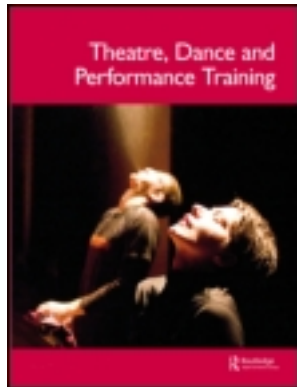


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Tekhnē Sessions: investigating dynamic aliveness in the actor's work

Frank Camilleri

This essay documents a practice-based investigation of the space between training and performance processes. The interplay between structure and improvisation within a reiterative cycle of exercises and tasks provided the base for an exploration of a central aspect in the actor's work underlined by the term 'dynamic aliveness'. This ongoing investigation was initiated in 2003 under the name of *Tekhnē Sessions*. *Tekhnē*'s investigation of dynamic aliveness emerged from three different yet related contexts: the technical training of Jerzy Grotowski, the performance vision of Ingemar Lindh, and the aesthetic of the sublime of Jean-François Lyotard. An overview of the context and of the informing technical principles that led to the design of the *Tekhnē* structure paves the way for a description of its informing principles, format, and applications. The agency of structure, the dynamics of improvisation, and the presence of observers, are identified as conditions of possibility for dynamic aliveness.

Keywords: structure, improvisation, performer process, *Tekhnē*, sublime sentiment

This essay discusses *Tekhnē Sessions*, a practice-based investigation of the space between training and performance processes. The interplay between structure and improvisation within a reiterative cycle of exercises and tasks provides the foundation for an exploration of a central aspect in the actor's work underlined by the term 'dynamic aliveness'. The *Tekhnē* investigation was initiated in 2003 under my artistic direction within Icarus Performance Project and is still ongoing.

The essay begins with a definition of dynamic aliveness in the actor's work. An account of the informing practical and theoretical contexts that led to the design of the *Tekhnē* structure paves the way for a description of its informing principles, format, and applications. The agency of structure, the dynamics of improvisation, and the presence of observers, are identified as conditions of possibility for dynamic aliveness. Intention, counter-tension, and management of energy, are highlighted as indispensable elements within a Saussurean-informed view of the basic components of physical action.

Dynamic aliveness

As a practitioner since 1989, I have always been intrigued by the fact that certain aspects of training – usually those that involve improvisation with assimilated techniques – are more alive than the so-called objective of this training, i.e. the performance event. By ‘more alive’ I mean more energetic and dynamic not only in *how* a training task is performed, but also in *what* is being performed: in these cases it is no longer accurate to call this phenomenon training. This state or dimension of the work is clearly recognisable, even by non-informed observers who would think that what they are seeing is in fact a rehearsed performance due to (1) the practitioners’ engagement with their material, and (2) the accomplished compositional nature of the overall structure. It is like when a virtuoso pianist starts practising scales or chords, and then moves on to improvise with this technical material in a highly compositional manner. Is this training or performance?

It is a bit of both, of course. In these instances the practitioner occupies a central or interactive ground where the technical meets the imaginative. Rather than a ground or space, it is more accurate to view it as a spectrum that ranges from codified and technical work on one end, to free improvisation in performance on the other. The shades of possible interaction in between these two poles are as diverse as a spectrum. With *Tekhne Sessions* I have tried to investigate aspects that can be found towards the training side of the spectrum. With *Duration 56* (2007–current), another aspect of this long term research that does not concern us here, I investigate the space on the side of the performance end of the spectrum.¹ Though one of the aims of *Tekhne Sessions* is to identify basic elements of dynamic aliveness, its main objective is to support the ongoing laboratory practice of Icarus Performance Project.

It is possible to situate the phenomenon of dynamic aliveness within the domain of processual creativity, which is based on, but transcends, technical training. The ability to maintain ‘aliveness’ in this domain has been a central concern of researchers and practitioners in the twentieth century from Stanislavski onwards (cf. Hodge 2000, pp. 4–5, Zarrilli 2009, pp. 13–15). As will be described in the following section, the *Tekhne* investigation was inspired by Jerzy Grotowski’s work on physical actions and by Ingemar Lindh’s practice of collective improvisation as performance. However, the intuition to explore this domain by means of a structure that is neither training nor a performance but somewhere in between is, I feel, specific to *Tekhne*.

Considering that we are dealing with a specific manifestation of the actor’s work, it is not surprising that the entry for ‘presence’ in *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* provides some indications of what I am calling dynamic aliveness:

In the context of performance, ‘presence’ is used to describe *a perceived quality of performance ... where the performer appears to be notably focused or ‘in the moment’*. What these tautologies mean is that performers convey *charisma, strong engagement with themselves, their roles and/or their work, a particular quality of concentration, and a special ‘aura’*, to use Walter Benjamin’s term from a

1. See the Installations link at <http://www.icarusproject.info> for more information on *Duration 56* and other aspects of Icarus Performance Project.

different but related context. The performer's presence strongly engages the audience's attention and cultivates the audience's own sense of presence – *a sense of the importance of being in that moment at that event*. (Allain and Harvie 2006, p. 193; emphasis added)

The italicised qualities in this passage are all relevant to dynamic aliveness, which leads to the supposition that we are concerned with a kind of mental focus that is indistinguishable from a committed physical engagement with the task at hand. In this sense, then, dynamic aliveness partakes of the psychophysical capacity described by Phillip Zarrilli (2009, p. 21) – as an integration between outer/physical and inner/psychic action in which body–mind dualism is transcended (2009, p. 84) by means of an inner energy that in acting takes the form of impulses which initiate actions that constitute a performance score (2009, p. 19).

However, 'dynamic aliveness' is not simply a synonym for psychophysicality. Nor is it interchangeable with Eugenio Barba's 'pre-expressive' (Barba 1995, p. 9). In their analysis of the actor's presence, Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis (2004, p. 234) observe that:

The word presence in the theory decade [1990s] tended to imply a mistaken belief in the 'unified subject'. Old-style theatre talks about a star having presence, as a sort of natural quality, an extension of their self. [Philip] Auslander would say that this sense we have of a performer's self is actually a product, an effect of micro-relationships with respect to space, time, gesture, sound, etc.

These micro-relationships are reducible to techniques of the body and can be found across cultures. They can be viewed as 'a set of physical micro-techniques, learnt muscular disciplines', which together constitute what Barba calls the 'pre-expressive':

It is the way the performer stands, occupies space, physically 'is'. The overall discipline of the body comes from training which can produce the sensation of 'presence'. The techniques are what an audience sees. (Shepherd and Wallis 2004, p. 234)

Dynamic aliveness in the actor's work does partake of and can be manifested in and through such micro-techniques. However, it is also in the quality, the *how*, they are applied that announces the state of dynamic aliveness.

Following the example of the improvising pianist mentioned earlier, *Tekhnē* also explores the compositional quality that characterises instances of the phenomenon under review. This is a quality of the work that presents viewers with a legible experience, open to readings and associations. This is not necessarily the case in technical training, psychophysical integration, or pre-expressive technique, which are all conditions of possibility for dynamic aliveness but which, on their own, do not constitute processual and compositional creativity. In dynamic aliveness it is as if training is imbued not just with an aesthetic but with a poetics.

In Zarrilli's (2009, p. 41) phenomenologically inspired enactive approach to acting and embodiment, the psychophysical and compositional components

of dynamic aliveness can be situated in between the ‘aesthetic inner bodymind’ – e.g. those ‘forms of embodied practice which engage the physical body and attention (mind) in cultivating and attuning both to subtle levels of experience and awareness’ (Zarrilli 2009, p. 55) – and the ‘aesthetic outer body’ – i.e. ‘the body constituted by actions/tasks in performance’ (2009, p. 52). In Barba’s terms, it is as if the culturally specific micro-techniques that constitute the pre-expressive are organised and performed as (an) ‘expressive’. Dynamic aliveness is thus a phenomenon that seems to be at home when in transition or in a borderland: between the inner and the outer, the pre-expressive and the expressive. Indeed, the link between art and technique that the etymologically driven name of the *Tekhnē* project highlights (Greek for art and craft), serves as an indication of the borderland territory under analysis. The following section looks at the practical and theoretical contexts that informed *Tekhnē*.

Technical lineage and theoretical contexts: Grotowski, Lindh, Lyotard

Tekhnē’s investigation of dynamic aliveness emerged from three different yet related contexts: the technical training of Jerzy Grotowski, the performance vision of Ingemar Lindh, and the aesthetic of the sublime of Jean-François Lyotard. It is not possible to put these three formative contexts in a hierarchical order because all of them informed each other in the process of conception, elaboration, and practice. However, I will start with Grotowski because his work was the first to inform the practice that eventually led to the inception of the *Tekhnē* project.

The technical context from which *Tekhnē* emerged includes two training processes developed by Grotowski in different phases of his work: the corporal exercises of the Laboratory Theatre in the late 1960s (Wolford 2001, pp. 200–203), and the Motions sequence from the 1970s and 1980s (Slowiak and Cuesta 2007, pp. 125–126). The corporals, which were a dynamic elaboration of the static and introspective positions of Hatha Yoga, ‘included a range of headstands, shoulderstands, rolls, somersaults and leaps that developed the flexibility of the spinal column and allowed the actor to test the range of the body’s equilibrium’ (Wolford 2001, p. 201). The flowing energy and flexible body movements of the corporal exercises, which can be seen in the second part of *Training at the Teatr Laboratorium in Wrocław* (1972), recall some of the foundational aspects that drive the *Tekhnē* structure. These aspects will be discussed in the following section of this essay.

The Motions exercise, which is still part of the practice of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, is aimed at enhancing one’s psychophysical awareness through the ability of listening and reacting (by means of a structure of exercises) to what is happening around one. It consists of the ‘primal position’ and a series of stretches, with the primal position being a ‘position of the body in which the spine is slightly inclined, the knees slightly bent, a position held at the base of the body by the sacrum-pelvis complex’ (Grotowski 1997, p. 297). The photo images of Motions in *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (Schechner and Wolford 1997, pp. 401–403) and

the description of it in terms of cycles of stretch/positions and the synchronisation of details within a group (Richards 1995, pp. 52–55, Lendra 1997, pp. 324–326) were a direct influence on the design of the First Movement of *Tekhnē* as outlined in the following section. It was only in 2006, i.e. three years after *Tekhnē* was designed, that I had the opportunity to see Motions in practice. In addition to the interactive technique-performance objective of *Tekhnē* and the shape of the individual stretches, the tempo-rhythm of Motions and *Tekhnē* are distinctly different. Still, the *Tekhnē* concept of a repeatable and dynamic structure of stretches was influenced by images and accounts of Motions.

Though the technical context from which *Tekhnē* emerged was informed by Grotowski-based processes, the main influence that subtends the concept of a training structure in a performance context can be traced to Ingemar Lindh's research on collective improvisation. Lindh's resistance to fixed structures, his vision of collective improvisation as performance and not as a training or rehearsal process (Camilleri 2008a, pp. 84–91), and the work he conducted on mental precision and intention (Camilleri 2008b, pp. 430–431), are all crucial aspects and aspirations shared by *Tekhnē*. Because of Lindh's resistance to fixed performance structures and his espousal of empirical forms of training (Camilleri 2008b, pp. 431–433), I did not receive a tangible and codified know-how from him during the period he was working in Malta (1994–1997). Notwithstanding this, I did receive from Lindh the importance of mastering technique (thanks to his precise work with Étienne Decroux) and of combining inner with outer action (through the Tai Chi sessions I did with him). If Grotowski's corporal exercises and Motions provided some of the basic tools for *Tekhnē*, Lindh informed the objective of *Tekhnē*'s investigation.

The other important influence in the overlapping triangle of contexts that informed *Tekhnē* was provided in a philosophical manner by Jean-François Lyotard's account of the sublime sentiment (Lyotard 1984, pp. 77–81). *Tekhnē*'s investigation had to take into account the compositional aspect of dynamic aliveness, an aspect which is converted into the legibility of what the practitioners are doing. Without this legibility by observers and practitioners alike, *Tekhnē* would be a training structure, similar to Grotowski's corporals and Motions or practices mentioned by Zarrilli that characterise the 'aesthetic inner bodymind' (Zarrilli 2009, p. 55). The endeavour to address the poetics, in addition to the aesthetics, of dynamic aliveness was at the forefront of the *Tekhnē* investigation from day one: what is it that practitioners make present during instances of dynamic aliveness? Without going back to the discussion on the actor's presence (a glorified, unified self and its aura versus Auslander's micro-relationships or Barba's micro-techniques of the body), it is possible to situate this question in Lyotard's account of the sublime sentiment. In providing *Tekhnē* with the theoretical substratum it needed to address the readability that accompanies dynamic aliveness, Lyotard's reading of the Kantian sublime influenced the approach, design, and practice of *Tekhnē*. This, I feel, is another distinctive feature that sets it apart from the practices mentioned in this essay, i.e. Zarrilli's, Grotowski's, and Lindh's.

In his account, which is concerned with literature and painting but which I extend to theatre and performance, Lyotard distinguishes between the

2. In Lyotard's reading of Immanuel Kant's aesthetics of the sublime, the unrepresentable marks the infinitely large or small, a powerful feeling or a state of being: the universe, humanity, the end of history, the instant, space, the good (Lyotard 1991, p. 126). These are ideas, Lyotard writes, of which no presentation is possible (Lyotard 1984, p. 78) – which does not mean that they do not exist. The unrepresentable, therefore, defies presentation in resting beyond the capabilities of representational techniques.

aesthetics of representation (or the sentiment of the beautiful) and the aesthetics of allusion (or the sublime sentiment). He writes that in works that belong to an aesthetic of the sublime, there occurs a kind of 'negative presentation' where an unrepresentable is *alluded to* (rather than represented) in the strategic use of representational techniques (Lyotard 1991, p. 98).² This application of representational devices inevitably involves the drawing of attention to their manner of representation which is found to be inadequate (meaningless, abstract, non-linear, fragmentary), and it is paradoxically in that strategic failure to represent (a single, 'beautiful' meaning), that allusion to the unrepresentable occurs.

Tekhnē's espousal of what is essentially a structure and dramaturgy of training in an observed performance situation aspires to belong to an aesthetic of allusion in drawing attention to its manner of representation. In lacking a performance theme, *Tekhnē* strategically fails to represent a coherent meaning at the same time as it presents itself as a performance structure in front of an audience. The overall structure of *Tekhnē* and the individual actions that constitute it (as described in the following section) are abstract in not meaning anything beyond their technical function. The clothes that practitioners wear are also relatively neutral in being black, minimal, and functional. As such, nothing happens in *Tekhnē* except what the practitioners are doing and how they do it; a nothingness which serves to rupture the sentiment of the beautiful and which functions as a 'negative presentation'. Images and associations, however abstract they might be in terms of dynamics (e.g. lines and speed) and texture (e.g. light and rough), are generated in observers and practitioners alike. It is in this context and through the agency of the practitioners' work, that these images and associations push the limits of what constitutes training and performance, thereby attempting to privilege the phenomenon of dynamic aliveness in *Tekhnē*.

Tekhnē Sessions: informing principles

The principal structure that constitutes *Tekhnē Sessions* was developed under my artistic direction in 2003–2004 and has been practised since then. It is made up of three seamless movements, each exploring different possibilities of interplay between structure and improvisation. Whereas the highly structured format of the First Movement allows for a habitational kind of improvisation to occur (i.e. *how* to do a codified action), the seemingly free structure of the Third Movement is in practice an improvisational recall of actions, rhythm, dynamics, and other elements from the first two movements and from exercises not incorporated in *Tekhnē*. In the remaining part of this essay, an overview of the theoretical and technical principles that inform *Tekhnē* will precede an account of its overall format.

The investigation of dynamic aliveness led not only to the identification of a strategic intermediary space where such a structure can be sited, but also to focus on fundamental components of action. Following the Saussurean model, which analyses irreducible elements of the linguistic sign, the 'stretch-action' was identified as partaking of basic components of physical action. As the name implies, a stretch-action is a fusion of a stretch position (e.g. a yoga

position) and a physical action as understood by Grotowski's use of the term in marking an integration between inner action (e.g. intention, imagination) and outer action (i.e. the visible movement) via impulse (Richards 1995, pp. 93–99). Viewed from this angle, a *Tekhnē* stretch-action is comparable to the individual elements in the dynamic re-elaboration of Hatha Yoga positions in Grotowski's corporal exercises. From another angle, they recall martial arts positions. Figures 1–4 illustrate some examples of stretch-actions in the First Movement of *Tekhnē*.

To better understand the concept and practice of a *Tekhnē* stretch-action, it is useful to distinguish it from a normal stretch. A stretch position (inclusive of the actions that lead to and follow from it) contains a basic intention, basic counter-tension dynamics, and a basic management of energy, e.g. to touch the floor in front of your feet with the palms of your hands without bending your knees. On the other hand, the practice of a stretch-action adopts these training-based properties as a performance score, i.e. as *ends in themselves* in an observed performance situation, thereby investing them with the status of physical action in the here and now of occurrence. This process marks an attempt to place a constituent basic element of dynamic aliveness in the borderland between technique and performance. The operative principle here is investiture, which is a question of attitude, i.e.



Figures 1 and 2 *Tekhnē* stretch-actions, Frank Camilleri and Caroline Gatt, Malta, 2004. Photos by Sandro Spina.



Figures 3 and 4 *Tekhnē* stretch-actions, Frank Camilleri and Electa Behrens, Canterbury, 2009. Photos by Felipe Cervera Noriega.

you approach a stretch not as an introspective task or a training exercise but, rather, as a performance score that incorporates intention (as discussed later on in this section) and the awareness of performing in front of observers.

Though the practice of the *Tekhnē* stretch-action can be said to be inspired by Grotowski, the concept behind it is Saussurean in seeking to identify irreducible components of a phenomenon in a borderland. Ferdinand de Saussure's view of the linguistic sign as an arbitrary composite of 'a concept and a sound-image' which once 'intimately united' is no longer possible to separate except abstractedly (Saussure 2001, pp. 4–5), led him to situate the study of linguistic signs (i.e. linguistics) 'in a borderland where the elements of sound and thought combine' (2001, p. 7). Saussure's description of the linguistic sign was strategically adapted during the work on *Tekhnē* as a provisional model for a theorised account of physical action with the objective of formulating a mechanism that embodies basic elements of dynamic aliveness. In this context, the body movement of physical action is considered as the signifier (i.e. the equivalent of the sound image in a linguistic sign) and the intention which constitutes that movement as the signified (i.e. the concept in a linguistic sign). Just as in the Saussurean paradigm one can 'neither divide sound from thought nor thought from sound' (Saussure 2001, p. 7), the distinction between movement and intention in physical action can only be accomplished abstractedly.

The application of Saussurean linguistics to the performer's situation was not meant to be conclusive but rather a strategic device at the service of a practical investigation. This process yielded the stretch-action as a crucial mechanism within the *Tekhnē* structure, a building block like letters and words in language. The following sub-sections provide an outline of the basic technical characteristics of stretch-actions that feed the practice of *Tekhnē*.

(a) Intention, application of

A stretch-action applies intention as a fundamental aspect of physical action. In a stretch-action, the primary intention to take action (e.g. to reach out and touch another part of the body) is cultivated as an ability to focus that later on forms the basis for the generation and layering of more sophisticated intentions (e.g. to reach out and touch my toes *so that* I check that blue spot on my toe). The objective of the practice is Grotowskian in attempting to narrow the gap between mental and physical processes (e.g. Grotowski 1975, pp. 176–177). In some instances, a case that also occurs in disciplines such as sports and martial arts, physical (re)action often precedes rationalised intention, i.e. an intention surfaces and is verbalised after it has happened. This condition of action announces a Saussurean state of signification where intention is movement and movement is intention.

The application of intention in a *Tekhnē* stretch-action is informed by the central role that it and 'mental precision' play in Lindh's research on the principles of collective improvisation (Camilleri 2008b, pp. 430–431). Discussing the psyche or mental component in the psychophysical mechanism that Lindh sought to engage in his practice, I argue that:

Rather than adopt the term 'psychological', he prefers and insists upon the descriptive term 'mental'. For Lindh, the term 'psychological' implies a mechanism (e.g. need, desire, and motivation) that filters the performance of an action by predetermining it, submitting physical action to a procedure that announces a split where the mind controls the body. The term 'mental' is preferred, in that for Lindh it indicates the exclusion of psychological mechanisms, in the process highlighting *the status of action as an intention to do something without a (psychological) motive to do it*. (Camilleri 2008b, p. 430; emphasis added)

This view of intention and its relation to physical action informs the practice of *Tekhnē*, not only in the technical terms of how to perform a physical task or score, but also in the overriding vision of an aesthetic of the sublime that resists representation even at the level of intention. This problematic perspective is still under investigation in other areas situated in between training and performance and will form the basis of future research.

(b) Counter-tension, dynamics of

A stretch-action engages the movement/intention dynamics of counter-tension. The practitioner necessarily applies counter-tensions/intentions to

perform a stretch position, e.g. the action to touch a toe without bending the knees is countered by that of the legs and spine to remain straight. This primary and fundamental aspect of a stretch position forms the basis for the later layering of more sophisticated counter-intentions. For example, the basic counter-tension dynamics of the stretch position exemplified above can spark in the practitioner an association of counter-intentions that is manifested in and operates as an initial layering of images: I have to touch that blue spot on my toe but cannot bend my knees because my legs are buried in soil. This apparently spontaneous and simple layering of images and associations is symptomatic of a trained mechanism that can be traced to Grotowski, Lindh, and, indeed, to Stanislavski. Initially, the practitioner works consciously towards the generation of such images, just as a stretch position is practised consciously, but with time this phenomenon is developed as a mental flexibility that accompanies the more visible physical flexibility that results, in this particular case, from stretch-based training.³

3. In exercising the ability to develop variations of an action through intention, this phenomenon also marks a primary stage of improvisation and partakes of Lindh's work on mental precision. See especially the role that 'phrases' and 'themes' play in Lindh's research on the principles of collective improvisation (Camilleri 2008a, pp. 88–90).

The layering of counter-tension/intention dynamics can be further refined to accommodate (or constitute in the case of *Tekhnē*) complex performance contexts. The objective here is the cultivation of a psychophysical state where the performer is always already engaging counter-tension dynamics, thereby priming actions for an eventual dramaturgical layering in performance. For example, for a text-based performance of *Macbeth*, the protagonist's counter-tensions of not/wanting to kill Duncan can be consciously and directorially layered on the counter-tensions exemplified above: a part of the body does something (e.g. a hand reaches out to pick a dagger), while another part does something else (e.g. the legs remain stiff due to a lack of conviction). Of course, in the agenda of the sublime sentiment in *Tekhnē*, the layering of counter-tensions never reaches such a level of dramaturgical representation and remains provisional precisely to explore the allusive potential of the intermediary spectrum between training and performance.

(c) Energy, generation and management of

The feature that immediately distinguishes a *Tekhnē* stretch-action from a conventional stretch position is the continuous flow of energy and movement that propels both the individual stretch-actions and the links that bind them in a sequence. The flow of energy in *Tekhnē* is generated by a whole-body vertical swing-action that is akin to the arm-positioning and quality of energy that leads to a leap when diving into water. The soft and flexible bending knees in the swing and the stretch-action positions in *Tekhnē* make possible and facilitate the generation and management of energy.

The swing-action generates energy in a manner reminiscent of the momentum of a pendulum that uses just enough energy to keep the swing going. The potential energy (i.e. the energy a body potentially has because of its position) must be preserved so that once the arms swing back and the knees adjust, the kinetic energy gained (i.e. the energy a body has because of its motion) must be equal to the potential energy preserved in the previous position.

The management of energy tension is also intrinsic to the swing-action. In a swing-action, only the concerned nodes (e.g. neck, shoulders, elbows,

wrists, knees) are tensed to generate energy (e.g. the shoulder muscles are slightly contracted to provide swing and direction in the outstretched arm motion). The muscle contraction involved in a swing-action is therefore localised, minimal, and timed to coincide with the deceleration of energy in order to keep the flow constant. The oscillating combination of tensed nodes and untensed body base (torso and legs) serves not only to generate energy but to give it shape by channelling it towards different positions (e.g. arms stretched sideways, forward, backwards, or upwards).

Tekhné Sessions: Format

The First Movement seeks to engage the practitioner's behavioural attention within a highly codified and synchronised structure of stretch-action sequences.⁴ The design of this movement, which incorporates six sequences of five to six stretch-actions each, provides practitioners with a 'point of entry' allowing them a form of access to a state of dynamic aliveness. The mantra-like repetition of these sequences serves to wake up the body and is aimed at stimulating a psychophysical engagement with the task at hand. The almost hypnotic momentum of the flow acts like a channel or slide that once embarked upon, takes one on a journey without thinking about directions, only about tempo-rhythm, dynamics, and movement. The highly structured quality of the sequences is aimed at facilitating the overcoming of physical blocks (e.g. stiff muscles) and psychological obstacles (e.g. working in front of observers), thereby creating the conditions of possibility for improvisational dynamics to occur, which in turn stimulate the compositional aspect of dynamic aliveness in the Third Movement. Improvisation in this highly codified movement is intentionally restricted to *how* a predetermined form is performed, i.e. to subtle changes that are hardly noticed by observers but

4. The demand for synchronicity that characterised the First Movement from 2003 to 2007 was removed in 2008 in order to test and explore new research exigencies which are still being investigated.

Box | Tekhné Sessions: Format

First Movement: Point of Entry

Basic unit: stretch-action in codified sequences

1. Primary Sequence
2. Crescent Sequence (see Figure 1)
3. Dive Sequence
4. Half-Lifts Sequence
5. Floor Work Sequence
6. Horse-Riding Stance Sequence (see Figures 2–4)

Every sequence incorporates various sets of actions (e.g. squats, backward rolls, torso twists)

Second Movement: Springboard

Basic unit: stretch-action in individual empirical task-sequences

1. Rooted-Hands Floor Work Task Sequence
2. Floor Work Task Sequence

Third Movement: Flight

Improvisation with material from First/Second Movements and other exercises not incorporated in *Tekhné* (see Figures 5–7)

Tekhné Sessions include a brief introductory address and last about 50 minutes. Due to their nature, all sessions are unique. *Tekhné* can be presented in solo, duo, or trio format, in various frontal or circular spatial configurations, and in diverse ways of coordination.

which are perceptible by the practitioners working together. In terms of historical lineage and technical inspiration, the First Movement can be traced to Grotowski's corporal exercises and Motions as discussed earlier. Due to its highly codified nature, the First Movement's duration of 25 minutes is very consistent.

If the First Movement serves as a 'point of entry', the Second Movement functions as a 'springboard' that propels the practitioner away from the codified First Movement towards the open frame of the Third Movement. The basic unit in the Second Movement is the task-sequence which permits the practitioner more improvisational freedom than the codified stretch-actions of the First Movement but which still provides a recognisable structure within which actions (movement and intentions) can be situated. The first task-sequence consists of finding as many positions as possible with the palms of the hands held flat on the floor. This task involves an individual and empirical codification process that engages intention, stretch counter-dynamics, and energy flow, on a different level than the stretch-actions of the First Movement. The second task-sequence involves a



Figures 5 and 6 *Tekhnē* Third Movement improvisation, Frank Camilleri and Caroline Gatt, Malta, 2004. Photos by Sandro Spina.

version of the first task that allows movement in space: the practitioner uses the by-now-sensitised hands to move in the space by means of the actions and positions explored in the previous task. The duration of the Second Movement, which is usually around 15 minutes, is dependent on the session leader. Though in this and the Third Movement the practitioners are no longer bound by the demands of synchronicity, it has been noted by observers and practitioners alike that a kind of coordination does take place. One suspects that this latent synchronicity is symptomatic of a shared psychophysical awareness of what is happening in the space, which in turn reflects a more dialogic form of dynamic awareness.

The Third Movement's formal freedom is rooted in the structural frames of the previous movements. In functioning as an improvisatory culmination of the 'point of entry' and the 'springboard' processes that precede it, the Third Movement has been named 'flight'. This Movement involves the recall of actions, dynamics, positions, rhythms, and other elements from the first two movements. The nature of this improvisational recall often takes the form of selection and adaptation of elements from the practitioners' assimilated techniques, including from exercises not incorporated in *Tekhne* (e.g. acrobatics). The distance between the generation and the execution of these recalled forms is reduced to a minimum as the practitioners' concern is not 'what to do' or 'how to do' (both of which are embodied by the practitioners as residue from the First and Second Movements) but the imperative 'to do compositionally'. Therefore, whilst the properties of First Movement stretch-actions and Second Movement task-sequences are still operative on subtler levels in this movement, improvisation dynamics operate as a recall of micro and macro structures of actions which come to function as the leitmotifs and themes of the 'negative presentation' that carry



Figure 7 *Tekhne* Third Movement improvisation, Frank Camilleri and Electa Behrens, Canterbury, 2009. Photo by Felipe Cervera Noriega.

the agenda of allusion in *Tekhnē*. For example, see the allusive and legible potential of the counter-tensions that characterise the practitioners' 'free' positions in Figures 5–7.

Though the Third Movement does not have a specific structure of sequences or tasks, it does follow a wavelike pattern of a running in (which overlaps with the concluding phase of the Second Movement), a peak (itself made up of various undulations), and a cooling down. The duration of the Third Movement varies but it usually lasts around 10 minutes. Long term practice has shown that it is extremely difficult to maintain the 'flight' momentum of energy and focus for a sustained period because demands of 'what/how to do' start to intrude on the practitioner's consciousness. When practitioners start to refine sequences of actions from the material just produced or recalled, the intermediary state that *Tekhnē* explores loses its borderland status and shifts towards performance. The objective is to push the boundaries of this intermediary terrain in the final phase. This is indeed a challenge because the more experienced the practitioner, the more difficult it becomes to arrest or suspend the impulse to compose in a predetermined or determining manner aimed at creating something else rather than being the created artefact itself.

Conclusion

This essay looked at a practical investigation of a dynamic and compositional quality in the actor's work that is often manifested in training situations characterised by improvisation with assimilated techniques. The interplay between structure and improvisation was explored within a cycle of exercises informed by Jerzy Grotowski's psychophysical training and Ingemar Lindh's research on the principles of collective improvisation. In situating the research in an intermediary area between training and performance, the investigation sought to engage mechanisms of allusion, rather than representation, in order to highlight the aesthetic dimension of this aspect of the actor's work. The compositional use and allusive potential of intention, counter-tension, and energy were highlighted in this essay as basic elements which the actor engages in training and performance contexts, and which could be put forward in a structure that is not reducible to technique but which is, potentially, a possible form of performance in its own right.

Endnote

Tekhnē has been presented in various contexts, either as a full or as a conference presentation, including Malta (2003–2004), Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland, 2004), University of Exeter (UK, 2006), Moscow Art Theatre School (Russia, 2007), University of Evora (Portugal, 2007), and University of Plymouth (UK, 2009).

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