways of checking the appropriateness of the choices made by the cognitive unconsciousness or a means of consolidating what we have learned in long term memory.²⁸

What Lutterbie means by cognitive unconsciousness is the “processes of embodied and embedded cognition and emotion that cannot be made experientially accessible to the person.”²⁹ The meaning of a choice, a response or an action we perform, mostly arises through a process that is not separate from the decision making process, but does not consciously participate in the moment.

Experimental neuroscientist Benjamin Libet spent much of his career investigating response time to physical stimuli as it reaches the cortex and one becomes aware of it. In his book, *Mind Time: The Temporal Factor in Consciousness*, Libet hypothesizes the implications of the delay he found between the timing of a sensory stimulus and the awareness of that stimulus. He claims that

The delay, of up to 0.5 sec, in the appearance of awareness of a sensory event introduced a difficulty in how to define or understand ‘the present moment.’ However, existence of subjective referral backward in time (to the time of the fast primary response of sensory cortex) does put the subjective experience of the present back into the present. So we have the strange situation in which actual awareness of the present is really delayed, but the content of the conscious

²⁸ Lutterbie 98.

²⁹ Thompson, qt. in Lutterbie 97.

experience is brought into alignment with the present. Subjectively, then, we do live in the antedated present, although in fact we are not aware of the present for up to 0.5 sec after the sensory signal arrives at the cerebral cortex.³⁰

This gap between the ‘real time’ event and the awareness of that event, which corresponds to Rayner’s gap, might be thought of as the thickness of the present, operating within circular causality between mind, body, and world. This thickness allows for non-conscious mental activities to be activated as a response to sensory events, prior to the person’s awareness of them. The non-conscious mental activities I refer to are not only automatic reflexes, but refer to conditioned reflexes that may be developed with or without the person’s awareness.³¹ In fact, Libet’s controversial supposition is that this type of process may be true to the way neuro-cognitive processes operate in all types of situations: “Thoughts of various kinds, imaginations, attitudes, creative ideas, solving of problems, and so on initially develop unconsciously. Such unconscious thoughts only reach a person’s conscious awareness if the appropriate brain activities last a long enough time.”³²

Acting Time: The Moment

A moment onstage is shaped in rehearsals through repetition which sets some of its aspects in advance. This prior knowledge of the rehearsed moment, then, threatens to escape the process of “backward referral” in time. That is one of the reasons why we

³⁰ Libet 88.

³¹ Libet 92.

³² Libet 107. It is important to stress that Libet’s hypotheses are based on experiments on basic activity and that applying his findings to more complex cognitive processes has not been scientifically proven.

need to develop techniques enabling spontaneity, even when we know many of the moment's aspects and its meaning in advance. This resonates with Barba's assertion:

The performer, the director, the researcher, the artist all often ask themselves: 'what is the meaning of what I am doing?' But at the moment of the negation of the action, or of the creative 'pre-condition', this is not a fruitful question. At this moment it is not the meaning of what one is doing that is essential, but rather the precision of the action which prepares the void in which an unexpected meaning can be captured.³³

Barba's "moment of negation of the action" can be seen as the potential for action that is opened by the temporal gap between the stimulus, the reaction we perform and the logical explanation given to this action. This moment may occur in the delay of up to half a second that Libet describes in his research, in which we are able to make unconscious choices—whether to act or not to act, as well as how to act—within a split of a second.

Trying to create meaning through our responses *a-priori* necessarily changes this process, slows us down and prevents us from letting the unconscious neuro-cognitive processes to operate. In addition, the relation between the emerging components of a moment and the sought-after meaning of the moment, needs to escape the linear progression and somehow retain the circular causality that characterize real-life flow of events. How then are we to regain the dynamics

³³ Barba, *Paper 87*

of spontaneous behavior, in which most decisions are made, as Gallagher puts it, “before you know it”³⁴ by our cognitive unconscious?

When we speak of time we often speak of moments. But it is not easy to define what constitutes a moment. This ambiguity stems out of the subjective experience of time or, better put, the subjective experience of occurrences in time. We have seen that the experience of the present has a structure: a temporal thickness and a correspondence with the immediate past and future. We also know that this thickness may differ according to various conditions, i.e., the length of the present is variable. However, because of performance’s potential for extra-daily experiences, the experience of a moment in performance can ostensibly escape normative time-flow. Likewise, a moment does not have an objectively prescribed measurable time. An experience that presents itself as having a beginning, duration, and an end, has them only as part of the emerging, temporal, and subjective construct of that experience. Defining what may constitute a moment onstage, then, goes beyond measurable components of time. In addition, it goes beyond the above models for the present.

One way of determining the structure of the experience of a moment is defining its beginning and end, which separate the moment from the moment that preceded it and the one that follows. The moment is thus bracketed and differentiated. The beginning and end are not moments in themselves but rather the marks of awareness of differentiation. This form of defining a moment may be shared by agreed upon structures such as the beat of a drum or the rhythm of

³⁴ Gallagher, *How the Body* 237.

music. It may also be marked by the beginning of movement from prior stillness or speech from prior silent (and vice versa). In many approaches to acting, a moment onstage is determined by a change in the action according to the text and its division into ‘beats.’ Alternatively, there could be individually defined moments even within a single theatrical event, marked by the beginning and end of personal experiences as perceived from various particular points of view.

The ideas that relate “good acting” to the fresh experience of each moment within the structured flow of events, have been at the heart of most approaches to actor-training in North America, from the mainstream to the more ‘specialized’ techniques. However, the centrality of, on the one hand, ‘acting moment-to-moment’ and, on the other, the use of text, has led some practitioners to privilege spontaneity that is tied to the back and forth structure of dialogue, arising strictly within the linear progression of story. This ‘dialogic bias’ is usually related to mid-twentieth-century psychological realism and is steeped in the Cartesian notions of separation of thought and body, content and form. Actor-training approaches that strictly relate action and meaning-making to speaking may relate spontaneity to text in the same way, since moments of not speaking are seen as ‘empty’. This view is apparent in claims that “gesture, unlike the verbal discourse, has no ‘blanks’ between the words, no silences, no *absence* of signifiers that would act as natural borders and limits.”³⁵ This assertion is problematic in several ways. It is based on an assumption that spoken text can be perceived independently from the gestalt of a situated body-in-environment. A challenge to the idea that silence equals the absence of textual

³⁵ Pavis 71, italics in original

signifier is proposed by gesture theorist David McNeill. He claims that in speaking gesture takes part in the creation of linguistic meaning in intricate ways. His approach to the study of spoken language adds a dynamic dimension to the traditional approach that he claims treats language as static. “In the dynamic tradition, language is regarded as a process, not a thing. This dimension could be termed the ‘activity’ of language, but I will call it (somewhat mysteriously, at present) the ‘inhabiting’ of language.”³⁶ McNeill’s dynamic approach, which, according to him, is in a dialectic relationship with the “static approach” to language, adds to text an embodied (inhabited) dimension that complicates the understanding of language as unfolding in a linear progression over time.³⁷

Although most acting techniques give focus to inhabiting the text in some way, it is the tendency to stick to the text’s linear progression that may restrict the dynamic dimension of the communicative process, hence restrict presentness over time. Even the Meisner technique, which of all the ‘Americanized Stanislavsky’ approaches seems to take the most direct route toward finding spontaneity and being-in-the-moment, mostly trains actors within the particular structure of the one-on-one dialogue. As a result, actors might learn to respond primarily to textual nuances and direct face-to-face interaction.

In addition to being-in-the-moment, in Stanislavsky’s writings the actor’s operation in and of the flow of time is discussed directly through the term *tempo-rhythm*. In *An Actor’s Work*, the updated translation of Stanislavsky’s major body of writing, he

³⁶ McNeill 63.

³⁷ McNeill does not negate the existence of a static dimension to language but, rather, that there is a dialectic between the static and the dynamic.

dedicates a whole chapter to tempo-rhythm³⁸ and mentions it extensively throughout the second part of the book (formerly known as *Building a Character*). The term tempo-rhythm applies, in Stanislavsky's words, to both "external" and "internal" aspects of acting; "external" refers here to the speed in which things happen, in the same way as musical rhythm is determined and maintained through a piece. "Internal" refers to the dynamic tempo of a specific person/character's behavior in a specific situation and "includes the subjective awareness of time."³⁹

Other theatre practitioners and theorists stress the significance of developing the actor's awareness and control of the experience of time. Joseph Chaikin states that "A theatre event should burn into time, as a movement cuts into space."⁴⁰ This statement does not separate theatre from time, since a movement is not separate from the space it occupies though it changes it. A theatrical event similarly is part of real time, but it changes it. By the same token, Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese claim that "The actor or dancer is she who knows how to carve time. Concretely: she carves time in rhythm, dilating or contracting her actions."⁴¹ It is clear that "carving time" with actions can only happen in the moment of action, in the present. But the dilating and contracting Barba and Savarese talk about do not strictly mean elongating or shortening the amount of time it takes to perform an action. They refer here to what Stanislavsky calls the "inner" tempo-rhythm. Barba's theory of acting is associated with extra-daily (and non-realistic) techniques and on-going training. The dilated action, as opposed to a "regular" action, is

³⁸ See also Benedetti, Jean 68.

³⁹ Carnicke 226.

⁴⁰ Qt. in Goodall 172.

⁴¹ Barba and Savarese 211.

embedded with heightened “inner” energy that may not have a visible difference from the daily action, yet is qualitatively different. It is this dilation, according to Barba, that brings about heightened presentness and enables the actor to affect the experience of time in performance.

Declan Donnellan claims that the past and the future are, in fact, the actor’s enemy. He stresses the fact that the actor’s actions (as well as the target of these actions) can only exist in the present. Yet, much of the actor’s preparation deals with the past (the character’s biography, given circumstances etc.) and with the future (goal, objective). This creates a line of action and attention that stresses the movement from a known point in the past to a desired result in the future, leaving each present moment on the way unattended. In the chapter titled “Fear,” Donnellan claims that fear is often the reason for blocks on the actor’s creative process, arguing that

All problems of blocks get cured in the ‘now’.

Fear does not exist in the ‘now’. So he has to invent a pretend time to inhabit and rule. He takes the only real time, the present, and splits it into two time zones.

One half he calls the past and another half he calls the future. And those are the only two places he can live. Fear governs the future as Anxiety and the past as Guilt.⁴²

Donnellan’s clear-cut negation of the very existence, for the actor, of the past or future apart from some kind of “mental space” is reminiscent of the phenomenological standpoint that “any ‘life’ a performance achieves can only occur in the present.”⁴³

⁴² Donnellan 33.

⁴³ States, “Performance” 10.

What practices of presentness do is in fact a kind of balancing act to the prevalent tendency of actors to focus on past and future, against which Donnellan warns the actor. Adding focus, heightened attention, and responsiveness to the present-instant balances the traditional understanding, stemming from psychological realism, of an acting moment as always emanating from a ‘motivating event’ in the past and moving toward an objective to be achieved in the future. Because of the centrality of such notions, even on the smaller units or ‘bits’ of momentary actions, the flow from one moment to the next might end up being privileged over the sensory-motor entwinement with each particular moment on its own. In the standing-streaming model of time, then, streaming is often privileged over standing. Similarly, Stanislavsky called for a process in which “A continuous line of fleeting images is formed, both inside and outside us, like a film.”⁴⁴

With the metaphor of the film, and in his elaborate psychophysical system, Stanislavsky tries to combine the ‘standing’ and the ‘streaming’ of time. In comparison, in practices such as Suzuki, Viewpoints, and some parts of Lecoq there is a clear emphasis on the ‘standing’ part of the equation. The practitioners train in somatic experiencing of the moment and in making it the focus of the practice, thus complementing the tendency of much of mainstream actor-training to focus strictly on the streaming. In this vein, Joan Herrington claims that “Bogart actually favors actors who have trained in psychological realism, and actors with whom she works claim it is a necessity.”⁴⁵ This claim supports the idea of balancing between, on the one hand, the linear, forward moving approaches that are associated with psychological realism, and,

⁴⁴ Stanislavski 74.

⁴⁵ Herrington, “Directing” 160.

on the other hand, the techniques that enable the actor to attend closely to the psychophysical and sensory-motor event that emerge in each present-moment.

Rather than attending to the road, what Stanislavsky calls the through-line of action, the actor in practices such as Suzuki, Viewpoints, and Lecoq now attends to each point on the way as if it stands on its own. While Stanislavsky's 'bits' seem to correspond to short present-time units, they are usually constructed in light of the objective and correspond to the momentary action or intention rather than the emerging present experience. This focus, the impossible task of living the now regardless of past circumstances and future expectations, brings us back to the attempt of achieving "pure presence". Just like the neutral, which (as I discuss in the previous chapter) cannot be truly accomplished but which serves as a sought-after horizon for the training process, the present moment cannot be truly detached from the stream of time.

The three techniques I investigate attempt to enable the practitioner to tap onto the structure of temporal experience and make it an important part of the work. These approaches touch on the way we experience time and react to things in it, thus changing both our perception of temporal objects (moments, events in time) and our actions in relationship to them. These techniques, then, operate similarly to phenomenological methodologies that are meant to examine the operation of experience and reveal its structure by suspending the habitual inattentive immersion in experience:

Suspending one's inattentive immersion in experience implies the capacity to notice such immersion, and thus implies what psychologists call meta-awareness (awareness of awareness). Being able to redirect one's attention to the manner in

which something appears implies flexibility of attention; in particular it implies voluntarily being able to shift one's attention and stabilize or sustain it on a given mode of presentation. The ultimate aim is not to break the flow of experience, but to reinhabit it in a fresh way, namely, with heightened awareness and attunement.⁴⁶

In the next section I take a closer look at the different ways in which the Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Lecoq techniques train the practitioners in exploring temporal presentness. That is, I examine the ways in which the practice lays the ground for experiencing temporal dynamics that are determined by various embodied responses to emerging spatiotemporal events, following diverse temporal experiences each approach affords. These differences, however, are underlain by the structure of the experience of the present. As in the previous chapter, I spend more time on the Suzuki technique because it is the most firmly formed and thus enables a clearer examination of temporal presentness.

Training Time

Suzuki

In the Suzuki technique time is marked precisely on and by the body and the experience of time is related to the movement and location of the body in space. This is true of the more stationary exercises as well as of the more spatially dynamic exercises. Suzuki

⁴⁶ Thompson 19.

clearly demonstrates and embodies a sense of the now and almost marks the length of each present moment within a specific location and position for each individual actor and for the group as a whole. By juxtaposing exercises with different temporal structures we can expose the ways in which time is experienced and marked on the body in practice.

Performing the form of each exercise creates a concrete shared score for each moment. However, the experience of each moment depends on the way the flow between one moment to the next is timed. For example, the timing determined by the precise beat of a percussive music in the stomp exercise is experienced quite differently from the unexpected timing determined by the calling of beats by the leader of the training in the basic number one exercise. Further, ‘Training time’ in the Suzuki technique differs from time in everyday life initially because there is a set and clear structure to the flow of events. By working on timing in various ways, temporal presentness moves to the fore of the practitioners’ attention. The temporal structure of the exercises corresponds to Stanislavsky’s ‘outer rhythm’ and thus may be thought of as objective time. It is an objective temporal structure in the sense that it is known to and shared by all the practitioners. This objective time then becomes a container within which subjective temporal experience may emerge as the focus of awareness.

The Suzuki technique structures the experience of time by way of oppositions and tensions between movement and stillness, action and inaction, legato and staccato.⁴⁷

These oppositions are experienced as two aspects of a unified experience in time. What

⁴⁷ Legato and staccato are terms from classical music. Legato indicates the continuous flow of music from one note to the next whereas staccato denotes the separation and differentiation of each note with a short break between them.

this means is that the practitioners are asked, through the various exercises, to explore, for example, the existence of stillness within movement and movement within stillness thus investigating tempo-rhythm within a dialectic whole and developing high awareness to it. In this way, as I intend to show, the Suzuki technique instills in the practitioner's body a heightened relationship with time that creates heightened temporal presentness.

Many Suzuki exercises, such as the Walks, are done to fast-paced rhythmic music, requiring the actor to keep up with the rhythm while performing repeated steps with precision. In other exercises, such as the Standing Statues or Basic number 1 and number 2,⁴⁸ the timing of movement and stillness are determined by a cue from the instructor. Yet another temporal experience is created in the slow walk, when the practitioners move their center and upper body in one long continuous motion across the room. The different temporal experiences as well as the particular technical emphasis in each exercise create a rich temporal landscape for the actor; a landscape s/he goes through and, with long-term training, can embody to the extent of it becoming a "rich inner landscape"⁴⁹ that can be available in her work.

In the previous chapter I analyzed Suzuki's stomping for the way it structures the experience of space to create heightened spatial presentness. We can similarly examine the way stomping affects and helps the practitioner to achieve heightened temporal presentness. Stomping exemplifies the inclusion of a dialectic opposition within a single exercise: on the one hand, a continuous flow of movement and, on the other hand, a

⁴⁸ See description in chapter 3.

⁴⁹ Marshall 105.

punctuated differentiation, a break in time between one step to the next. The upper body, from the center up, keeps a continuous flowing movement while the lower body, the legs and feet, stomp on the floor to the beat of the music. The center of the body is the place from which the opposing movements originate as well as where the opposing forces collide. This dialectic is akin to the structure of the experience of the present as standing-streaming: with every beat the actor experiences a stop, as if standing for a split of a second and at the same time she experiences the continuous streaming movement of her center and upper body.

The two aspects combined create an embodied and heightened experience of the ingrained structure of temporal experience. In other words, each stomp forces the actor to experience the fleeting now, but without stopping to dwell on it because the next stomp must be taken immediately; and the more the actor commits to each stomp the harder it becomes to continue. In other words, this exercise requires heightened commitment to each step as if it stands alone, differentiated from its predecessor and the one that follows. As one becomes more proficient in the training, the level of commitment to each step *as well as* the efficiency and lightness in which one moves from one step to the next grow.

Juxtaposing the slow walk with the stomping reveals another type of temporal presentness that the Suzuki technique affords. Similarly to the stomping exercise, in the slow walk the center and upper body move along a continuous unchanging straight line. Theoretically speaking, if I were to cross the stage from left to right with only the upper body visible, the viewers would not be able to tell whether I am stomping or slow

walking.⁵⁰ It may seem as if the upper body's relationship to the vertical and horizontal is kept more or less the same in the slow walk and in the stomping because the speed of the movement is similar. However, the experience of the continuity of movement in the slow walk is similar to hearing one elongated musical note, stretching the present moment from its inception to an unknown end. In the stomping, on the other hand, the embodied experience is more akin to a fast repeated beat of a drum. The temporal experience in each is quite different. If the present moment were marked by the word 'now', the slow walk would sound like one long enunciation, 'n-o-o-o-o-o-o-w-w-w', and the stomping would sound like an abrupt repetition, now-now-now-now-now-now.

In the slow walk the legs and feet are freed from any prescribed form as the practitioners are instructed to merely enable the movement of the center in any way possible. In all the SITI Company workshops I took, the only indication about the legs and feet in this exercise was to not drag or slide the feet on the floor as is sometimes done in the Noh theatre. In fact, whenever a student would ask about the correct way to walk, the instructor avoided a direct answer and returned the debate to the quality of the horizontal movement of the center across the space. The emphasis for the movement, apart from keeping the same speed, height and straight line, is on creating strong tension and resistance on the front-back horizontal axis. When practitioners try to perform the slow walk while focusing on the way the legs and feet work, when they create a "way of walking", their attention is given to the planning and maintaining of this form. This

⁵⁰ I actually tried this with my students on several occasions. I hid my legs, from the center down, behind a long barre with a curtain so that only my upper body was visible. I then stomped along the curtain and then slow walked. The visible movement itself remained almost the same although its quality changed drastically.

results in reduced engagement with the environment since, temporally, planning ahead shifts my attention from the present to the future and reduces sensory-motor awareness and responsiveness. Focusing strictly on the center's movement and relationship with the surrounding (space, other practitioners, observers, point of fiction) forces the practitioner to be "in the moment", that is, to be continuously engaged with the emerging psychophysical circumstances that affect it.

In the Stomping Shakuuchi exercise the stomping and the slow walk are practiced immediately one after the other. The actor thus experiences the similarities and differences between the two types of temporal presentness and explores the two in relationship to time. Sequencing the two walks leads to contrasting as well as blending of the two spatio-temporal enactive experiences. This blending lets the practitioner experience the "dotted" dynamics of the stomping within the continuous flow of slow walk. That is, it enables each short "now" to be present within the elongated now-ness of the slow walk, helping the practitioner to avoid entering a type of lulled attention that is sometimes the result of performing simple, continuous, unchanging, slow movement.

The second part of the Suzuki exercise Stomping Shakuuchi is about to begin. At the end of three minutes of hard stomping to rhythmic music around the room, while keeping our center still and our upper body relaxed yet held, we line up along the back wall, still stomping. As the first part of the music ends abruptly, we all collapse to the floor as one. I struggle to control my breath. My cheek is on the floor and the only thing I see is someone's back carefully filling up with air and emptying it out, going through the

same struggle as me. I try to keep my awareness to the people on the floor beside me and, at the same time, keep connected to the rest of the group who are watching us from the front of the room. I try to be present for them and with them, to be alive and resist the tendency to disappear into the floor. As the Shakuhachi flute starts to play, we slowly raise ourselves from the floor and start slow-walking together toward the front of the room. The slow walk requires a high level of concentration as I try to maintain my center's movement within a constant speed along a straight line with constant distance from the floor and no motion from side to side, all the while keeping my focus on the fiction point in front of me and remaining in one line with the rest of the group. It is as if the center performs one long continuous action. As I rise from the floor I realize I'm a bit ahead of everyone else but I start walking, thinking "ok I'm going to walk slow enough so that they can catch up." I try to relax everything from the center of my body upward while keeping it formed and controlled, floating above my center. I don't look to the sides but I keep my awareness of the rest of the line as we move together in a continuous pace. I still struggle to control my breath and resist the habitual undulations of my body by maintaining a constant relationship between my center and space: the same height, the same speed, the same straight line of movement. All these various levels of attention I redirect to my colleagues, my audience, who are watching me as I close the distance between us. I've done it many times before yet it is still a struggle.

Right then and there Barney calls: "Ofer, text." I am not ready to speak and I am already speaking. Ready without preparation, the text starts pouring out of my mouth. As if I knew he was going to call me, although I didn't expect it. I am talking to whoever is

there in front of me, and I am exhausted and I just let that be part of the text and I feel suddenly that everything makes sense. The text becomes coherent, so clear to me and so emotionally loaded, without me doing anything. The emotion comes to me in such a clear... as if I'm really hurt and as if I am really... you know how you feel that you do something and it happens to you at the same time. You are done by it.

And the minute the text was over, I am still slow walking, thinking to myself, Wow.

At that moment I lost it...⁵¹

This description brings us back to Libet's found delay between a sensory stimulus and awareness of it. According to Libet, we often respond prior to, and regardless of, conscious awareness of a stimulus. In the instant described above there is the moment of response to O'Hanlon's cue, a moment in which I may have started speaking before being consciously aware of the stimulus that prompted me to speak, that is, without any conscious decision to speak. This led to an emerging response I could not foresee and to a string of heightened fresh sensations within a known prescribed structure of behavior, including the continuous movement and the spontaneous speech. Both the textual response and the experiential content of the moment that followed it emerged within an exercise that has a simple, precisely repeated physical structure. The uttered text that I know very well and which I repeated many times before sprang out as an immediate automatic response to the unpredictable cue from the instructor. This automatic response

⁵¹ SITI Workshop, Link's Hall, 12 July 2009.

within fixed structure thus demonstrates quite vividly Roach's model of spontaneity as arising within the framework of strictly structured, conditioned behavior.

A different type of temporal presentness is created through the Basic exercises. The various Basic exercises are temporally formed in a similar way, though each has different emphases and leads to different experiences in time (and space).⁵² These exercises are composed of fixed positions or postures performed in a set sequence. Moving from one position to the next, unless otherwise specified, is to be performed on cue from the instructor as quickly and as accurately as possible. When the precise position is reached at the end of the movement the practitioner should reach and maintain complete stillness. At times, the group is told to perform a particular movement in the sequence to a count of 5 or 10. The time that the practitioners spend in each position changes according to the cues given by the instructor, who often changes the pace from one cue to the next. Thus the actual time between each part of these exercises, the duration of stillness in the posture taken at the end of each movement and, as a result, the tempo of the entire sequence, changes each time.

The embedded unpredictability of timing in the Basic exercises creates a particular temporal experience that enables training in heightened temporal presentness. While spatially there are specific predetermined structures and movement to perform, it is mostly temporal variety that challenges the practitioners' experience and puts them in the state of temporal presentness. This is achieved by, on the one hand, keeping the practitioners in a state of constant expectation for the next cue, which may come

⁵² See also description in chapter 3.

immediately or in a few seconds/minutes and, on the other hand, by demanding full commitment to each current position. Because this readiness is for a known spatial element but within an emergent temporal structure, a particular focus is given to timing. The requirement is to perform the movement as quickly and accurately as possible, with full commitment to plunging into it on cue, and then to immediately commit to stillness in the following posture. Physically experiencing the contrast between extremely quick and strong movement and complete stillness within a changing temporal pattern is translated into heightened temporal presentness.

As an example, the Basic number 1 has four movements numbered accordingly from one to four and leading to four still postures. In the practice of this exercise the instructor may create a more or less stable rhythm of cueing, calling each number in the same timing she called its predecessor. One... two... three... four... one... two... This stable rhythm reduces the practitioners' active attention to the timing because they enter an unchanging, predictable temporal pattern. It may also lead to each still posture being a preparation for the next movement. In this example, temporal presentness is hindered by anticipation because rather than being fully immersed in each posture, the practitioner is always one step ahead, preparing for the next movement. This anticipation can be exposed once the pattern is broken, with change in timing, and the practitioners are then "caught anticipating." In the moment the pattern breaks, when the count stops abruptly, the practitioners will often continue to move to the next posture. It then usually takes a split of a second until they stop short when realizing they did not move on the instructor's cue but on anticipating the pattern to go on. As the session of training goes on, the actor

learns to let go of this anticipation and embrace each posture as a moment on its own. This, in turn, may initially result in letting go of the readiness for change, leading the actor to be unprepared for the next cue. That is, it may create the opposite effect: the practitioners hold on to the static position even after the cue is given, causing them to delay their response. In other words, they dwell on the secure immediate past and are not completely responsive to the emerging cues from their surrounding.

The process of learning and embodying temporal presentness, as described above, includes revealing the practitioners' tendency to either anticipate what is about to come (immediate future) or to dwell on what just came to be (immediate past). This first step is almost inevitable as the extreme temporal structure of the Basic exercises challenges our habitual daily behavior in which the present comprises of constant negotiation of the immediate past and immediate future.⁵³ That is, the heightened temporal dynamic reveals the structure of experience of the present as including retention and protention. Revealing these intentional processes is similar to Thompson's suspending of "one's inattentive immersion in experience" in order to gain heightened awareness and attunement. Once these primary intentions toward immediate past and future are revealed, the practitioner can have better control over the way s/he operates in the present in relationship to them. The purpose, then, is not to avoid retention and protention (an impossibility) but rather to be able to tap onto both these intentional processes and reinforce them as two opposing poles that make the present "thicker".

⁵³ See Thompson's theory of structure of time above.

As in my description of the Stomping Shakuhachi exercise above, another element that is usually added to the basic exercises is the utterance of text in any one of the still positions. The text is memorized in advance by the entire group and uttered in unison with stops for breathing in predetermined places. Similarly to the structure of stops and starts that forms the Basic exercises, the use of text may easily fall into an unchanging rhythm which may result in the text being uttered automatically by each individual in the group. However, both the speed of the speech and the length of each stop serve as opportunities for negotiating timing among the participants. Thus temporal presentness can be explored and developed not only through movement but also with text.

Viewpoints

In the Viewpoints technique time and space are conceptually defined through their respective Viewpoints. In Viewpoints training the experience of time is divided into specific foci for the actor at work: Duration, Tempo, Repetition, and Kinesthetic Response.

Each one of the temporal Viewpoints can be dissected in light of the model of the experience of time as standing-streaming. For example, playing with changes in the duration of a gesture (the time it takes to perform it) from short and abrupt to long and continuous may change the experience of the gesture in time and of the present moment of that gesture. When its duration is short, it could be perceived as contained within (or as

forming) a single present moment. Conversely, the same gesture can be perceived as part of a longer occurrence in time, as being part of a sequence of gestures that together form ‘a moment.’ This highlights the tension between, on the one hand, the isolation of the gesture as *standing* apart from the rest of the flow of events and, on the other, the participation of that gesture in the *streaming* or unfolding of events. Even when elongated, that same gesture could still be similarly experienced as an isolated present moment, that is, as standing. At the same time, it could be perceived as comprised of several present moments that together create the experience of streaming. Further, it could be taken as a part of an even larger present moment.

Pertinent for this argument is Merleau-Ponty’s claim that “though my present is, if we wish so to consider it, this instant, it is equally this day, this year or my whole life.”⁵⁴ Accepting this perspectival approach to the present allows us to accept the simultaneous existence of various possibilities for the experience of the present. It also corresponds to Stanislavsky’s tempo-rhythm in relating the ‘objective’ speed with the subjective experience of time.

Examining the duration of a moment within a sequence of events leads us to the Viewpoint tempo, which can be seen as the result of a series of durations. Duration and tempo are probably easier to grasp as elements that shape the flow of occurrences over time. They can be easily detected and explored through the fluctuation and change in the occurrence itself. That is, every movement, utterance, or event has a specific duration and creates a specific rhythmic sensation in itself or in relationship to previous and following

⁵⁴ *Phenomenology* 489.

moments.⁵⁵ Further, duration and rhythm are entwined and directly affect one another: the duration of each moment in a series of moments determines rhythm.

Of the four Viewpoints of time, Kinesthetic Response is most likely the least intuitively grasped yet the one that is most intimately related to temporal presentness.⁵⁶ Therefore, it often requires special attention in the practice. At times, especially in early stages of the training, being aware of it necessitates intentionally producing a particularly clear instance that highlights the operation of kinesthetic response over the participants. In a Viewpoints session the practitioners are constantly geared toward surprising themselves so that at every moment of practice what one does is a spontaneous, embodied response that is not consciously predetermined. This kind of response is what kinesthetic response refers to. This Viewpoint is related to timing and to immediacy without prior contemplation. An example of this type of kinesthetic response appeared in a discussion following a Viewpoints session in which D. commented that, as he was doing the exercise, “I suddenly found myself leaving the flock on an impulse, and as I was doing it I realized I chose to do it; or my body did.”⁵⁷ In other words, D. was in a process of following impulses and discovering what he has already decided to do, while following this decision. This ability to respond in the moment prior to conscious engagement is tightly related to temporal presentness.

⁵⁵ See also the discussion of Stanislavsky’s term tempo-rhythm.

⁵⁶ Barney O’Hanlon likes to simplify this Viewpoint and call it ‘response time.’

⁵⁷ Ravid 48. This quote is from my MA thesis research. The Viewpoints session was part of a Lab process I instigated at Ithaca College in collaboration with teachers from the college and other local artists. The Flock is an exercise in which the group works together like a flock of birds with no prescribed leader.

Barba calls the ability for such presentness ‘being decided,’ which “does not mean that someone or something decides for us or that we submit to a decision. Neither does it mean that we are deciding, nor that we are carrying out the action of deciding.”⁵⁸ Although it takes training to achieve the state of ‘being decided’ in practice, it seems to be an integral part of our daily behavior. In his book *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*, Raymond Gibbs claims that being decided may describe the habitual way we make decisions and respond to the world.

Conceptualizing action from a dynamical system perspective explains why people need not explicitly decide something each time they act. The person’s current frame of mind automatically selects a subset from the unlimited other alternatives within her self-organized constraint-space. For instance, when your friend decides to inform you of her belief about the lecture, she does not need to explicitly formulate a decision or proximate intention about what to do. Her ‘choice’ of yawning rather than doing something else (e.g., writing a note, talking aloud to you) can *be ‘decided’* by the interaction between her own dynamics and the environment as the process ‘moves downstream.’⁵⁹

Gibbs treats most daily actions, be they yawning or starting to talk, as emerging from similar processes of dynamical entwinement of body in environment. According to him, most of our daily actions do not need conscious decisions but are rather the operation of ‘being decided.’ In other words, using Viewpoints lingo, most of our daily actions involve and possibly originate from kinesthetic response.

The challenge for the actor in training is how to maintain the process within the context of practice. It should be clear that all responses in training, whether in scripted or

⁵⁸ *Paper 33.*

⁵⁹ Gibbs 75, my italics.

improvisational practice, emerge as part of a process similar to daily life as described by Gibbs. The difference is not necessarily in the process itself but in the conditions, both environmental and individual, within which this process takes place. Most prominently, each action in practice takes place within circumstances and carries consequences that are not directly related to the moment of training but rather have to do with “real life” considerations. Echoing Donnellan’s claim about the past and the future as creating fear and impeding the experience of the present, we may say that professional and personal considerations that infiltrate training time influence the process of being decided. Considerations that should remain external to training time may include, for example: an *a priori* idea of a desirable experience, wanting to please the instructor, expecting to receive a specific response from partners/viewers.

Training time, then, should be bracketed from the flow of reality. In this sense, there is an attempt to turn training time into “liminal time.”⁶⁰ Similar to the process of training in spatial presentness in Lecoq and Suzuki, which includes aiming toward a type of “physical neutrality,” the practitioner attempts to shed the individual past and future, and replace the habitual conditions that shape daily behavior with the conditions shaped by the particular practice. This isolation of training time from the flow of reality is akin to the “intimate moment” Bogart mentions in the epigraph. Naturally, one cannot rid oneself of her personal history, memories, expectations, and wants. Only by reaching heightened immersion in each moment can the practitioners reach presentness and escape, for a short

⁶⁰ There are various ways to distinguish training time from ‘life-time.’ In Lecoq training, for example, the practitioners are expected to change into black movement clothes, which literally ‘colors’ the training space and time in ‘neutral’ colors. Warming up and exercising alignment are both ways to define an embodied zero point of departure after which the actual training session may begin.

instant, the “rush of time.”⁶¹ This immersion might be reached by paying close attention to the various temporal Viewpoints, thus affecting timing in each and every moment.

As the following description shows being decided, i.e. succeeding in letting go of pre-meditated decisions and letting each training moment’s decision emerge, often depends on the structure of the exercise and the focus given to the practitioners.

I had interesting discoveries in the first day of the Viewpoints workshop I led today.⁶² The Flow exercise enables me to lead this group of people, some of which aren’t even actors, pretty quickly into the essence of the technique. It really touches listening and responding abilities on the most basic level. We spent much of the class on it. Leading the group into the exercise I introduce each element of the flow gradually. From my experience, it’s important that the two elements of the flow that I introduce first are the element of going through the spaces that open up between two people (passing through gates or “gating,” as Barney⁶³ calls it) and then the element of following someone. In each one of these elements, the stimulus is a condition for the action because I can’t go through a “gate” without there being a gate opened for me to go through; similarly, in order to follow I need someone to be there to follow. The other elements of the Flow exercise can risk being produced autonomously. Stopping and starting, changing direction and changing rhythm (or speed) can all be produced independently of

⁶¹ See Bogart’s epigraph.

⁶² This was part of the Introductory Viewpoints/Suzuki Workshop I taught in Chicago in March 2010 as part of the Training Group expansion efforts (see Chapter 2).

⁶³ Barney O’Hanlon, SITI Company member.

what actually takes place around me. I can simply decide or plan to do it. But that misses the point of this exercise: letting go of making conscious decisions and letting the moment decide for you, surprise you. When I introduced the stop/start element, I watched how most of the time, most of the participants simply started to play with this element on their own and stopped listening to others. I commented on that, saying something like “try to take the cue for stopping and starting from what’s going on around you,” but very little had changed. I then realized I can make them practice stopping and starting in which the stimulus is also the condition for the action (of stopping or starting). The condition was: when someone stops – everyone stops, when someone starts – everyone starts. This immediately made it clear for them what it means to make the stops and starts a response as opposed to a decision and I could then go back to individually stopping and starting.

After spending some time on the flow with all its elements and as we discussed the difference between deciding and being decided by the moment, K. asked: “when I noticed an opening between two people, I felt I had to go through the gate, but then there were so many gates opening for me that I was too busy going through them and had to decide when not to pay attention to them if I wanted to practice other elements of the Flow.” I answered: “We want to develop a clear distinction between attention to or, better said, the awareness of the opening of the gate, the noticing, and the reaction – the action or movement that follows. There’s always the possibility of not going through the gate even though you notice it; each time it’s an instant choice. So, as you notice a gate you go through it OR NOT! This ‘or not’ is important only if it’s part of noticing. If you put your

body in this questioning mode of 'When I notice a gate, will I go through it or not?' you start doing the work."

The 'or not' worked wonderfully. It made it apparent that the work is done not by actually going through the gate, the resulting action, but by having the potential there and realizing in the moment when I follow this with an action or not. You can potentially spend the entire time never going through gates but still playing 'gating.' At a certain point the choice of following the impulse 'or not' is done so quickly that you are able to surprise yourself and discover the choice you made after the fact. The same is true for the other elements of the flow.

This description suggests that kinesthetic responsiveness and temporal presentness may be developed by enhancing two elements in the training. First, in order to respond kinesthetically in the moment the practitioner should not be able to anticipate or decide on the exact timing of the response. This condition operated naturally when I created a group condition for stopping or starting to walk. Once the practitioners experienced the difference between deciding and being decided by the group they were able to develop conditions of their own and let go of the uniform condition I imposed. Second, the response itself, the action one does kinesthetically, should not be pre-determined. Even when the repertoire of responses is limited to just one element of the flow such as passing through 'gates,' the 'or not' condition leaves at least two options for each moment of response.

These conditions can be seen as questions one's body is continuously asked: when and how to respond at each and every moment? And, when these two questions are enacted as part of the ongoing flow of events with no time for contemplation, they may lead the practitioner to 'be decided.' Incorporating these question/conditions and inhabiting them (making a habit of them) as part of ongoing training, develops and maintains the practitioner's temporal presentness in the long run.

For many practitioners, especially those raised on Western cultural values that privilege individual free choice, the elements of the flow (as well as other Viewpoints exercises) may seem to restrict the possibility for total freedom of response. However, each one of the elements of the Flow exercise creates abundant opportunities for various responses. In fact, if one were to try to be aware of even a fragment of the possibilities for responding, one may be overwhelmed. A small group of five practitioners, for example, presents the potential to follow five different people and go through six gates at each moment of training (or not). For someone like Akiko Aizawa, a native Japanese who joined the SITI Company after being a member of SCOT, the Viewpoints' freedom seemed daunting: "The first time [I practiced Viewpoints], I was so frightened, because... so much freedom... so much freedom... I was in the Suzuki Company of Toga, and first, I'm so [...] restricted... but Viewpoints is kind of free, and so, I couldn't move."⁶⁴

As opposed to the pre-determined timing and temporal structure in the Suzuki technique, the Viewpoints technique opens the practitioner's perception to explore emergent temporal relationships. Repetition plays a big part in both techniques and

⁶⁴ Qt. in Potter, 250.

operates similarly within the fixed structure of Suzuki and the open improvisation of Viewpoints. Leon Ingsrud, member of SITI Company and former member of Suzuki Company (SCOT) stresses that in both techniques one focuses on finding the difference between one moment and the next, even within repetition. He terms this

‘Receiving the news of a difference’, or, like, noticing that things have changed. And in Suzuki, you know, going across the floor and trying to make each stop real. And both of those ideas are about differentiating one moment from the next. So on stage, in the large scale you’re differentiating tonight’s performance from last night’s; this audience from last night’s. And in a smaller sense, trying to differentiate each moment from the one before and not let the fact that you have a plan, that you know what you’re doing, that you practiced this and you know it really well, get in the way of your actual experience of the moment. Both of the trainings are intimately connected to that skill, that process.⁶⁵

The possibility of differentiating one moment from the next does not require knowledge of what the moment is.

Dustyn Martincich, a university movement instructor who participated in the 2009 SITI Company workshop in Chicago mentioned, following a Viewpoints session, that she had discovered “The timing of when to stay with an idea or when to move on.” In Viewpoints improvisation this question often arises when a moment can be extended or repeated indefinitely. Martincich’s description reveals some of the challenges that such a moment creates:

Yesterday it really felt comfortable when we were doing a regular jam at the end of the [Viewpoints] session and it was a more physical dance moment that I saw somebody do and I got up and I continued doing it, continued doing it, continued

⁶⁵ Personal Interview, 10 Aug 2009.

doing it; and did it, did it, did it for so long; and then I sat down and walked away. And, you know, that was an ending. Typically, I'm in my head thinking: 'Shit, what shall I do next.' But in there, I didn't feel that in that moment it was necessary to think about what I should do next. I wasn't trying to judge it, I didn't try to pre-plan what was going to happen next, I wasn't trying to overly perform this moment. I was just trying to be in the moment, 'till the moment stopped being in me.⁶⁶

The clear temporal structure that is laid down through this description can demonstrate the difficulties of dealing with temporal presentness. It begins with repetition, as Martincich first joins someone else's dance and repeats its movements over and over again. It feels the moment lasts for a long time (duration), which, according to her, often leads to thinking ahead and anticipating the next move. Nevertheless, the moment of ending may have been a moment of kinesthetic response, and therefore temporal presentness, because she simply walked away without deciding ahead or pre-planning.

The pattern of thought, judgment, and planning ahead that Martincich describes is typical of a lengthy moment of repeated activity in which there is time to think, judge, and plan ahead. In this situation, the longer one stays in a continuously repeated moment the harder it gets to change it and move on. The instant of stepping out of a repeated prolonged activity attains greater risk because of the high contrast it creates between the charged lengthy moment and whatever follows. In one of the Viewpoints improvisations as part of a SITI workshop Leon Ingsrud, who participated in the session, was standing still facing the back wall for a very long time while the other participants kept improvising with movement and sound. As he stood there, high tension arose in me

⁶⁶ Personal Interview, 13 Aug. 2009.

concerning the question: when and how will he do something else? It felt as if the moment of change would have to be a significant one, at least as charged as the standing-by-the-wall moment. However, when the moment came, Ingsrud simply turned and walked away from the wall, as if that was the plan all along.

As opposed to the Flow exercise in which the moment constantly changes as the practitioner is challenged by the flow of emerging new stimuli, in a repeated moment there is stability and continuity. The question, then, is how one treats each moment within this ongoing repetition as a distinct moment in itself. Distinguishing each moment means that repetition is made of discernible moments, and each of these moments is a potential for repeating, ‘or not’. Arguably, Viewpoints training makes each choice—to repeat, to follow, etc.—just as hard as its exact opposite, the ‘or not’. Hence, it should be just as difficult to stay within a repetition as it is to break it; and it should be just as easy to do one as it is the other. The stakes should be high in both cases. And these high stakes lead to heightened presentness.

The experience of, and training in, temporal presentness in the Viewpoints is structured through the various temporal Viewpoints. Each Viewpoint focuses the practitioner’s attention to a particular aspect of the present moment within the standing-streaming dialectic. This tension helps us pay attention to each and every moment without breaking the flow of events. It helps avoid, on the one hand, being stuck in one moment to the extent that one is not affected by changes and, on the other, let the flow of events take over so that one automatically flows from one moment to the next.

Ultimately, both the Viewpoints and Suzuki techniques wake up the practitioner’s

temporal presentness so that she can “be present for longer and longer. We fall asleep so often. I think both these training are actually asking us to be present and to practice, seeing how long we can exchange that before something takes us out of it.”⁶⁷

Lecoq

In this section I briefly examine temporal presentness in Lecoq’s Neutral Mask work, then compare it to clown training. As I intend to show, there is a clear difference between the ways the two training approaches affect temporal presentness. While the neutral’s structured temporality can be compared with the structure of the experience of time in Suzuki, the subjective time created by the clown training can be seen as closer to Viewpoints.

As I show in the previous chapter, Lecoq’s training system uses very specific spatial structures or ‘masks,’ in the wider sense of the word,⁶⁸ in order to awaken presentness. The Neutral Mask serves as the zero point of orientation for all other masks and training toward its spatial neutrality is the first step toward achieving temporal neutrality. In other words, training in the present begins with training in the vertical; as Paola Coletto claims: “Everything that goes before and after the vertical is past or future.”⁶⁹ This claim can be examined in relation to Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of embodied metaphors. Their theory offers two primary spatial metaphors that position

⁶⁷ O’Hanlon, Viewpoints/Suzuki intensive workshop, Link’s Hall, Chicago, 5 August 2009.

⁶⁸ See for example Fusetti’s comment in Chapter 3, p. 31.

⁶⁹ Coletto, personal interview, 27 April 2011.

time in relation to the body. The first metaphor treats time as a moving object that moves towards us from the front/future, passes us and moves backward into the past. The second treats time as a path on which we move from the past, which we leave behind us, forward into the future, which is ahead of us. Being vertical means neither leaning forward nor backward but being in perfect balance in-between them. If the here-ness of the vertical is directly related to the now-ness of the present, then leaning forward may mean expecting or anticipating something in the future and leaning backward may mean avoiding what is to come and trying to stay in a past occurrence.

Similarly to the spatial balance of verticality, the tempo-rhythm of my movement with the Neutral Mask and the duration of each action require a measure of exactitude in the balance between moving too fast or too slow. In a Neutral Mask session Coletto claimed that “the different rhythms that you’re walking tell different stories.”⁷⁰ Fast tempo may create the sensation of rushing; that is, I am either trying to get somewhere in the future or trying to get away from somewhere in the past. Conversely, moving too slow may create the sensation of attachment to the past or avoiding getting to the future. Stemming from this articulation is the notion that temporal neutrality is achieved when, for the practitioner, there is no past or future, only now. This idea is backed by Laura Purcell Gates’s observation of a workshop with Philippe Gaulier who is a world wide authority on Lecoq teachings: “The Neutral Mask as positioned in Gaulier’s workshop

⁷⁰ Coletto, “Neutral to Clown” workshop, 17 Dec. 2009.

was physically a-temporal, with no bodily past that might influence the body's present moment."⁷¹

In opposition to Gaulier's notion about the a-temporal nature of the Neutral Mask (as articulated by Purcell Gates), Coletto claims that this work does not mean actually entering a present that is outside the flow of time. In an introductory workshop to the Neutral Mask and the red nose clown she stated:

What it means to only exist in the present is that we go back to the action. [...] It can only work if you touch that present. [But] that's why it's not going to happen. Why it's extremely difficult. We don't do that to be good at it, and to *be* neutral and to make the mask work. We do it to touch that possibility for a second.⁷²

Training with the Neutral Mask, then, is one of the processes through which one is trying to reach an unattainable instant of heightened temporal presentness in order to have it as a clear horizon of possibility rather than a stable state.

The result of attempting to "step out of time" can be daunting. In the early stages of training with the Neutral Mask there is often a sensation of temporal disorientation.⁷³ Because of the need to maintain perfect temporal balance in each and every action, even simple daily actions such as walking become especially difficult to perform. The heightened attention one has to give to the duration and tempo of each and every small movement causes some people to slow down. This often has the effect of performing a kind of ceremonial movement, as if every step bears special consequences. Other practitioners may feel that everything happens too slowly, causing them to speed up. An

⁷¹ Purcell Gates, "Tout" 150.

⁷² Coletto, "Neutral to Clown" workshop, 17 Dec. 2009.

⁷³ For a discussion on disorientation see chapter 5.

example of this temporal disorientation is given in research that was published in the journal *The Arts in Psychotherapy*: “One young man pointed out how he was aware of slowing down at the same time he attempted to energize himself: ‘There’s an energy thing that’s still happening that’s not controllable, that makes the physical actions feel like I’m doing them too slowly. And there’s always something saying, ‘Well, get on with it.’”⁷⁴ This account shows the struggle to control the temporal flow of action when working with the Neutral Mask. As the training continues, most practitioners find the way to gain temporal control over their actions while wearing the mask, enabling them to explore temporal presentness in relationship to the Neutral.

The neat structuring of both temporal and spatial presentness through the Neutral Mask work serves as a starting point in the pedagogical journey of Lecoq training. At the other end of the journey is the red-nose clown training.⁷⁵ Coletto often connects the Neutral Mask work to clown work claiming that “The red nose is the same [as the Neutral Mask], it’s a great tool as a mask [...] and they’re complementary, meaning that they are the beginning and the end of a circle, of the theatre journey.”⁷⁶ The clown is often described as the antithesis of the Neutral Mask.⁷⁷ The Neutral positions the actor in relation to an “objective” and “universal” spatiotemporal horizon. The clown, on the

⁷⁴ Turner, Craig 41.

⁷⁵ In the Lecoq school in Paris, as well as in other schools that follow the same approach, the Neutral mask work is followed by an investigation of more distinctly defined spatiotemporal dynamics of different elements, materials, colors etc. Next, the journey goes through different dramatic territories such as tragedy, melodrama, commedia dell’arte and boufon, leading to the final part of training in the red-nose clown (Lecoq).

⁷⁶ Coletto, “Neutral to Clown” workshop, 17 Dec. 2009.

⁷⁷ Murray 73.

other hand, positions the actor in relation to a completely personal and subjective space and time.

While the work on temporal presentness with the Neutral Mask may seem like an exercise in balance and control, working on the red-nose clown calls for surrender and loss of control. Temporally, this means entering a heightened state of attentiveness and responsiveness leading to synchronicity with others in the room; as Colletto commented to one of the participants in a workshop: “You have to be able to come here first and accept whatever is happening here.”⁷⁸

J., a woman in her mid twenties, enters the room with her red nose on. She walks to the center of the playing area and stands in front of the rest of the participants who are all sitting on the floor of the studio space. She looks at the group, trying to make eye contact; her eyes wander from one side of the group to the other. She seems to be looking for something, waiting for something to happen. After what seems like a long time her gaze changes and she tries to look at us with more intent. She then starts walking toward one of the people. She takes two steps then stops. As she starts to take one more step Paola says something to her. Her head rises and turns to Paola. She obviously didn't hear what Paola said. She has a questioning look on her face. As she looks at Paola,

⁷⁸ Colletto, “Neutral to Clown” workshop, 17 Dec. 2009.

*trying to understand what she just heard, we all start laughing. Almost immediately she looks at us again, smiling. Almost immediately the laughter subsides.*⁷⁹

What happened in the moment J. looked at Paola that made us laugh? How did our response emerge so instantaneously and disappear just as fast? As J. attested right after the exercise was over, she tried to avoid “trying to make us laugh,” while constantly expecting something to happen that *would* make us laugh. This articulation clearly shows why initially her temporal presentness was diminished. She was attached to the past, in the form of the predetermined idea of how it should or should not work, and to the future, in the form of her anticipation for a response. Entering with an idea and into a state of anticipation resulted in diminished responsiveness. Consequently, when Paola spoke to her, J. unwittingly had a moment of simple kinesthetic response to something happening at that very instant. She was suddenly present and responsive; and, the red-nose mask turns such moments of temporal presentness into laughter. For an instant she seemed transparent, which struck a chord in her spectators. Immediately following our laughter, J. stopped listening to Paola and went back to her previous state. The clown state, as this example shows, relies heavily on kinesthetic response. Further, this response operates on an intersubjective level wherein the clown’s ‘nowness’ is exposed to the viewers. In this process, the red nose seems to operate as a temporal presentness detector, causing a reaction from the viewers who witness the performer’s presentness.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

* * *

In this chapter I examined training time and time in training, specifically focusing on the creation of moments of heightened presentness within the praxis of Suzuki, Viewpoints, and Lecoq techniques. The specific relationship an actor develops toward time at each training moment expands the range of her heightened temporal experience. Each technique uses different mechanisms that result in distinct relationships between the practitioners and the flow of time.

Temporal and spatial presentness are two aspects of the same experiential phenomenon. As I show in this chapter and in chapter three, both temporal and spatial presentness operate as part of our being in training. In the next chapter I turn to examine failure as an aspect of the training that enhances presentness and operates both spatially and temporally. In my final discussion of the clown exercise J. experienced a brief moment of uncertainty and disorientation which enabled her to be momentarily present at the intersubjective level required to include her observers. Uncertainty and disorientation are just two types of failure that I explore in the next chapter. In it I show how the three techniques use failure as a mechanism to heighten both temporal and spatial presentness.

Chapter 5

Failure or the Paradox of Embodied Success

To be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping.

Samuel Beckett¹

Some eighteen years ago, I entered the classroom on the first day of my three-year studies at the Nissan Nativ Acting Studio.² I looked around at my new classmates with whom I was about to spend the best of the next three years as we all waited anxiously for the first class to begin. Nissan Nativ himself, the legendary teacher and founder of the school, entered the room. We had all seen him during the long process of auditions, but this time it's a class and he is our first teacher. He sat, a seventy year old man with silver hair and creviced skin, facing us with tinted glasses through which we could barely see his eyes. His body seemed younger than him: his back straight, hands on his knees, as if ready for action, one foot flat on the ground and the other slightly back with its heel raised. He

¹ Beckett 21.

² Nissan Nativ Acting Studio is considered for many years one of the most prestigious professional actor-training programs in Israel. It is a three year conservatory for acting. For more information see www.nissan-nativ.org.il.

portrayed the figure of the mythological acting teacher to perfection. After drily welcoming us to the school with his not-quite-distinguished European accent, he said: “In this school you’re allowed to do anything. You have permission to fail. You should let yourself do anything even at the risk of failing to ‘act well.’ The only thing you’re not allowed to do in this school is let the fear of failure stop you from doing something.”³

Failure was the very first thing presented to me as part of the “right” way to enter the learning process in this professional setting. Paradoxically, immediately after and throughout the training process I was taught and expected to succeed in performing what I had learned. What did Nativ mean? In retrospect, I assume he meant partly that we should let ourselves experiment and risk failing in what we do, knowing that there is a safety net to make each failure a learning experience toward succeeding in acquiring the necessary skill-set and knowledge. The advantages of this pedagogical approach are not unique to actor-training. Perhaps more pertinent, his approach toward the art of acting was steeped in a paradox that might be as significant as Denis Diderot’s *Paradoxe*: in order to succeed in acting, the actor must allow herself to learn and practice how to fail, constantly. That is, to be in the process of acting requires one to be in a process of dealing with the ever recurring potential for failure.

Declan Donnellan proposes the idea of the Stakes as being made of two opposing possibilities rather than one thing the actor should focus on. He claims that in every choice the actor takes for the character, there is something to be won—which would

³ This quote is not verbatim because, naturally, after so many years I can only remember the gist of things. I did keep Nativ’s idea in my mind for many years and heard various versions of these sentences from other graduates of the Studio.

entail the momentary success of the action—and something to be lost—the loss of which would mean the action’s failure. In other words, success and failure are eminent in each and every moment for the character. The result of a dramatic action, therefore, should always be evaluated in light of these terms, leaving the actor in a constant search for the character’s possible failure.

This tension between success and failure is paramount to actor-training and may as well be at the heart of all learning processes. Johanna Linsley claims that “One premise of pedagogy is that the successful outcome of learning is knowledge. At the same time, there is a notion that the risk of failure offers a crucial freedom to the student. Without a safe space to fail, experimentation and innovation cannot occur.”⁴ Hence, the paradox is that in order to succeed in going through a deep process of learning one should allow oneself to fail. As I intend to show, this paradox is even more deeply engrained in the art of acting. A similar tension between success and failure seems to exist in the arts in general, most apparently since the beginning of “modern art” when many innovators created from a position that responded to or negated existing knowledge and conventional understanding of the arts. Further, many iconoclastic artists may have been considered failed artists by their contemporaries. Some of these innovators might not have turned to seek new artistic routes had they not failed within the existing conventions of their artistic milieu. Consequently, much of 20th century quintessential acting practices and theories owe much to failure.

⁴ Linsley 59.

Failure played a crucial role in the development of modern acting. It was Stanislavsky's experience of failure as an actor—emerging after he was already an acclaimed actor, director, and the leader of a celebrated theatre company—that pushed him to develop his system.⁵ Particularly, Stanislavsky's greatest failure was, to him, his inability to keep the life of the role within the repeated structure of performance. Edward Gordon Craig's theory of the *ubermarionette* deals, in a way, with the problem of failure by attempting to avert it completely. By calling to replace the actor with the ubermarionette Craig points to the inevitability of the human-actor's failure to repeatedly perform her part with the desired exactitude he envisioned. While positing the ubermarionette as the utopian performer and radically demanding the replacement of the live actor, Craig calls for a perfect form of acting. Striving for perfection in acting and failing to achieve it seems to be one of the recurring themes in praxes of presentness.

Perhaps more than any other theatre thinker, Antonin Artaud's philosophy and practice, as well as personality, symbolize extreme failure entangled with success. Professionally, he failed to produce the kind of theatre he preached for. And in his insanity he failed to be a normal part of society. However, Artaud succeeded in influencing generations to come with his theories and manifestos. Further, failure in acting looms from his writing through the call for artists to be “like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames,”⁶ and from his invoking danger, anarchy, and chaos⁷ as opposed to the safe theatre he encountered and despised. These and other failures are

⁵ As he describes in *My Life in Art* 458. See also Benedetti, Jean 41-45.

⁶ Artaud 13.

⁷ Ibid 42-3.

arguably all part of the nature of the contemporary art of acting. The extreme relationships that the praxis of Stanislavsky, Craig, and Artaud have with the failure/success duality are just three revealing examples of the slippery nature of the terms and their particular entanglement in art and for artists.

In this chapter I argue that heightening the actor's presentness can be achieved by training in specific embodied forms of failure. Heightened presentness, I contend, may become more readily available when the embodied awareness of the immanent possibility for failure at each and every moment becomes habitual through ongoing training; when one's sensory-motor apparatus becomes accustomed to being aware of the potential to constantly and repeatedly fail. This type of practice of failure, then, is a kind of conditioning for the actor, developing of 'reflexes of failure' rather than the representation of failure or an attempt to learn how to create apparent failure onstage.

Training in particular forms of failure does not mean one trains to fail onstage or that even the risk of failure would be apparent to an observer. Rather, in some forms of practice of failure the practitioners embody the dynamic tension caused by repeated *micro-failures*, heightening the ruptures that such failures open in the conventional linear formation of thought and action. Training to embody micro-failures can be most clearly detected in the Suzuki technique. Another type of failure appears in moments of *disorientation* and *uncertainty* which unsettle the practitioner's encounter with the world as well as her self-knowledge. Mask training, particularly Neutral Mask work, does create micro-failures, but also causes disorientation that serves to increase presentness. The Viewpoints technique enables the actor to accept uncertainty of knowledge, thus

increasing presentness through the failure to know and anticipate each moment in time and space. Finally, a foundational part of Lecoq clown training requires the failure to hold onto the habits of socialization and is based on other forms of embodied failure while applying them to create the clown state.

Before further elaborating on these various types of embodied failure, which are intrinsically connected to presentness, in the next section I give a brief overview of some of the extant scholarship that deals with failure in the arts in general and in performance in particular. Although the writers whose work I delineate deal with failure in different contexts than actor-training, their theories are useful for understanding the influence of failure on various aspects of practice. They offer an approach that positions failure in its various forms and manifestations at the heart of the experience of theatre and performance.

Failure (in theory)

“Failure is all of a sudden quite trendy” claim Róisín O’Gorman and Margaret Werry in the editorial introduction to the *Performance Research* issue dedicated to failure.⁸ Indeed, it seems that failure has recently gained much attention in theatre and performance scholarship: alongside the abovementioned dedicated journal issue, several recent articles and books focus on this contentious term.⁹ O’Gorman and Werry go as far as to argue that failure is performance’s “innate ontological condition: its defining liveness and

⁸ “On Failure” 1.

⁹ See for example Bailes; Ridout; Le Feuvre; Halberstam.

ephemerality marks performance's ultimate failure to perpetuate itself. It becomes itself (to bawdlerize Peggy Phelan) through failing."¹⁰ Exploring and constructing practices of performance around failure affords scholars and artists a point of view that is already skewed from mainstream, consensual ways of thinking. It relates to the post-modern endeavor to break away from monolithic, logocentric expression. Further, O'Gorman and Werry claim that

performance studies has also focused on failure's intimate relationship with creativity. These authors recuperate failure, even champion it as a site of resistance. For them, failure's promise lies in its capacity to unravel the certainties of knowledge, competence, representation, normativity and authority. Failure, they argue, is the inevitable and critical counterpoint to modernity's empty promises of progress and betterment.¹¹

Taken into my main argument, the ways in which failure "unravels the certainties of knowledge" of the present in training, enables heightened presentness. That is, the baseline for the process of actor-training in practices of presentness is arguably the constant challenging of the attempt, even the possibility, to know the present. The type of knowledge that is challenged is the conscious knowledge that enables to safely stay within a linear narrative about what is happening in the present moment.

The failure to attain perceptual "certainty of knowledge" is, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, part of the structure of our lived experience. Merleau-Ponty posits the subject's relationship with the world as laden with the "ever recurrent failure of

¹⁰ "On Failure" 2.

¹¹ Ibid 1, italics mine.

perceptual consciousness.”¹² This failure is part of Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the subject as entwined with the world and therefore unable to perceive its wholeness, a feat that requires a step away, or separation from it in order to have a perspective from the outside. Hence, the attempt to reach “self-comprehension, consists, paradoxically enough, in recovering the *unreflective* experience of the world.”¹³ Recovering this type of experience, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, may require a breaking-down of the habits that lead us to construct reflective knowledge, which is a step up in the cognitive process from the unreflective experience. As I intend to show, this type of break from the ongoing conscious narrative, a break which implies failure to construct the content based on propositional logic and verbal understanding of things,¹⁴ can be reached in moments of embodied failures.

Anne Bogart ties together accident (i.e. failure to stick to the known plan), creativity, and the unconscious. She claims that “Accidents are one of the most valuable commodities in the creative process. The creative act is a conscious process fed by the unconscious.”¹⁵ According to Bogart, an accident that breaks the planned creative process opens a space for the unconscious to introduce fresh, surprising elements that do not conform to everyday logic and habit. This idea, which seems to relate to the latent feminist and queer praxes that underlie Bogart’s practice, resonates not only in performance but in other realms of culture as well. For example, in her book, *The Queer Art of Failure*, feminist literary critic Judith Halberstam explores failures in various

¹² Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology* 279; See also Power, “Space” 75.

¹³ Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology* 280, italics mine.

¹⁴ See p. 28 above.

¹⁵ *An then* 48.

cultural and artistic realms. She tries to dismantle “the logics of success and failure with which we currently live. Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world.”¹⁶

Most of the literature about failure in theatre and performance deals with its emergence onstage, during live performance. These types of failure may be accidental or planned. One of the most common types is the failure in maintaining the wholeness of the system of representation; that is, when “real” events accidentally infiltrate the fictional world of a performed piece. This can happen when, for example, a part of the set falls onstage and reveals the deceit; or when a cellular phone rings in the audience and throws the actors and audience’s attention away from the stage action. Another common failure onstage among actors comes in the form of forgetting their lines. Nicolas Ridout theorizes such failures in his book *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*. He follows various ‘problems’ that may occur onstage and disrupt the routines of representation, such as stage fright, the appearance of animals, and fiasco, which he defines as a particular kind of failure.¹⁷ His fourth chapter is particularly relevant for this research as it examines failure that creates heightened presentness within an intensified intersubjective field including performers and audience alike, what Ridout calls the “Mutual Predicament.”¹⁸ Similarly to O’Gorman and Werry’s ontological position of

¹⁶ Halberstam 2-3.

¹⁷ Ridout’s book positions these problems within the co-presence of performers and audience.

¹⁸ 129-160.

failure in performance, Ridout claims more specifically for the centrality of such moments of failure for the experience of performance at large:

One might suggest in fact that the system [of performance] itself, the entire edifice of appearance and representation, is either an elaborate feint or decoy made in order to permit such moments to occur, or a huge machine designed expressly to break down – reverse-engineered, as it were, from these moments of failure, and the pleasures they occasion, which are its true aim.¹⁹

These accidental lapses of failure on stage, then, create moments of heightened presentness that are essential to the experience of performance.

A different type of failure appears in performances that position failure-in-representation as their main performative apparatus. The representation of failure is part of an attempt to expose and bring this, arguably, ontological feature to the forefront. This represented failure is, in fact, the representation of the breakdown of a linear and coherent system of representation. In other words, the apparent failure to keep a conventional, linear system of representation intact is planned and practiced as an integral part of the performance. In her book *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service*, Sara Jane Bailes offers an examination of the use of failure in performance and in the process of performance creation of the three influential theatre companies mentioned in the title. The creative practices that privilege the failure of representation depend on intentional acts of failing, which are not easily achieved. Bailes describes, for example, Goat Island's use of an impossible dance:

¹⁹ Ridout 151.

... a Goat Island dance is impossible because it consists of unperformable, individual movements, which isolate different parts of the body that are unable to perform the designated gesture adequately by themselves. But also, the dance is impossible for this same effort marks its success; thus impossibility is doubly inscribed into the performed act. The folds within this paradox help to articulate the way we might theorize a poetics of failure in different techniques of practice: impossibility, for example, extends the way we can think through failure as performed resistance that pushes body and mind to work beyond binary thinking or what is perceived as 'possible.'²⁰

Within this segment of text Bailes brings up several points pertinent for my argument. First, she suggests that we can create moments of failure by taking seriously the attempt to perform sets of movement too difficult to perform. This resonates with the praxis of Suzuki, although, as I elaborate further below, in Suzuki the aim is to conceal the inevitable failure rather than represent it. A second point brings up the tension between failure and success through the question of what it means to succeed in failing to do something. This question circles around the double inscription of intentional failure onstage – it is not success and not-not success. In addition, the consequences of this rupture may open, according to Bailes, the road to discovering fresh and complex forms of praxis. As I show further below, attempting an impossible feat creates, for the practitioner's self-in-the-moment, rupture and vulnerability resulting in heightened presentness.

Bailes is also a member of The Institute of Failure.²¹ Headed by Tim Etchells and Matthew Goulish, the Institute of Failure brings together a community of scholars and

²⁰ Bailes 59.

²¹ www.institute-of-failure.com

performers whose work concerns failure, through a website accompanied by occasional live presentations. Bailes book focuses on the works of three theatre companies, two of which are led (separately) by Etchells and Goulish. Although Bailes's arguments pertain to staged performances that reveal and stress the workings of failure, her theorization may be relevant for training and, consequently, for other approaches to performance that do not necessarily attempt to represent failure.

The list of types of failure that appears on the home page of the Institute of Failure includes: accident, mistake, weakness, inability, incorrect method, uselessness, incompatibility, embarrassment, confusion, redundancy, obsolescence, incoherence, unrecognizability, absurdity, invisibility, impermanence, decay, instability, forgetability, tardiness, disappearance, catastrophe, uncertainty, doubt, fear, distractability. Grouping this vast variety of terms as 'types of failure' works against the normative understanding of failure as a finite identifiable event. Failure becomes a part of the everyday, a process, a constant force always at work. This shifts the ways in which we observe and articulate most artistic processes, from examining them in light of their desirable outcome to focusing on processes that resist and change that outcome.

A failure less often spoken of by theorists appears in the simple failure of artistry that may be otherwise termed incompetence. Although 'bad acting' might not be defined as objectively as 'singing out of tune,' there is often an assumed shared understanding of what constitutes failure to act well within the confines of a particular cultural context and theatrical style or genre. While it is perhaps assumed that this type of failure is mostly dealt with by theatre critics, it is still surprising that contextualized notions of "bad

acting” has received so little attention from theatre scholars. Perhaps the most well known source containing various descriptions of “bad acting” is Stanislavsky’s *An Actor’s Work*.²² In this book Stanislavsky repeatedly describes moments in which acting students “fail to act well” in order to explicate the ways to avoid these failures and train to become “a good actor.”²³

While every actor wants to perform their part to perfection, it is the safety of the seemingly perfect that may eliminate the aliveness of a performance. Trying to solve the ingrained problem of feeling too safe in performance has led some practitioners to turn to improv as their preferred practice. Improv can be used in various ways including, for example, a fully improvised performance as well as improvisation exercises specifically designed to unravel the life potential of scripted scenes. Improvised performance is not my main concern here and discussing it in the context of this research requires an entirely different set up. While the risk of failure that underlies improv relates directly to the type of presentness I discuss, this training is mostly geared toward creating dialogue or situation that often remain within the linear structure of story and text. Hence, failure in the context of improv means the risk of creating an incoherent story, dialogue, or line of action. This type of failure remains within the “dialogic bias” of many actor-training practices.²⁴ As opposed to the apparent potential for “dialogic failure” of improv, my

²² See Stanislavski 22, 87

²³ Yet another realm in which the definitions of failure and success play a big part concerns the actor’s professional career and economic stability. For most actors the experience of failing to pass an audition might be the most immediate and common failure in this respect. Who sets the standards for what may be considered success or failure in the acting profession is possibly one of the most loaded questions in theatre and performance.

²⁴ See my discussion of the dialogic bias in chapter 4.

concern is a type of spatiotemporal failure, which arguably affects the very being of the actor, regardless of dialogue or story.

In most actor-training related to psychological realism there is often an expected aesthetic outcome to the learning process that is inherent to the practice itself. That is, in many acting classes there is a certain expected way of acting to be learned and the student is trained to succeed in performing it.²⁵ Failure, in this context, may be seen as the inability to achieve “realistic,” “believable,” or “truthful” acting. The demand to act moment-to-moment, to be in the present, becomes inseparable from the realistic aesthetic influenced by mainstream film acting. Presentness in these practices is often examined exclusively within successful “realistic” acting style. This fact may risk turning the concept of presentness, a process by definition, into a finite result, a feat to accomplish. In contrast, presentness is closely related to moments of failure that are constantly in tension with the natural expectation for successful performance of the particular aesthetics of the practice.

In the rest of this chapter I examine various kinds of failure in four sections dedicated to training in Suzuki, Lecoq’s Neutral Mask, Viewpoints, and Lecoq’s clown. In the next section I examine micro-failures and the ways in which they operate to promote presentness in the practice of Suzuki. Following it is a section exploring the working of disorientation in Lecoq’s Neutral Mask training. I then turn to examine uncertainty of perceptual knowledge in Viewpoints. In the final section I look at Lecoq’s

²⁵ See also discussion in chapter 1.

red-nose clown training in which, perhaps more than any other technique, achieving presentness through both latent and overt failure is at the heart of the praxis.

Embodied Micro-Failure – Suzuki Training

Micro-failures may potentially appear in daily life in the micro-level of the operation of the sensory-motor apparatus at each moment: I pick up a spoon and it slides out of my grip; I hear a sound and turn my head to look the wrong way; I start speaking accidentally before my conversation partner is done. We might even consider the simple act of walking as presenting the potential for falling or tripping at each and every step (I return to this idea shortly). These quotidian examples might not be considered or perceived as highly dramatic failures since they are often rectified almost immediately in the stream of daily events. However, these are exactly the kind of mishaps that create the “moment-to-moment” embodied presentness of daily life. Using such failures as part of training toward performance means that their repeated effect on the practitioner needs to be transposed into a heightened, extra-daily level. Closely related to the explorations of the experience of space and time examined in the two previous chapters, the experience in training of the types of failure I discuss here can become the core of practices of presentness.

In practice as in life, this type of failure might not be noticeable to an observer. While the potential for such minute failures in unrehearsed contexts is immanent, this potential and the alertness that comes with awareness of it usually fail to appear in the context of a well rehearsed performance. That is because I practiced so many times to

pick up this particular spoon from this table, I know in advance where the sound is supposed to be coming from, I know my partner's lines and the timing of my reply. In other words, I know too much in advance; my body is too accustomed to going through all the moves, anticipating every step of the way. My attention goes to the exact execution of the line of action and the activities set in rehearsals.

Further, even if an actor decides to insert tiny failures such as those I describe above as part of the acting score and rehearse them, these failures will become represented failures, demanding from the actor their exact *successful* execution. In other words, these failures will not be experienced by the actor as failures and therefore would not lead to the sought-after heightened presentness.

In the Suzuki technique the training operates on two opposing trajectories. On the one hand, the actor is required to learn to perfection sets of precise movement patterns that she is to perform with spatial and temporal accuracy. On the other hand, when performed accurately and with full force, the practiced forms should lead to the actor's failure in their precise execution: a slight loss of balance, a missed bit of movement, an off timing. Succeeding in the choreography of each exercise seems quite simple at first, but failure emerges at the heart of the struggle for spatiotemporal perfection.

In order to let presentness emerge within the set structure of Suzuki training, the practitioners must work within the tension between perfection and failure. Perfection is seen in this duality as success pushed to extreme, that is, anything but perfection cannot be seen as success and is, therefore, failure. This notion is most likely a product of Japanese culture, but it relates to other cultural sources as well. "For the ancient Greeks,"

for example, “the idea of success was intrinsically linked to the idea of perfection.”²⁶ Tadashi Suzuki’s affinity to classic Greek theatre, of which he directed many of his most well known productions, finds resonance in this principle, which seems to be at the heart of his training. His idea of perfection in the theatre may also relate to Craig’s theory of the ubermarionette. Yet, while Craig’s uncompromising theory had never become practical and remains not much more than an important theoretical intervention, Suzuki’s perfect body, like Lecoq’s Neutral body, is used as a point of reference impossible to sustain. That is, as Inglsrud states, the Suzuki technique is based on “trying to do the impossible and failing. By failing you are learning to locate where, who and what you are and are not doing. You also become compelling.”²⁷

Suzuki’s uncompromising stance toward failure as the opposite of complete perfection may be seen as belonging to a culturally specific Japanese point of view, pushed to extreme by a martial-arts kind of logic. The teaching approach in Suzuki classes supports this model in various ways, for example: there is no room for questions during an exercise and very few in between exercises;²⁸ there is a feeling that the instructor is observing the practitioners’ every move and correcting the tiniest postural “mistakes”; cues are often given in strong, abrupt, commanding voice followed by a clap or a bang of a bamboo stick on the floor. These and other ‘pedagogical tactics’ accompanied by the technique’s physical demand seem to push the practitioners to seek perfection. The cultural model of the samurai’s constant search of martial and spiritual

²⁶ Fischer, Joel. “Judgment and Purpose.” In *Le Feuvre*, 116.

²⁷ SITI workshop, 4 Aug. 2009.

²⁸ Often if questions are asked after an exercise the answers are short and obscure, leaving the participants to deal with the question on their own.

perfection, who in the face of failure commits *Hara-kiri*, the Japanese ceremonial suicide, seems apt as grounds for developing a method in which one seeks perfection, trying with great pain to eliminate all failure. This cultural stance toward failure seems foreign to North American culture in which the idea of success seems to have very little to do with personal perfection.

The idea that the way we operate in the world is based on constantly rectifying tiny failures can be detected in the biomechanics of walking. Learning to walk happens at an early age and with time becomes one of the simplest and most controllable abilities individuals practice on a daily basis. Most adults are experts in walking to the extent that, unless there is an unexpected disruption in this ongoing activity, one does not need to pay attention to the way it is done. However, each step presents a potential threat of falling. In fact, the mechanics of walking is based on a surprising combination of repeatedly losing control and gaining it. Laurie Anderson describes it in her song “Walking and Falling,”

With each step, you fall forward slightly
And then catch yourself from falling.
Over and over, you're falling
And then catching yourself from falling
And this is how you can be walking and falling
At the same time.

Incidentally, Andy Ruina, Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Cornell University, quotes Anderson's song when he describes the principle of human walking that he

implemented when building what is considered the most efficiently walking robot.²⁹

Ruina claims that “the walking robots move like humans, falling and catching themselves as they move forward. This essentially is the same movement people use, a motion toddlers must master to walk.”³⁰ I imagine that for the toddler who is learning to walk each step might involve the actual experience of the risk of falling forward and then immediately figuring out the way to catch oneself with a step. Such a feat requires of the toddler a high level of attention and engagement in order to develop the awareness of the exact positioning of the legs and feet and the timing of each step so as not to fall. This high level of engagement and attention dissipates as the toddler slowly becomes an expert walker, which may take years to accomplish. Nevertheless, the principle of falling and catching remains at the heart of walking.

In daily life we use our expertise in walking to move in various ways without being aware of constantly being on the verge of falling. Only in the occasion of having to tackle an unexpected hurdle, a hidden hole in the ground, or an exceptionally unordinary terrain, do we turn our attention to the fact that we actually need to catch ourselves from falling as we move about. When a person actually falls in the middle of walking failure, in the normative sense of the word, is clearly apparent. However, positing this failure, falling, as the constant looming danger against which walking operates changes our very perception of this daily act.

²⁹ Seely.

³⁰ “Robot.”

The Suzuki technique harnesses the principle of walking and falling into its practice in order to heighten the practitioners' embodied awareness of this immanent risk of 'failing to remain upright.' This type of failure can be seen as spatially operating against the vertical. In the various exercises the practitioners are constantly pushed to experience this sensation of being on the verge of breaking away from verticality and the need to catch themselves in order to recuperate their vertical spatial engagement. At the same time, the horizontal engagement is challenged by the attention needed to maintain verticality by catching oneself from falling.

In order to constantly create vertical and horizontal micro-failures that may heighten the practitioners' presentness the Suzuki technique uses the natural biomechanical principle of 'walking and falling' in two opposing ways. In the first instance, the risk of falling, hence the need to 'catch' oneself and the form of catching, are pushed to extreme. In the second option, the form may go completely against this habitual principle by not letting oneself fall at any time, even while walking. In other words, Suzuki practice heightens the tension between the loss of control achieved by 'falling' and the gaining of control achieved by 'catching,' stepping forward. At times, these two opposing mechanisms operate almost simultaneously. The Suzuki Walks provide ample examples for the use of this kind of micro-failure.

In the *Uchimata* walk (also called pigeon toed walk), which is usually practiced second in the sequence of walks, "knees are bent and held together, and toes pointed inward in a pigeon toed manner so that feet slide flat on the floor in an inward sweeping

motion.”³¹ With each step the foot moves outward, forward, and then inward in a kind of semi-circle so as to pass around the foot in front of it. This description focuses on the working of the legs and feet, while the center and upper body seem to simply follow. However, focusing on the center’s movement, rather than the feet, as the place from which the movement should originate reveals the forces that operate in this walk and create micro-failures. The motion begins with the center thrown forward as quickly as possible while the foot moving underneath inadvertently releases the weight of the body as it slides on the floor, only to catch the weight back again at the stopping point. The center and the moving foot should arrive at the stop simultaneously and then the actor should “apply the brakes”³² in order to find complete stillness for a split of a second before the next step is embarked. The attempt to reach perfect stillness at the end of a quick, abrupt, strong movement is bound to fail. Both in the inception of movement and in its break there is an attempt to move directly from stillness to fast movement and vice versa. That is, the practitioners are asked to eliminate the graduate change, the necessary transition faze, between stillness and motion.

Inevitable micro-failure on the vertical may appear in the attempt to keep the center at a constant height at all times even as it moves quickly forward away from the firm support of the unmoving foot. Although the potential for falling is still there, the sliding foot needs to catch the body before the center loses height. Thus, the natural up-down undulation that occurs when walking regularly by the falling and catching process is eliminated. Another micro-failure may occur as a result of the tension on the horizontal

³¹ Carruthers and Takahashi 92.

³² Ibid.

plane between the straight motion forward of the center and the circular outward-inward motion of the foot, which pulls the body from side to side. In addition, applying the brakes at the end of each step creates an effect similar to what happens when one presses hard on the brakes of a car in motion – because of inertia, the upper body continues the movement a bit forward as the kinetic energy dissipates before a full stop is reached. This tendency needs to be contained as the entire body should reach complete stillness at once. Further, for advanced practitioners the request is to move as fast as possible and stay still as long as possible; yet the faster one moves the bigger the opposition between the motion and the stillness becomes. This makes it harder to reach immediate stillness.

These micro-failures can generally be seen as spatial since they break the body's engagement with the vertical and/or horizontal. Nevertheless, we can detect temporal micro-failures as well. The demand to reduce the time of movement and increase the time of stillness can be constantly pushed further. It may lead the practitioner to experience a micro-failure of staying still a split second too long, thus missing the next beat; alternatively, the practitioner may start moving a split second too early (perhaps in compensation for that earlier micro-failure) then needing to elongate the motion time in order to land on the beat.

As always, the SITI Company people practice with us while one of them leads the exercise. Today, Akiko joined the Suzuki training as one of us. She was originally a member of Suzuki's company for over seven years and is a master practitioner. Luckily, the group trains in two parts, one half working and one half watching, so I could

sometimes watch her work. What a treat to watch her perform the exercises to perfection [...]

When we did the standing statues with the free form, Akiko was so quick and sharp, reaching stillness immediately. There was something almost too perfect about the way she moved, like magic. Her sharp movement and the stillness at the end of it stuck out among the other participants, who were all struggling to some degree to manage moving really fast and reaching stillness in the form of the statue at the end. After a few times of going up and down in what seemed to me as a conventional standing statues exercise, Akiko's lower body started going into more and more extreme postures as she rose into each statue. In some of these statues she actually stood on one leg or bent her knees in an impossible angle. As she went into these impossible forms she continued trying to maintain the same speed and accuracy that she had earlier; most of the time she actually kept moving in the same speed and reached stillness.³³

Unlike Goat Island's impossible dance, which is physically impossible to perform in a way that makes the failure created by this impossibility visible, the outer form of Suzuki exercises seems possible to master and is not meant to make failure visible to an untrained eye. In fact, watching Suzuki training may seem impressively accurate to a layman observer, even when the practitioners are not considered experts. What makes Suzuki training impossible is the attempt to constantly push the envelope, to never settle for safe and proper execution of the form. That is, striving for making things harder to

³³ SITI workshop, 7 June 2011.

perform, rather than simpler or easier, is ingrained into Suzuki training. This goes to the extent that an accomplished practitioner such as Ellen Lauren, who is considered the most senior teacher of Suzuki outside of SCOT, was quoted saying that her biggest problem is that exercises have become too easy for her.³⁴

Keeping the practitioners always on the edge of safe execution of the form is part of the technique and can be achieved in two ways. In the more obvious and apparent one, as the above description of the standing statues exercise demonstrates, expert practitioners of Suzuki find ways to keep challenging themselves by complicating the forms, making them harder to perform so that the practice does not become stale. The level of difficulty should be high enough to challenge the practitioner, but not too hard to create total breakdown, because what is sought after are moments of invisible micro-failure, rather than moments of complete fiasco.³⁵ The second and more subtle way to raise the stakes is by working on constantly raising the level of accuracy and sharpness, both spatially and temporally. If at a certain level of the training I can, metaphorically speaking, locate my center within a radius of five centimeters, the next step would be to get to the accuracy of one centimeter, then millimeters, then microns, and so on. Knowing exactly where I am in space in each moment, both vertically and horizontally, becomes a process of constant re-affirmation and ongoing fine-tuning rather than a finalized act; it is a process that never really ends.

³⁴ Grimes, Dennis personal interview, 19 Aug 2009.

³⁵ For a discussion of fiasco see Ridout 129-160.

The impossibility of reaching spatial and temporal perfection is reminiscent of one of the most basic philosophical conundrums in Greek philosophy, Zeno's paradoxes.³⁶ According to the logic of one of his paradoxes in order to reach a point across space, one must first cross half the distance, then a quarter, then an eighth, a sixteenth, and so forth *ad infinitum*. The paradox is that by this logic, because no one can perform an infinite number of actions, one can never reach the other side of the room. Similarly, locating my center on an ever-reduced scale can be an unending process, even if it reaches an invisibly small scale. My experience of reaching stillness at the end of each step in the *Uchimata* walk seems to follow a similar process. As the movement forward is stopped by the 'brakes' I apply, I create a small invisible counter movement backward in my center, which I also need to block, leading to another smaller counter movement forward and so on. The forward-backward movement of this inner pendulum in my center diminishes quite rapidly but theoretically never completely disappears. Moreover, before this pendulum movement subsides I already embark on the next step. Through this ongoing process of movement and blocking of movement, as one becomes better at applying the brakes faster and more efficiently, the failure to become immediately still becomes less and less apparent, more internally felt.

The process of working toward temporal perfection, and failing in achieving it, operates alongside the ongoing spatial fine-tuning. For example, moving my center down and up in the First Stance on a specific count, from the standing position to the squatting position and back, requires precise timing for the movement's starting and ending

³⁶ Zeno's paradoxes appear in Aristotle's *Physics*.

position.³⁷ Further, in each one of the different counts the practitioner needs to find the exact points on the way down or up according to the count, while never stopping the movement. Moving on a cue of “zero count” pushes the attempt to reach temporal perfection even further. With an abrupt cue, the practitioner needs to minimize the duration of movement, aiming at reaching zero duration between standing and squatting positions, and vice versa. This temporal aim, which appears in many other Suzuki exercises (including the *Uchimata* walk), is clearly impossible to reach but remains something to strive for.

Now that I have established the prevalence of failure in the Suzuki technique, the question that remains to be answered is how the recurring emergence of these micro-failures operates to develop presentness. When training to develop muscles one applies various forms of resistance to their normal operation, often in the form of weight that is applied against specifically directed movement. As the level of training rises, more weight and a larger number of repetitions of more complex movement are added. Similarly, developing presentness requires creating specifically designed resistance to the habitual operation of the sensory-motor apparatus in space and time. The various micro-failures create such resistance and the more the practitioner train the more complex the level and amount of micro-failure she is able to handle while maintaining the apparent accuracy of the forms.

Attending to the emerging micro-failures requires the practitioner to initially attend to her own body in order to correct each micro-failure and maintain the body's

³⁷ For a more detailed description of this exercise in the First Stance, see p. 137-9 above.

spatiotemporal accuracy. This inward directed attention raises one's awareness to their specific engagement in the here and now, making the practitioner consciously aware of her own experience. However, as Shaun Gallagher explains, "Although, as pre-reflectively self-aware of my experience I am not unconscious of it, I tend to ignore it in favour of its object. In my everyday life, I am absorbed by and preoccupied with projects and objects in the world, and as such I do not attend to my experiential life."³⁸ Attending to the micro-failures, then, inadvertently comes at the expense of our habitual attention to tasks and object around us. As opposed to our body's habituation into walking and falling, of which we are pre-reflectively conscious so that we learn to catch ourselves at each step without paying any attention to it, Suzuki's micro-failures initially demands reflective self-awareness.

While attending to one's own body in training, other elements of Suzuki force the practitioners to remain consciously aware of their surrounding. Many forms are practiced in unison with other training participants. The walks, for example, are usually practiced on a diagonal line in the space and the practitioners walk two by two, each couple staying aligned and keeping a constant distance with the couple walking ahead and behind them. However, different individual body structures inevitably result in different stride lengths to each practitioner. This raises the need to constantly adjust one's step to keep in line with the other participants. That is, while focusing on correcting the micro-failures created by one's own body in order to maintain the temporal accuracy and the body's exact form, each practitioner must also adjust to the form and timing of the other

³⁸ Gallagher, *Phenomenological* 54.

practitioners. Inglsrud suggested, in a discussion following a ‘walks’ session in pairs, that the relationship with the partner on each step should revolve around the question “am I going to go again? Or, am I going to stop? Or, am I going to go to the opposite direction?” Thus, added to the spatial adjustment to the partner is a form of temporal challenging. The practitioners’ engagement in the here and now is thus stretched to include both their own body and the rest of the group. Further, when the utterance of text is added to the mix practitioners need to maintain yet another temporal focus by trying to stay in textual unison.

Adding to these various concentrations, the focus on the ‘fiction’ demands of the practitioners to keep their gaze on a specific point in space at all times and maintaining a particular fictional relationship with it even while attending to the abovementioned recurring micro-failures.³⁹ The fiction forces the actor to be *visibly* engaged with a partner in space. The struggle to hold on to the fiction, against which all the other elements operate, is at the heart of the training. Focusing on the fiction, which remains constant while all the other elements constantly engage the body in micro-failures, thus reinforces a particularly performative type of presentness.

When several trained practitioners seek heightened presentness in an exercise, failure may appear not only individually but as group failure as well. Dennis Grimes describes such a moment, which occurred in one of the Suzuki session with the SITI Company. What Grimes describes took place when a small group of experienced

³⁹ For a discussion on Suzuki’s ‘fiction’ see p. 144-5 above.

practitioners, including the instructor Leon Ingsrud, practiced the Basic number 3 exercise:

In Suzuki we had spontaneous breakdown as a group. We all lost balance at the same time. Everyone couldn't spontaneously have bad focus. Leon was in that group and *his* focus was bad. We entered a space where collectively... and it happened again... we were facing forward so it was peripheral... you could feel everyone's focus was annihilated. Why? How could it be unless we entered a group flow state? You would normally think these are moments of harmony but in this case it was a moment of chaos.⁴⁰

This description relates group failure to group presentness (what Grimes interprets as group flow). The experience of spontaneous group failure, which can be seen in this context as a positive result of the training, was made possible by each individual's heightened presentness which resulted in a kind heightened group presentness through which the entire group was psychophysically connected. In other words, while succeeding in the execution of the form in unison with the group is expected, it is actually the shared failure that revealed a shared moment of heightened presentness.

By dealing with an increasing number of micro-failures we are "stretching out [our] concentration" and are able to "take [more] things in and still keep it together."⁴¹ Repeating this process heightens and stretches presentness as an entwinement of body and/in environment, including other participants. Further, trying to contain a multitude of emerging micro-failures while holding on to the fiction and delivering text, keeps this process within the context of theatrical performance.

⁴⁰ Personal interview 19 Aug. 2009.

⁴¹ Ingsrud, SITI Workshop, 11 Aug. 2009.

Neutral Mask: from Micro-Failure to Disorientation

Similarly to the micro-failures ingrained to the Suzuki training, the Lecoq technique challenges the practitioner to find spatiotemporal accuracy that constantly provokes micro-failures. This can be clearly observed in the Neutral Mask training, which demands great attention to verticality and horizontality and a precise relationship to rhythm and timing. That is, similar to the pursuit of an impossible spatiotemporal engagement in Suzuki, the actor in Lecoq's Neutral Mask training is asked to do the impossible – to find spatiotemporal neutrality. Rather than seeking neutrality for its own sake, “the pursuit of neutrality purifies [the actor], making his very errors more commanding, shedding personal clichés and habitual responses.”⁴²

Jacques Lecoq's insistent search for permanencies and the essential elements of life through movement finds a strong counter-balance in his idea of failure. As I mention in chapter 3, neutrality, as a sort of 'prime' permanency, is seen as an unattainable fulcrum point of verticality and horizontality rather than a state to be reached and maintained. Although, as in Suzuki, the majority of training time is dedicated to perfect the accuracy of movement, according to Lecoq life actually appears when small errors—micro-failures—appear:

Of course there is no such thing as absolute and universal neutrality, it is merely a temptation. This is why error is interesting. There can be no absolute without error. I am fascinated by the difference between the geographic pole and the magnetic pole. The north pole [sic] does not quite coincide with the true north.

⁴² Eldredge and Huston 146.

There is a small angle of difference, and it is lucky that this angle exists. Error is not just acceptable, it is necessary for the continuation of life, provided it is not too great. A large error is a catastrophe, a small error is essential for enhancing existence. Without error, there is no movement. Death follows.⁴³

Thus, not only does Lecoq reinforce the centrality of error to his approach, he also stresses the permanency of micro-failure in creative processes and in training.

Once again we encounter failure as part of ongoing processes rather than as a finite result. According to Lecoq's articulation, leaving room for micro-failure to actually occur seems to be necessary for creativity as well as for movement itself to take place. Thus, not only does failure increase presentness, it may be what makes true process possible.

In addition to the emergence of micro-failure in Neutral Mask training, another form of failure that is in tension with the attempt for neutrality is disorientation. While moments of disorientation lead to the emergence of heightened presentness as a momentary non-reflective experience similar to that of micro-failure, disorientation is also experienced on a larger scale as a significant feature of the training. Unlike the hidden operation of micro-failures to which the practitioner herself is sometimes unaware, disorientation initially springs into the center of attention and colors the entire experience of training. That is, there seems to be a general feeling of disorientation in the first period of training that joins the heightened moments of disorientation that emerge as part of the exercises.

⁴³ Lecoq, *Moving* 20-21.

Disorientation can be defined as perceptual failure, a momentary failure in the coherency and clarity of perception. It might also be described as an emergent uncertainty of perceptual knowledge, that is, the momentary impossibility to ascertain the meaning of a moment as it emerges. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, disorientation is “...a confused mental state [...] in which appreciation of one’s spatial position, personal identity, and relations, or of the passage of time, is disturbed.”⁴⁴ Failing to know my “spatial position” and the “passage of time,” as well as my “personal identity, and relations” means that there is a break from the flow of my reflective spatiotemporal knowledge and, as a result, of my positionality.⁴⁵ To willfully create such a break, to voluntarily ‘fall’ into uncertainty of knowledge, forces me to come in touch with the pre-reflective consciousness. It is, then, a way of connecting to my perception and heightening my awareness to my perceptual engagement. Further, disorientation may act as a form of breaking away from habitual ways of seeing and behaving in the world.

Lecoq asserts that through his pedagogy he tries to “create a state of uncertainty: it’s up to the student to discover what the teacher already knows. The teacher must be prepared, at every moment, to question his own approach, to get back to seeing the world with freshness and innocence, to avoid imposing clichés.”⁴⁶ Although it may seem that Lecoq students acquire a decisive body of knowledge in the use of masks, genres of acting, and styles of moving and playing, these are all designed to break the habitual, daily patterns of behavior rather than as prescribed aesthetics to be performed for their

⁴⁴ www.oed.com, accessed 17 Nov,2013.

⁴⁵ I use the term positionality to mean identity-in-context. See also my discussion in chapter 2.

⁴⁶ Lecoq, *Moving* 48.

own sake. Coletto, for example, insists that Lecoq training “doesn’t give you a final product. It gives you a platform on which to create.”⁴⁷ That is the biggest misunderstanding about Lecoq.”⁴⁸ Coletto argues that Lecoq did not incorporate into his school the study of forms such as *commedia dell’arte*, to name one example, in order for his students to start *commedia* troupes or for them to focus on creating *commedia dell’arte* pieces. Rather, *commedia dell’arte* and all the other genres and styles that are part of the Lecoq curriculum serve to study particular dynamics of movement and relationships to the world, thus developing various distinct approaches toward presentness. Although many graduates of Lecoq start their career trying to assimilate the exact forms they have learned in school by, for example, creating pieces of *commedia dell’arte*, *bouffon*, or clown, the graduates that “invent their own theatre”⁴⁹ are eventually those who follow the true spirit of Lecoq’s pedagogy.⁵⁰

A practitioner working with the Neutral Mask may become ‘disoriented’, which means that she would undergo unfamiliar experiences. In a mask exercise in one of Coletto’s workshops, a young woman felt extremely disoriented under the mask and, as a result, started crying. “Nothing happened,” she said in dismay, wiping her tears, “it just got scary in the mask sometimes, I couldn’t breath.”⁵¹ This intense sensation may stem, according to Coletto, from trying too hard to maintain our habitual ways of perceiving the surrounding and expressing ourselves, even though the field of vision is restricted by the

⁴⁷ The platform Coletto refers to is the trained body.

⁴⁸ Personal interview, 27 April 2010.

⁴⁹ Lecoq, *Moving* 23, see also p. 45 above.

⁵⁰ It seems that the most well-known graduates of Lecoq have found their own voices and invented their own theatre, rather than stayed within the aesthetics they have learned at the Lecoq school; *Teatre du soleil*, *Complicité*, and *Mummenschantz* are but three examples.

⁵¹ Intensive Mask Workshop, 5 Nov. 2009.

mask and the face is almost completely covered. Trying to force our habitual connection to the world increases the disorientation rather than alleviates it because we cannot rely on the habitual use of our face and common forms of expression. The Neutral Mask work thus creates disorientation by restricting our gaze and by bringing us face to face with lack of knowledge of our faceless self, our faceless body, in the world.⁵² When wearing the mask, everything “needs to get out in the body. That’s the only door I have.”⁵³ The initial feeling of stress caused by this type of disorientation should, with time, subside as the practitioner learns to develop new ways to perceive the world and communicate with it. As Lecoq explains,

The first time that you put on a neutral mask it seems a heterogeneous sort of object that bothers and suffocates you. Gradually, however, you begin to feel hidden and you start to do things that you would never ordinarily do. Finally, once you have totally taken on the mask, you discover a new freedom that is greater than the naked face.⁵⁴

Disorientation in the practice is caused by more than simply wearing the mask. The insistence on finding neutrality, that is, on erasing one’s stories and opinions, forces the practitioner to constantly challenge the way they move and relate to the space around them.

The feeling of disorientation that emerges in mask work is not always experienced as stressful and unpleasant. Following a workshop with Coletto, one of the practitioners described the work with the Neutral Mask as an out-of-body experience, similar to what

⁵² For another instance of the feeling of sensory restriction with the use of masks see the description of the Primitive Mask improvisation on p. 65-6.

⁵³ Coletto, Intensive Mask Workshop, 5 Nov. 2009.

⁵⁴ *Theatre* 105.

she experiences in meditation. This formulation is curious because it points to an experience of detachment from the embodiedness of the here and now, even though the mask work is an extremely physical practice related to the present. Following this remark, Coletto responded:

Because people think ‘I’m thinking so I’m doing something,’ they relate thinking to the present. But then when they go into the body, which is where presence is, they leave their head and that’s why they say it’s an out of body experience. They can’t comment on it, they can’t have ideas about it. But you’re actually more in your body [...] It happens all the time, but it doesn’t stay for long. Sometimes when it happens people get scared when they get there and they just run away. People describe it as an out-of-body experience because you’re not in control anymore, the moment takes over. But when we’re kids we do that all the time.⁵⁵

Such loss of control, certainty, and knowledge characteristic of moments of failure, is also part of the experience of moments of heightened presentness in which “the moment takes over.”

Through failure presentness is once again heightened and exposed in the here and now, emerging as part of a specific moment, embedded within its particular context, and is especially influenced by the technique, style, or aesthetics one practices. In other words, when Lecoq asserts that “the neutral mask, in the end, unmask,”⁵⁶ he does not evoke the exposure of pure and all encompassing presence, but rather of momentary presentness that emerges through the perceptual shift aided by the mask.

⁵⁵ Coletto, Paola. Personal Interview, 28 Aug. 2009.

⁵⁶ *Moving* 38.

In spite of the difficulties in dealing with repeated failures, the atmosphere in Coletto's workshops remains positive and playful. That helps the participants to accept the failures as part of the required learning moment. As opposed to her reassuring pedagogic strategy, some of the older generation of Lecoq teachers sharply point to their students' failures immediately as they occur, without explanation or reassurance of the necessity to go through such a process. According to Purcell-Gates, in Gaulier's harsh strategy toward the students "the point was to move through a 'tunnel of failure,' shedding each of their acquired habits until they emerged open and 'beautiful.'"⁵⁷ She claims, moreover, that disorientation serves not only as "an approach to revealing socialized habits," but also to "bypass the habits of learning that many of us had brought with us to the workshop from other actor training experiences."⁵⁸ Purcell Gates calls Gaulier's approach a "pedagogy of disorientation," adding that

One of the chief effects of Gaulier's hyper-critical pedagogy—accompanied by a near-constant glare as he slumped in his chair, caressing the drum in anticipation of hitting it to mark a student's failure—was to make apparent to us the physical strategies that we brought with us to please a teacher in an acting class, strategies that often had become naturalized through years of corporeal training.⁵⁹

While many Lecoq exercises cause disorientation by their own design, Gaulier seems to have developed an extreme approach that forces the student to face her own failure head on by simply and, some would say, brutally pointing out one's failures the very second they emerge.

⁵⁷ Purcell Gates, "Tout" 50.

⁵⁸ Ibid 171.

⁵⁹ Ibid 169-170.

Lecoq's approach seems to be based on the assumption that the only way to unlearn acquired habits is by unsettling the practitioner's self-knowledge in every way possible as a sort of *via negativa*. However, neither Gaulier nor Coletto seek a singular presence to be revealed underneath the shed layers of habituation. As opposed to Grotowski's theory of "pure presence"⁶⁰ in which "Totality is the aim—a fusion of the mind and body—and a connection to the essence, that which precedes any social conditioning,"⁶¹ ongoing Lecoq training puts one in a process of de-socialization and constant re-habituation. What is left at the outset of the training is the very experience of disorientation and uncertainty. In other words, just as the Neutral Mask training is at the base of all other techniques in Lecoq training, so is disorientation at the base of the experience of training.

Uncertainty of Knowledge in Viewpoints Training

As I mention above, disorientation can be described as a form of uncertainty of perceptual knowledge. However, it seems that not all occasions of uncertainty of knowledge result in disorientation. Arguably, only the more extreme cases of sustained and overt uncertainty are experienced as disorientation. Hence, the main difference between the two, in my opinion, lies in the intensity and dynamics of the experience. Disorientation is more dramatic, almost traumatic. Uncertainty of knowledge, on the other hand, sounds like a calmer, almost philosophical experience. Uncertainty, in fact,

⁶⁰ Slowiak and Cuesta 93.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

does not necessarily unsettle the flow and coherency of our perceptual experience but, rather, puts a question mark on top of it. In other words, things *might* be different than they regularly seem. The nature of the Viewpoints technique and its organizing principles fit the experience of uncertainty of knowledge more than that of disorientation. In this section I analyze the ways in which Viewpoints training habituates the practitioners into an uncertain mode of knowing space-time.

Certainty of perceptual knowledge means that one knows what one perceives; that is, perception is translated into reflective, narrative knowledge. Being uncertain of what exactly are the things that I perceive is not a common experience in daily life, as we tend to make sense of things almost automatically. Viewpoints training averts the habitual process of perception and meaning making to enable the practitioner to experience and focus on the non-reflective perception of space and time. Through various exercises and by practicing the use of the nine Viewpoints of time and space practitioners learn to let go of their habitual need to know the meaning of things and enter a process in which the uncertainty of knowledge is the source of presentness. The exercises I mention below are designed to stop the practitioner from succeeding in the fulfillment of this habitual meaning making process.

I was once told by a SITI Company member that you cannot fail in the Viewpoints technique because whatever happens in each moment is correct. The post-modern approach that allows the practitioner to use whatever emerges and to accept it as potential working material is meant to free the actor from any attempt to create a prescribed result and decide in advance on what needs to be done. Hence, since there is

nothing to succeed in and accomplish, there can be no failure. While it is true that what one does when practicing the Viewpoints bears no consequence in terms of success and failure, the processes that underlie the doing, the sensory-motor and cognitive processes, do. Bogart claims that “to do one’s best work, one has to bypass the frontal lobe – just essentially stop thinking and just respond and work intuitively.”⁶² Bogart’s Viewpoints is designed to bring the actor to this intuitive state and this bypassing of the frontal lobe by practicing the failure to activate normative habitual cognitive processes.

As I mention in chapter 2, the process of Viewpoints training can take many forms. Still, there are some exercises that are usually introduced at the beginning as an entryway into the basic perceptual, non-reflective state of being. The Flow exercise, described in the two previous chapters,⁶³ is one such exercise. When a practitioner applies the ‘or not’ principle to each instant of emerging opportunity to act and when, as a result, she is ‘being decided,’ she inadvertently trains in failing to decide. Decision requires knowing, but the process of being decided in each moment of choosing between doing ‘or not’ is too quick to incorporate any reflective knowledge of the moment. As such moments of failing to know precede one another, the practitioners get accustomed to embrace uncertainty of knowledge.

Another exercise that leads to uncertainty of perceptual knowledge is the initial Soft Focus exercise (described in chapter 3).⁶⁴ When I lead this exercise, each time I tell the participants to choose one more person to follow, they respond as if I asked them to

⁶² Qt. In Herrington, “Directing” 158.

⁶³ See pp. 177-8, 219-222.

⁶⁴ P. 176-7.

do the impossible. In this simple exercise there seems to be a constant sense of failure in achieving the goal of being aware of the location of several people in movement all the time while still walking forward. In order to succeed in the task, in the first trials many people start walking in circles close to the outskirts of the space, facing in. In this way they are constantly facing the entire group. Other people start walking backward or suddenly stop in their place whenever a person they are following reaches the edge of their field of vision. When this happens I direct them to always walk forward and to cross the center of the space. The point of this exercise, then, is not to succeed in actually knowing where each of the people I am following is at each moment. The ingrained uncertainty in this exercise is in fact what one is training in. Failure to achieve the goal does not stand in contradiction with the real attempt to “get it;” rather, the practitioner needs to truly try to succeed within the parameters of the exercise in order to experience the kind of uncertainty of knowledge that results. Only in this way can she briefly and fleetingly access the emergent non-reflective knowledge.

The Viewpoints themselves are concepts that help the actor to deconstruct her experience into spatiotemporal elements. When actors train to perceive their cohort’s bodies through the Viewpoints, often with the use of soft focus, they learn to perceive them as spatiotemporal phenomena. They thus learn to fail to recognize them as fully socialized bodies, since the body as a whole is often unrecognized. This is done initially by actively avoiding the process of translating spatiotemporal phenomena into meaningful behavior, and eventually one becomes accustomed to let go of the need to know. When one responds to a gesture seen in the periphery of the field of vision or,

further, to a sound she hears behind her back, she is in direct interaction with a phenomena that bears no meaning beyond its spatiotemporal effect. Thus Viewpoints training shifts the focus of our understanding of the world from a behavioral, normative knowledge to the uncertainty of non-reflective awareness of space and time. Recognizing who is the individual who triggers a specific response sometimes occurs only after the response has already taken place through recalling *a posteriori*. The actor's gaze, then, fails to recognize the subject it sees in the moment of seeing. At the same time, the actor's body is seen by the gazes of other actors without being recognized, hence, without being known.

Viewpoints training can have many beneficial effects for actors and groups of actors. However, at its core it requires a shift from interactions based on knowing and deciding to responsiveness based on uncertainty of knowledge. Clearly, a technique based on teaching to escape existing knowledge needs to be constantly refreshed so that new habits and patterns do not slip in through the back door. The improvisatory nature of the Viewpoints is meant to enable such renewal, but it is only through the practitioner's constant self-challenging to embrace uncertainty that presentness can be developed.

Training to Fail – the Red-Nose Clown

Of all the techniques I investigate in the dissertation, clown is the one most well known to be a popular form of performance. However, like all the other techniques, Lecoq's red-nose clown training is first and foremost a technique meant to endow the actor with a skill that underlies any type of acting. Lecoq claims that this clown "who can develop a

way of teaching drama – necessary for the freedom of the actor – isn't necessarily a clown who performs, and clowning most often remains a private mode of expression. The little red nose doesn't necessary [sic] make a professional clown and public performance doesn't have to be a consolation show.”⁶⁵

In Lecoq's pedagogical journey the Neutral Mask training and the clown training are positioned at the beginning and the end, respectively. The reason for that is because they both approach presentness directly, though in different ways. In a sense, the complementary nature of the Neutral Mask and the clown is similar to the way in which Suzuki and Viewpoints complement one another. While the Neutral Mask provides a rigid structure that forces the actor/student out of habituation and into presentness, in the clown work the actor is in search for her unique individual form of/and/through presentness.

Although the two training approaches are quite different, there are some similarities and parallels between them. Coletto claims that if “the Neutral Mask is the Mask of Humanity the red nose mask is the humanity of the mask.”⁶⁶ That is, if the Neutral Mask is designed to expose personal idiosyncrasies, embodied micro-failures, by pushing the habituated body toward a utopian neutral, what Martha Graham calls the “divine normal,”⁶⁷ the clown-mask amplifies these idiosyncrasies, making these failures the center of attention. “The little red nose ‘the smallest mask in the world’, gives the nose a round shape, lights up the eyes with naiveté and makes the face seem bigger,

⁶⁵ Lecoq, *Theatre* 115.

⁶⁶ Coletto, “Neutral to Clown” workshop, 17 Dec. 2009.

⁶⁷ In Turner, Craig. “Contemporary” 33.

robbing it of all defences [sic].”⁶⁸ Red-nose clown training, then, incorporates the face into the same process of exposure of habituation that the body has gone through in the Neutral Mask. However, rather than trying to shed the stories that are embedded in the body, in clown training we embrace the personal quirks that emerge in the work and let them play for us.

The amplified personal idiosyncrasies exposed by the red nose are often the things one learns to hide or compensate through processes of socialization. These take the center of attention, come to the fore and are the basis for revealing “one’s own clown.”⁶⁹ The clown’s failure, then, goes beyond the personal failure of self-knowledge to include failure in complying with social norms. In this sense, clowns seem to “celebrate the habit of human being to fail proudly in conforming to logical thought and externally imposed order, embodying comic evidence that controlling frameworks fracture and backfire under pressure from bodied experience.”⁷⁰

“The worse you are the better” explained Paola as everyone was standing in a circle trying their red noses on and getting ready for the first trial of going solo.⁷¹

“What you do is very simple. You go there, where there’s an entrance; you put the red nose on; you come out, just walk towards us a little bit; you get there (she points to an area in front of the seating area) and just be with us. There is nothing that you have to

⁶⁸ Lecoq, *Theatre* 116.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Weitz 86

⁷¹ Red nose clown workshop, 13 Sep. 13 2009.

do, but you can do whatever you want to do, as long as it's not coming from the point of view of: 'oh, I have to do something, I have to entertain them.' But it's coming from what is going on with you because you're there. Let's see what that means..."

Further comments and responses to participants' work:

"When you go up there, 99% of the time, what you don't want to show is what's going to work. You're trying to avoid that and cover that with something else, which gets you in this shitty situation. Basically, what I'm telling you is that you better go in your underwear right away than just pretend that it's not going to happen (it's a metaphor [everyone laughs] yeah, yeah, you never know). Because it's not going to be fun for anybody; and you suffer. Whatever you've got there – play with it. 'I don't feel anything,' well, that's something."

"It's a control problem! Don't grab it, surf it! Because if you want to control and understand then that's a different game; and you're not going to get it. You are not. The only way to get it is to just go with it. If you want it and try to grab it, it won't work. 'Oh, they laugh from this thing, let me do it again!' It won't work. The only thing that you can do is laugh together, see what it does to you and give them something else that comes from that."

"When he comes in the effect of being there with the red nose is so unbearable that he starts to do something, no matter what; anything is good but not that feeling. But that [feeling] is exactly what we want... What we want is you there, whatever it makes you feel and how you deal with it."

“Before we can get to the point when we start to do things, we have to go through this place; and you being there is uncomfortable because you think, ‘What am I doing here exactly?’ It’s very important that you can stay there even if you don’t know what to do there. I want you to become familiar with that place – you can be there with yourself without doing nothing, being ready to do something.”

As in the Neutral Mask training, failure can be experienced both in particular moments within exercises and in the training process as a whole. The texts above show the centrality of uncertainty to the development of presentness through the clown. This experience might be accentuated into disorientation depending on the pedagogical strategy of the instructor. Gaulier, for example, adopted a strategy in which “by forcing [the participants] to fail in a humiliating way, he had shattered their confident personas and opened them up to performing their vulnerable clowns.”⁷² Coletto’s style of teaching is quite different. As the segments of text from her workshop reveals, hers is a strategy of calmness and humour. Rather than powerfully manipulating the participants of her workshops into a state of disorientation, Coletto lets them experience the uncertainty embedded in the attempt to “just be there with us”⁷³ over time; sometimes a lot of time. This process of “cooking,” as Coletto calls it, is required for recognizing the uncertainty and getting accustomed to “surf it.”⁷⁴

⁷² Purcell Gates, “Tout” 195.

⁷³ Coletto, Red nose clown workshop, 13 Sep. 2009.

⁷⁴ See slanted text above.

In clown training the actor's failure is primarily identical to the clown's failure.⁷⁵

The clown, then, is not considered a character that has a separate controllable and visible life, which hides the real actor underneath. That is why the failures that emerge in the early exercises serve as the crude material for creating the practitioner's own clown.

These moments of slippage and loss of control may reveal the passageways into heightened "clown presentness," which includes vulnerability, responsiveness, and direct engagement with the observers. This type of presentness with the audience is, according to Coletto one of the main benefits of clown training:

If you understand the red nose mask you get incredible freedom onstage. You know how to connect with the audience, and you don't have to look at them, it's this circle that you open with them. It's totally something energetic but it makes a difference. And it's not something you do. You just bring that in when you walk onstage. And it makes you a different quality of an actor.⁷⁶

Failure is overtly an essential part of clown training. However, the kind of failure experienced in this practice is not essentially different from the failures I described earlier. As opposed to the popular image of the clown as a strange looking creature who fails through ridiculously large and expansive flops, eventually "for a theatre clown it isn't necessary to show the audience how to fail to succeed in doing something or to wear a red nose."⁷⁷ The failures exposed by the red-nose mask are part of being human, facing

⁷⁵ This is true to the training process and might change as the process evolves into creating clown sketches toward performance.

⁷⁶ Coletto, personal interview, 27 Apr 2010.

⁷⁷ Lecoq, *Theatre* 116.

the world, just standing there doing nothing, stripped of most conventions of stage acting, like the actor playing the woman in Beckett's *Rockaby*.

* * *

Failure in acting is inevitable. An actor goes through a process of rehearsals in which moments of revelation occur: the interaction flows organically; the blocking works impeccably in harmony with the action; great intensity is revealed. Everyone acknowledge that the scene “worked.” The structure that worked is then rehearsed in order to enable the performers to repeat these magical moments, which are or were by definition emerging, fleeting, momentary. This endeavor is clearly doomed. We cannot repeat something emergent. We cannot (re)capture a moment in time. It will fail. Yet most of what actor-training is about is to find “what works” and set the way to repeat it, to succeed in something one cannot truly succeed in. That is why actors need to befriend failure, experience it, train in it, in order to realize that “the way *around* [failure] is actually *through*.”⁷⁸

Presentness requires access to failure. O’Gorman and Werry claim that “failure can be a state of raw human beauty. When we fail we are vulnerable, fragile, unguarded, open. We are most utterly ourselves.”⁷⁹ However, what failure reveals is, arguably, not the presence of the “essential self” that lies hidden at the core under layers of habituation that are suddenly shed; rather, it is the self-in-the-moment, entwined with its surrounding,

⁷⁸ Bogart and Landau 61, emphasis in the original.

⁷⁹ O’Gorman and Werry, “Anatomy” 107.

heightened through its awareness of time and space. Failure as a form of trickery one does to oneself opens the rehearsed performance to possibilities of failing to know what one should do, of failing to control the exact results of a repeated action, of failing to foresee what one knows is going to happen.

Presence, like acting, is bound to fail; yet failure reveals presence. Just as presence fails again and again, yet persists, so does failure presents itself continually as a viable outcome of each moment of performance. Ridout goes as far as to claim that “this is not just, as we have seen, that the breaking down of the machinery is in itself the source of pleasure, although this can be the case, but that the machinery itself only truly appears in its moments of breakdown.”⁸⁰ Performance’s presentness, then, is revealed through the cracks created by failure.

⁸⁰ Ridout 168.

Appendix A

The Practice-Based Research: A Chronological Outline

Oct. 2008 – Nov. 2009

Training Group initial period of work in various rented studios in Chicago
Three hours a week (total of six meetings)

January 2009 – May 2009

Training Group at the Red Tape Theatre space
Three hours a week (total of 20 meetings)

August 3-14, 2009

SITI Company Suzuki/Viewpoints intensive workshop at Links Hall
Ten daily sessions of four hours each with Barney O’Hanlon and Leon Inglsrud

August 28-30, 2009

Intensive mask workshop with Paola Coletto at Links Hall
Three daily sessions of seven hours each

September 2009 – July 2011

Training Group at Japanese Culture Center
Three hours a week (ongoing)

October 6 – November 18, 2009

Body of Mask extensive course with Paola Coletto at Red Moon Theatre
Three weekly sessions of four hours each (total 18 sessions)

September 13, 2009 – January 31, 2010

Advanced red nose clown workshop and performance creation with Paola Coletto
Three hours a week (total of 19 meetings) and three performances at Links Hall

December 17, 2009

From Neutral Mask to the Clown State, introductory Master Class with Paola Coletto

A single six hour session

March 6-7 and 13-14, 2010

Introductory Suzuki/Viewpoints workshop with Ofer Ravid

Four meetings of three hours each

April 6 – May 24, 2010

Physical Storytelling workshop and performance creation with Paola Coletto, assisted by Ofer Ravid.

Four hours a week (total 8 meetings) and a performance at Links Hall

May 30 – June 10, 2011

SITI Company Suzuki/Viewpoints intensive workshop at Links Hall

Ten daily sessions of four hours each with J. Ed. Araiza and Akiko Aizawa

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