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ACTORS AND ARTISANS:
THE USE OF OBJECTS IN THE TRAINING OF ACTORS

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy

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Eleanor Margolies

ABSTRACT

This study is based on the description and analysis of acting exercises in which actors work with concrete objects. The exercises are drawn from various acting methodologies, including disused and marginal methodologies as well as those in common use in British and American acting schools and studios. It is argued that every theory of acting presents a theory of human relations to the material world, and that the specific possibilities of interaction with the material world which are offered by an acting methodology are demonstrated by its treatment of concrete objects.

The introduction places these 'object exercises' in the context of contemporary actor training. It surveys the main trends in actor training in British drama schools, and notes a problematic division (reflected in prospectuses and timetables) between 'acting' and 'movement' studies, and a further division between 'Stanislavski-based' approaches and the various approaches gathered under the heading of 'improvisation'. It is suggested that the concept of 'improvisation' has an importance which goes beyond the conventional taxonomy of theatre practice. 'Improvisation' refers to a particular attitude to the world, a form of 'free play within constraints', which can be found in various acting exercises from different traditions, in musical improvisation, and in the practice of 'bricolage' or 'making do'.

The question of how humans interact with matter, which is raised by 'object exercises' for actors, has a bearing on wider questions of material transformation and physical work. The second section of the study places the theories of acting under consideration within the cultural context of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It examines the trope of 'work' -- as a theme for drama, a subject of movement analysis and an image of the performer's activity, looking particularly at the work of Decroux and Meyerhold.

A distinction is drawn between two approaches to objects in performance: objects may be treated as 'constraints' or as 'texts'. The object treated as a constraint denies the actor access to habitual responses and socialised behaviour and thereby frees the potential for other ways of being; the object treated as a text is seen as a reservoir which both records its own history and proposes actions to the performer. Examples of both approaches are given in five sections

which analyse specific acting exercises -- in the exercises described in the first two sections, the object is primarily treated as a constraint, and in those described in the remaining sections, the object is primarily treated as a text.

Section One looks at the simple, concrete use of objects such as balls and sticks in exercises to develop physical, mental and interactive skills, and at how these exercises promote a 'dialogue' between human and object. The practitioners discussed include Clive Barker, Meyerhold, Stanislavski, and Lee Strasberg.

Section Two looks further at the 'dialogue' between actor and object, and at how various 'ways of being' on stage can be transmitted through specific approaches to concrete objects. The question of the actor's presence on stage is discussed through the work of Stanislavski, John Wright, Jacques Lecoq, Uta Hagen and Enrique Pardo. Connecting the practical exercises to the introductory section on 'work', it is argued that the 'listening', 'following', or 'depressive' approach to objects -- which evokes a particular mode of being on stage -- relates to the artisanal approach to the material world, a particular mode of 'work'.

Section Three looks at exercises in which the object is treated as a text which proposes unusual or exaggerated movement (as in the work of John Wright), provides imaginative access to historical or social background (as in the work of Stanislavski or Brecht) or provokes extraordinary emotional responses (as in the work of Lee Strasberg or Uta Hagen). The section concludes by looking at the work of Michael Chekhov, who links these three aspects of the actor's work.

Section Four discusses actor training exercises which may lead directly into the devising of performances, in which the actor and object are of equal importance on stage, the actor consciously manipulating the material properties of the object to create an image. This section draws on the work of Lecoq and 'object improvisation' teachers Steve Tiplady and Julian Crouch. It is noted that several drama schools are creating new courses to prepare 'devising actors' for work in Theatre-in-Education and other collaborative company work.

Section Five examines puppetry, in which the object takes centre stage. It is argued that this form of theatre is a useful tool for actors, since it defamiliarises theatrical conventions and demands acute observation and reproduction of material qualities. It is further suggested that recent theorisations of the 'double vision' enjoyed by spectators of the puppet theatre -- aware of the material nature of the object as well as of the fiction of the character -- may also apply to spectators of live theatre.

The conclusion recalls that 'work' has been an important trope for acting theory, since both acting and manual labour involve transformation and repetition. It is argued that the

analogy between work and acting can be traced in the opposite direction, that is, that the theories of human-object relations developed experimentally in theatre (the various attitudes towards the material world which are represented and transmitted by acting exercises involving concrete objects), may offer new possibilities for human-object interactions in the wider world. The comparison between musical and theatrical improvisation, mentioned in the introduction, is developed further, suggesting that 'improvisation' is a particularly valuable and neglected approach to the material world. The study concludes that 'object exercises' offer an effective means of promoting dialogue between the actor's imagination and the material world, of transmitting a 'listening' approach to the material world -- a crucial element of creative improvisation.

ACTORS AND ARTISANS: THE USE OF OBJECTS IN THE TRAINING OF ACTORS

CONTENTS

Introduction

Work and the actor

Objects treated as constraint and as text: practical acting exercises

- 1 Concrete use
The object as a constraint and the idea of human-object dialogue
- 2 Presence
Exploring different ways of being on stage through objects
- 3 The object as a text
Objects which propose movement or emotion in training and rehearsal but disappear in performance
- 4 Towards performance
Objects treated as texts, remaining in performance as images
- 5 Objects brought to life
The lessons of the puppet theatre for the actor

Conclusion: work, repetition, experience and improvisation

Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

Our approach to acting is organically connected to the development of the theater; that is, acting training is inseparable from the state of the theater. You cannot just say that acting affects the shape of the theater, or the shape of the theater affects acting. They mutually affect each other.

Helena Kaut-Howson (Mekler 1989: 242)

The actor and the object

Every theory of acting implies a theory of the relationship of humans to the material world but this aspect of actor training is rarely considered. In this study, I analyse the various possibilities of interaction with the material world which are presented by the actor training methods in use in British drama schools today. In order to do this, I have focused on acting exercises in which actors work with concrete objects. I use the word 'object', rather than the usual term for something designed or chosen to be used in theatrical performance - a 'prop' - because I am referring to objects which have not previously been assigned a role in a drama, which may be used in training but not in performance, and which may even be samples of more or less unformed matter, such as lengths of cloth or paper.

In the course of this study, I observed (and sometimes participated in) acting classes and workshops taking place both in drama schools and through non-institutional training organisations. I discussed actor-object exercises with teachers and actors and studied the historical origins of the methodologies through written and audio-visual sources. It became clear that the question of how actors interact

with concrete objects is a neglected and unconsidered area, both in practice and in theory. Often, when I asked in drama schools about the ways in which actors learn to work with props, and how they come to decisions about the model of reality which they will present through their handling of concrete objects, I was told that if the question ever arose as a theoretical issue (as it might, perhaps, in a production of Chekhov), it was simply dealt with on the spot, in rehearsal. However, even in critical writing on performance, the theories of human-world relationship embodied in different theories of acting are rarely considered. Among the important exceptions are a short but far-reaching essay, 'Man and Object in the Theater', by Jiri Veltrusky, a critic of the Prague School; the essays of Enrique Pardo on 'object-metaphor'; Natalie Grohn Schmitt's book *Actors and Onlookers*, and Brecht's argument, found throughout his theoretical writing, that the nature of the stage-world – whether it is presented as fixed or capable of transformation – affects spectators' attitude to the world outside the theatre.

I will argue that one mode of relationship to the material world, which I will call 'improvisation', has been neglected, both in actor training and in a wider cultural sense. If I do not provide a full definition of 'improvisation' at the outset, it is precisely because I intend to define it through the analysis of practical exercises, and to make a case for its importance which goes beyond its conventional meaning in the taxonomy of theatrical practice. This means complicating the conventional division of actor training into 'Stanislavski-based' and 'improvisation-based' methodologies. Under the first heading, Stanislavski, Lee Strasberg, Uta Hagen and other 'Method' teachers are usually gathered; under the second heading, Keith Johnstone, Lecoq, Decroux and a variety of diverse mime,

mask and clowning practitioners are bundled together. Members of the first group are assumed to work from mental concepts or emotions outwards, and members of the second group to work from physical states inwards (which is why this approach is also known as 'physical' or 'movement-based' theatre). This binary categorisation is unsatisfactory, whether one attempts to trace lines of influence, or looks in detail at the methodology of a particular practitioner. Where, for instance, does Michael Chekhov belong? He trained as an actor at the Moscow Arts Theatre under Stanislavski, but his theory of 'Psychological Gestures' is based on the view that performing a physical gesture produces emotion. Where, indeed, does Stanislavski's own 'Method of Physical Actions' belong? It has little in common with the 'Method' developed by American acting teachers, which was based on Stanislavski's earlier work.

Although 'improvisation' as defined in contrast to Stanislavskian approaches, is a category too vague to be helpful, a product of theatre history and educational politics, the concept of 'improvisation' remains invaluable, with a significance that extends far beyond theatre. I suggest that 'improvisation' defines a particular attitude to the world, which can be glossed as 'free play within constraints'. An analogy between theatrical and musical improvisation can be made. Grotowski, for example,

when speaking about improvisation, [often] gave the example of early jazz. He said that early jazz musicians understood improvisation could exist only within a definite structure: they had mastered their instruments, and were starting from a base melody.

(Richards 1995: 19)

I will return to the comparison with musical improvisation in the conclusion.

Another way of looking at improvisation, which emphasises its roots in concrete

practice, is to consider it as a dialectic between the free play of the imagination and the physical possibilities of the material world. Improvisation can be usefully compared with *bricolage*, as in Michel de Certeau's redeployment of the term. *Bricolage* is commonly used in French to describe an approach to household construction and repair which encompasses inventiveness and 'making do'. The *bricoleur* demonstrates that 'necessity is the mother of invention'. Certeau writes of 'ways of operating' which 'create a certain play in the machine'. 'Play' refers to the mechanical flexibility of an object or structure, but this meaning is not unrelated to the 'playing' of games, verbal or non-verbal, in which a structure is extended or transformed. Certeau gives the example of a North African living in Paris, who

insinuates into the system imposed on him by the construction of a low-income housing development or of the French language the ways of 'dwelling' (in a house or a language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He superimposes them and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find ways of using the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation.

(Certeau 1984: 30)

I argue that it is vital for actors to consider how they 'create play' within the 'machine' of a text or stage world, and the ways of 'dwelling', or interacting with the material world, that are made available by different theories of acting. Object exercises promote a dialogue between imagination and the material world, and suggest an approach to actor training that is analytical as well as practical, that gives actors the ability to make independent decisions, using their professional judgement, not just in practical matters, but in dramaturgical decisions too.

My discussion of acting exercises is framed by a discussion of the idea of 'work'. For, with the professionalisation of the theatre in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, acting was increasingly compared to other forms of work, and theatre theorists were drawn into debates about the nature of work. This theme emerges particularly strongly when professional training institutions are the focus of study, since they prepare students for work in 'the profession'. Nevertheless, the idea of 'work' has a much deeper significance in theories of theatre. Setting aside the social definition of work as a cash-for-labour contract, it is the physical definition of work which is at stake here: work involves changing the form or position of an object through the expenditure of energy. The treatment of this subject in acting theory illuminates attitudes to the material world and its transformation, but also suggests the relevance of the discoveries of acting theory for wider questions of human relations to the material world. I will begin, however, by surveying the context of contemporary actor training, before turning to the question of work.

Actor training – the current context

Why do actors need training? What sort of training do they need? To ask these questions is also to ask: what is an actor? There have always been conflicting definitions – the actor as an inspired, shamanic or priest-like figure, in touch with the gods, or the actor as a charlatan, mountebank, or trickster. These two views of actors entail opposed attitudes towards training: the inspired require little or no formal training – indeed, training might destroy their innate gifts, whereas jobbing

actors need all the technical resources they can garner – they need wigs, costume and make-up; and they need to be able to sing, dance, tumble and even do conjuring tricks.¹

The 1975 report on British actor training, 'Going on the Stage', which gathered evidence from actors, directors and teachers, concludes that, despite the success of some actors who have not undergone formal training, drama schools are necessary to achieve 'the objective level of competence required by actors in such aspects as movement and the projection and control of voice which has to be acquired by practice, learning and self-discipline'. This report reflects a continuing debate about the 'professionalisation' of acting. The formation of 'professionals' usually includes a period of advanced education or training, leading to recognition by a professional body, which in turn confers independence on individuals, including the right to deploy their own 'professional judgement'. The professional status of actors is not, however, fixed. It has always been challenged by the 'bright young things' who are cast for a particular role without having been through drama school – who are, in effect, recognised as actors by the profession without undergoing training.² Moreover, it is my contention that actors who do follow a course of training are not always encouraged to develop the independence and critical skills of a professional while in education, and are discouraged from employing that professional judgement in their work.

In their prospectuses, most British drama schools are described as balancing both sides of the actor's equation – attention to inspiration and individual development is combined with an apprenticeship in technical skills. Nevertheless, differences in approach can be perceived. Some schools emphasise the

development of the actor's individuality, and the shaping of its expression, as Christopher Fettes, Principal of Drama Centre, London, does here:

The training of the actor consists essentially in learning how to bring feeling under control and how to confer form upon it – and, in particular, those especially powerful and especially fruitful feelings that have their origin below the threshold of consciousness. If you have been led to assume that training centres upon the mechanics of expression, speech and movement, you will have to think again.

(Cording 1991: 22)

Other schools emphasise the range of skills that are offered in preparation for the job market. The Acting BA at Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh, comprises classes in:

Voice, Accents and Dialects, Improvisation, 'Expressive Movement', Dance, Singing, Stage Combat, Stage Make-up, Basic Acting, and Text Analysis.

(Queen Margaret College: 57)

A division between 'technique' and 'acting' shapes many drama school timetables:

Alongside classes in voice-production, speech, verse-speaking, singing, dance, mime, tumbling, combat, acrobatics, microphone and camera techniques, etc., etc., students will be introduced to text-study, character-building and rehearsal methods.

(Bristol Old Vic Theatre School: 2)

The course divides itself roughly into two parts; intensive work on individual [voice, movement and physical] skills and the application of those skills to work on group projects and productions for public performance.

(RADA: 5)

This division is identified with the division between 'training' and 'presentation'. As a result, physical and vocal 'training' is often abandoned by professional actors. The peculiarity of this separation between preparatory activities and public-directed activities can be seen by comparing it with the practice of daily training in non-Western performance traditions, or in companies of the 'third theatre', such as Odin or Gardzienice.

In particular, 'acting' and 'movement' classes are often listed separately (as in the summaries of the Bristol Old Vic and Queen Margaret College curricula

quoted above). This artificial division was identified as a problem by 'Going on the Stage', and remains one of the most important issues in actor training in Britain. All the teachers interviewed by the 'Going on the Stage' panel

agreed on the great importance as well as the difficulty of ensuring that students should bring all the work they have done on their body and voice (that is, their technical and personal resources) to their acting.

(*'Going on the Stage'*: 49)

The report concluded that it is therefore 'important that voice and movement teachers should be available to attend rehearsals and performances throughout the period of training'. Few schools do this, and many of the drama school teachers I spoke to in the course of research expressed their worries about students' difficulties in connecting work done in movement classes with that done in acting classes.³

Some schools do emphasise the integration of movement training and acting:

The acting training is based on working as an ensemble and integrates all aspects of the physical and vocal work which are at the heart of the training.

(*Guildhall School of Music and Drama*: 9)

Other schools, like the Central School of Speech and Drama, London, claim that their diverse courses are integrated through the use of a shared vocabulary which has been established by members of staff over many years. In an interview, the Principal of the Central School, George Hall, says that,

Here at Central every performance is discussed by the entire faculty. Over the years teachers have developed a common vocabulary so that what is being asked of the student in voice class doesn't contradict what is being asked in movement class. In other words, an important aspect of drama training at Central is the desire to integrate skills and imagination and not have them at war with each other.

(*Mekler 1989*: 41)

However, prospectuses and public statements only provide snapshots of good intentions – it would require detailed analysis of a school's teaching as it is experienced by students to show how far a course is integrated.⁴

It is not my intention to make such an analysis of particular drama schools, but rather, by analysing specific acting exercises to show how the unhelpful division between acting and movement can be overcome. For what may appear to be merely a question of timetabling, a way of dividing the curriculum into manageable sections, in fact reflects a more fundamental problem. The split in actor training is reflected in the structure of British theatre: actors trained in British drama schools are prepared mainly for work on traditional, realist drama (and especially television), and are rarely found in the 'physical' or experimental theatre, to the impoverishment of both.⁵

In addition to the problematic separation of 'movement' and 'acting' in drama-schools, there is a further division *within* the acting programme. As Natalie Crohn Schmitt has suggested: 'at present much teaching of acting is based unwittingly on conflicting aesthetic principles, a combination of old and new' (Crohn Schmitt 1990: 4). The conflict is – crudely put – between teaching based on Stanislavski's first book, *An Actor Prepares*, which offers a training system designed for the realist theatre, and 'the rest', that is, teaching based on mime, movement, clowning and improvisation techniques. As Crohn Schmitt argues, quite contradictory theories of theatre are juxtaposed in student timetables without any discussion of their incompatibility. For example, on a Monday morning, first-year students at Queen Margaret College take an 'object exercises' class, based on exercises described by Stanislavski and Uta Hagen, in which they

learn to create the imaginary 'fourth wall'; in the afternoon, in a class on Augusto Boal and the 'Theatre of the Oppressed', they learn techniques for breaking down the fourth wall. Is this juxtaposition of theories as problematic as Crohn Schmitt suggests?

For Crohn Schmitt, the juxtaposition of 'conflicting aesthetic principles' is an epistemological problem. She identifies the Stanislavskian approach with positivist science and the Aristotelian understanding of nature and theatre as a coherent, 'given' reality, which can be known and represented, while the 'improvisational' approach, exemplified for Crohn Schmitt by the teaching of Viola Spolin, is identified with an aesthetics based on twentieth-century physics, particularly the theory of relativity and Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy. Crohn Schmitt writes that 'relativity derives essentially from the philosophic view that events do not possess discrete facts and discrete perceivers; rather the two are joined in an observation' (Crohn Schmitt 1990: 8). The study of the relation between subject and object is paralleled by the dramatisation of the relation between actor and spectator in, for example, the theatre writing of Richard Foreman. Crohn Schmitt, a proponent of the approaches to performance developed by John Cage and Robert Wilson, claims that only the improvisational, chance-driven approach reflects a contemporary understanding of reality. In these terms, to limit acting theory to the writings of Stanislavski is akin to teaching nothing but geocentric theories in a physics class. However, *Actors and Onlookers* falls back on a simple opposition between 'Stanislavskian' and 'improvisational' methods; by reading Stanislavski through the 'Method', Crohn Schmitt misses the

'improvisational' elements in Stanislavski, and, in promoting a Cagean aesthetics of chance, she ignores the elements of rigidity and prescription in Cage's work.

Many actors and directors tackling realist plays, both recent and classic, still depend on Stanislavski's approach to the text, and though his psychological analysis and physics are undoubtedly dated, Stanislavski's acting theory has a firm position in British theatre. It accords with a 'common-sense' understanding of psychology, and by a circular process, becomes indispensable for dealing with scripts and screen-plays which have been written following this model. Hollywood script-writers know very well that they have to provide actors with clues as to the characters' 'back-story' and 'motivation'. A pragmatic approach to actor training recognises that this is the framework most actors will work within; however, this is a relinquishment of schools' responsibility to shape the theatre of the future and to give actors the confidence to challenge existing assumptions. Nevertheless, in opposition to Crohn Schmitt, I hold that conflicting approaches can be presented in education, so long as the conflicts between approaches are also analysed. In everyday life, incompatible systems of knowledge – social, psychological and scientific – are constantly juxtaposed: the sun always 'goes down' although we know that the earth is rotating. The Stanislavskian and improvisational approaches offer fundamentally opposed understandings of the human relation to material reality. The difference between these theories of acting needs to be recognised and analysed in drama schools, just as thinking about gravity requires an acknowledgement of the congruences and incompatibilities of the theories of Newton and Einstein.

I began my research by wondering how actors learn to reconcile contradictory world views. I discovered that many students do not perceive any contradiction between the various approaches to theatre that they are taught, because the theories are presented as 'styles' rather than principles of representation and reality. Although some schools, including, most forcefully, the Drama Centre, argue for a 'unified approach or artistic philosophy', otherwise their training 'would tend to be piece-meal, scrappy, and unco-ordinated' ('Going on the Stage': 50), many schools offer a variety of approaches, claiming that they equip actors with a 'palette' of choices appropriate to different kinds of theatre, preparing students for a profession where they may be asked to do Shakespeare one week and a panto the next. The 'Going on the Stage' panel concluded that although

there is much to be said for preparing [students] for a wide range of jobs, on the other hand there is a view that the essential function of schooling is usually seen as that of teaching the actor how to work by himself, whereas adapting to diverse production techniques is a secondary and possibly more superficial problem.

('Going on the Stage': 50)

Although this statement reflects a well-established pedagogical principle (education seen as 'learning how to learn'), it gives a misleading impression of the actor's work. The idea that actors 'adapt' to different production techniques implies that actors are passive and unreflective, simply following the pre-existing 'style' selected by a director.

If it has previously been assumed that actors, guided by a director, simply adopt the appropriate 'style' for each new production, this assumption is no longer a safe foundation for dealing with contemporary writing. Much new writing for theatre employs different levels or forms of representation within the same play or

even the same scene. In some plays it appears almost accidental, a post-modern promiscuous quotation of styles and voices; in other plays there is a clear artistic intention. Martin McDonagh's play *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996) is a combination of classic 'kitchen sink' realism with expressionist violence and a poetic use of language that proved problematic in production; *Attempts on her Life* (1997) by Martin Crimp quotes and pastiches a dozen contemporary discourses (advertising, journalism, art criticism, 'inspirational' autobiography and confessional interviews) in order to explore the representations of history and individual experience that are available through the mass media. The repertoire of 'acting styles' traditionally taught in drama schools – Greek, Shakespeare (Tragedy and Comedy), Restoration and Modern – no longer serves actors who need to be able to make independent decisions about the type of representation they are engaged in at each moment – whether they are being guided by a text or by a director.

How can British drama schools equip students to handle contemporary heterogeneous texts? In 1997, there was an interesting collaboration between students at RSAMD and the French drama school ENSA'I'I, who worked together for a week on contemporary experimental French texts, including plays by Michael Vinaver, Bernard-Marie Koltès and Enzo Cormann. The post-performance discussion of the collaboration suggested that there are significant differences between the French and British acting traditions, as represented by the students of these two schools.⁵ A French student explained that acting students are not taught to 'get into the skin' of a character – but to present the fiction of the character. There are few stylistic equivalents in English of the writing of Vinaver

and Koltès, and none as established in the English-speaking dramatic repertoire as they are in the French. The problems posed by this new writing – issues such as ‘consistency’ of characterisation or of identity, the ‘truth’ of speech, representation of the ‘other’ – are not seen as central issues in British drama training, and are not given much attention in drama schools.⁷

Outside the drama schools, the relation of the performer to non-traditional texts has been explored in interesting ways by smaller companies which may use specially written or ‘found’ texts. The director of Forced Entertainment, Tim Etchells, also writes most of their playtexts; the text of Theatre Pur’s *Euphoria* was taken from transcripts of ‘real’ speech contexts – lectures, conversation, language lessons, psychoanalysis. It is notable that in both cases, the performers do not have a drama school training, but studied subjects such as English, Theatre Studies, or Fine Art at degree level. The companies develop a collective aesthetic by training, devising and rehearsing together over long periods of time, although many members of unfunded companies also have to undertake paid employment at the same time.⁸

Clive Barker has suggested that an apprenticeship with a company which demonstrates a strong aesthetic and develops work over a long period of training and rehearsal (such as Odin in Denmark, or Gardzienice in Poland), offers the best kind of training currently available to actors, given a basic grounding in voice and movement.⁹ However, he complains of a certain ‘thinness’ in the work of actors in the experimental theatre in Britain: ‘I see many experimental groups who appear to feel that no technique is necessary’ (Barker 1995: 106). Tim Etchells, of Forced Entertainment, responded to this common criticism, pointing out that ‘poverty of

resources' may also be an artistic decision.¹⁰ It has to be recognised that the techniques used to avoid creating 'presence' or 'illusion' may give the impression of a lack of technique, as in, for example, the use of a microphone in place of vocal projection – a trope that once indicated the performer's deliberate relinquishment of dangerous charisma, which has become a cliché in the work of Forced Entertainment and their imitators. Ideally, vocal and physical training increases the range of options open to the performer. Traditional vocal techniques are not to be preferred to amplification, but audiences need to be confident that performers have made a choice on artistic grounds, rather than through technical necessity. If actors are to understand and control the signifying processes of theatre, and take their place as creators and devisers of theatre, they also require full control of their technical means, which does require the sort of intensive training over a long period of time which a drama school can offer.

The fact that many intending actors do not go to drama school arises from economic necessity, rather than principled choice: students who choose vocational (drama school) training do not receive mandatory funding, and many local authorities now refuse to fund acting training at all. Peter Cheeseman, chairman of the National Council for Drama Training, writes of the collapse of the discretionary grants system:

Young people who can't afford to pay the fees are excluded. The Arts Council has tried to help, but its scheme is failing because local authorities are asked to pay £1,250 towards the fees, and most of them refuse.

(Cheeseman 1998)¹¹

This means that full-time drama training once again can only be afforded by the wealthy, after a brief period in which drama schools were accessible to all. This

lack of funding for vocational training has several consequences: some intending actors opt instead to follow university Drama or Theatre Studies courses leading to a degree, and most drama schools offer Acting BAs which attract mandatory funding.¹² These developments are in turn problematic. Academic courses cannot hope to – nor are they intended to – offer students the intensive practical training required by actors.¹³ When, on the other hand, primarily practical, vocational courses are made into degree courses, they have to fit into an academic framework, with academic priorities. Ill-informed administrators sometimes apply inappropriate criteria of intellectual rigour – for example, a teacher may be encouraged to specify that a class will ‘study’ a published play rather than ‘explore space’.

Increasingly, actors have to finance their own training, working with individual movement and improvisation teachers such as Philippe Gaulier, or Monica Pagneux, or attending the Lecoq school in Paris, or the Desmond Jones school in London. Week-long or weekend ‘workshops’ are organised by the International Workshop Festival and the London Mime Festival (among many others), in which theatre professionals work with international directors and teachers drawn from a wide range of disciplines. These workshops increasingly supplement, or in some cases, replace, drama school training. This trend towards ‘kit’ training (a phrase used by Clive Barker in his article ‘What Training – For What Theatre?’) has both positive and negative aspects. John Wright, director and acting teacher, approves of the fact that ‘actors no longer say “That’s it – I’m trained” when they finish drama school’.¹⁴ The actor’s development is seen as a life-long process. On the other hand, it must be asked how much of a particular

'technique' can be learnt in a week, and how much retained if actors do not immediately have the opportunity to develop the work further. Workshops can be seen more as a burst of inspiration than as a replacement for full-time training.¹⁵

Regardless of the economic causes for their popularity, workshops have a significant function in contemporary British theatre. Taught by practitioners from non-European performance traditions (such as Kalarippayattu, Noh, and martial arts), and from 'lost' European theatre traditions (such as Decroux, Delsarte and Meyerhold), workshops may also be led by members of companies in what Eugenio Barba has called the 'third theatre' – unofficial, experimental theatre groups who make daily training a defining element of their practice. Such groups include Barba's own company the Odin Theatre, the Polish theatre company Gardzienice, and Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium. The 'third theatre' draws on the work of European practitioners who integrated movement and drama in their daily training sessions (such as Meyerhold and Copeau), and on Indian and Asian methods of training performers. Workshops give a taste of the apprenticeship to a demanding company that Clive Barker commends to the young actor, an experience of the practice of daily, rigorous training. Many of the object exercises I analyse are drawn from short workshops because it is in these workshops that I have found most attention paid to the human-object relationships, and because I believe that such workshops tend to propose an alternative model of the relationship between acting and movement, which might well inform a rethinking of British drama school curricula.

The object: constraint and text

I discuss the material objects used in training in terms of two functions, which can be seen as two sides of the same coin: the object as a *constraint*, which denies the actor access to habitual responses and socialised behaviour and thereby frees the potential for other ways of being; the object as a kind of *text*, a reservoir which both records its own history and proposes actions to the performer. This is not a distinction between different kinds of objects but between different ways of working with them.

Constraint

Interaction with an object produces specific kinds of movement. If, for example, a game of pat-ball is played with different kinds of ball, different qualities of movement will be produced in the players. To travel a certain distance, with a degree of accuracy, a balloon requires a light touch, whereas a tennis ball requires more force. The quality of the players' movement will reflect the physical characteristics of the ball to some extent: the players using a tennis ball will have to make faster, more direct movements than the players using a balloon, and the extent of their gestures is likely to be smaller. A player could of course deliberately upset expectations and work against the immediately apparent qualities of the ball to discover other possibilities. However, the potential of an object is not infinite – it will always be difficult to get a balloon to break a window, due to its lightness and lack of streamlining, which diffuses any force

given to the balloon in air resistance. So any object can be described as a 'constraint', something which 'restricts freedom of action', and by extension, restricts the 'expression of natural feelings and impulses' (O.E.D.). The object embodies a 'network of rules', or rather, many potential networks of rules which are put into action according to the context in which the object is used. The constraint both produces specific kinds of movement and forbids others: the goalie dives and leaps but his freedom to pirouette or swing from the crossbar is restricted.

The concept of constraint seems out of place in actor training, where 'release', 'relaxation' and 'freedom' are more commonly sought. Paradoxically, constraint can be a means of liberating the actor. The constraint – whether a formal aesthetic system or a concrete object – makes some of the decisions for the performer, suggesting certain kinds of gesture, rhythm and structure. Eugenio Barba refers to certain non-European performance traditions, such as Noh, in which an individual performer can only make small – if significant – variations from a fixed form, and claims that 'the actor who works within a network of codified rules has a greater liberty than he who – like the Occidental actor – is a prisoner of arbitrariness and an absence of rules'¹⁶ (Leabhart 1989: 56). Barba would liberate the actor who is paralysed by the obligation to choose between a seemingly infinite number of options, like a dazed shopper in the hypermarket. Western theatre tends to value spontaneity and individuality, and lacks a living tradition of 'fixed forms', and makes little use of constraints in actor training.

Other writers, including Keith Johnstone and Enrique Pardo, have suggested that a limiting constraint can free the actor both from the pressure to

'perform' and the pressure to 'conform'. For the unconstrained 'expression of natural feelings and impulses' is more complex than this dictionary definition suggests. As socialised creatures, our 'natural' responses are highly structured, our impulses constrained by ingrained rules. Keith Johnstone describes the restrictions imposed by socialisation:

At school any spontaneous act was likely to get me into trouble. I learned never to act on impulse, and that whatever came into my mind first should be rejected in favour of better ideas. I learned that my imagination wasn't 'good' enough. I learned that the first idea was unsatisfactory because it was (1) psychotic; (2) obscene; (3) unoriginal.

(Johnstone 1981: 82)

He goes on to describe how this ingrained way of thinking blocks creative freedom even in the relatively secure setting of a class:

'Say a word', I say to someone...
'Er...er...cabbage,' he says looking alarmed.
'That's not the word you first thought of.'
'What?'
'I saw your lips move. They formed an "O" shape.'
'Orange.'
'What's wrong with the word orange?'
'Cabbage seemed more ordinary.'

This student wants to appear unimaginative. What sort of crippling experiences must he have gone through before he came to me?

(Johnstone 1981: 89)

A physical constraint, such as a ball game, can make it impossible for actors to *show* that they are 'clever', or 'charming', 'imaginative' or 'unimaginative'. By making it impossible to 'act' (understood here in a negative sense as the production of a pre-existing idea, a simulation), the constraint makes space for the 'first thought', the 'obvious' idea.¹⁷

In improvisational actor training the acceptance of the 'first thought' is considered a necessary stage in freeing the actor's imagination and developing spontaneity. Keith Johnstone considers that creative and uncreative people are

distinguished only by their attitude to ideas, with the latter group enforcing rigid quality-control and self-censorship. He refers to Schiller's image of a 'watcher at the gates of the mind', who examines ideas too closely: '[Schiller] said that in the case of the creative mind "the intellect has withdrawn its watcher from the gates, and the ideas rush in pell-mell, and only then does it review and inspect the multitude"' (Johnstone 1981: 79). Johnstone advocates the acceptance of the mundane as a precondition for creativity, while insisting that artistic selection, judgement and shaping are required at a later stage, in preparing work for an audience.

Here a connection can be made with the contrast between 'acting' and 'being' which is discussed further in Section Two. For writers on 'performance' or 'live art', 'acting' is the negative term that gives 'performance' its meaning. For example, Dennis Oppenheim writes about 'body art' that 'it was very important that it was not seen as "drama" in the traditional sense of acting. It wanted to be *real* in the simple sense of the word' (Kaye 1996: 7). One might well ask whether there is a simple sense of the word 'real' in the context of performance, and Oppenheim concedes that 'it was a rather simple version of theatre that Body Art wanted not to associate itself with' (Kaye 1996: 58). While I am interested in acting theory developed for the theatre, which has to address the question of repetition, the 'performance' concept that a 'real' activity is one which is undertaken once only, is important in actor training. Even within the constraints of a text, set and fixed blocking, a performance will never be exactly the same. Work with objects can be a way of exploring constraints, and the actor's freedom (given the necessity of repetition) to make variations within constraints, to improvise.

Text

As I have suggested above, a specific material object produces specific kinds of behaviour, and so any object can be seen as a kind of reservoir, or embodiment of various potentials. A manufactured object, in particular, is a material representation of human labour, imagination, and practices. Any object can be 'read' as a text by 'reading' or becoming aware of its intrinsic physical properties and of the meanings that are attributed to these properties. Brecht's appreciation of worn tools, in this poem of about 1932, expresses a view of the object as social history embodied:

Of all the works of man I like best
Those which have been used.
The copper pots with their dents and flattened edges
The knives and forks whose wooden handles
Have been worn away by many hands: such forms
Seemed to me the noblest.

(Willett 1984:139)

For an archaeologist or social historian, the marks and dents of use are signs of social practices to be interpreted. For example, through the nineteen-thirties, Walter Benjamin was engaged in an interpretation of society through its material culture – a study of nineteenth-century arcades and the objects they contained. Benjamin aimed, writes Susan Buck Morss, to bring the 'mute object' to speech. He proceeded 'as if the world were language. The objects were "mute". But their expressive (for Benjamin, "linguistic") potential became legible to the attentive philosopher who "named" them, translating this potential into the human language of words, and thereby bringing them to speech.' (Buck Morss 1989:13)

Benjamin saw this process of 'reading' of the material world prefigured in the phrase 'the Book of Nature'. This phrase, he wrote, 'indicates that we can read reality like a text. That will be the approach here to the reading of the nineteenth century. We break open the book of what has come to pass' (Buck Morss 1989: 240).

For an actor, however, the object is more than a text for critical interpretation, or imaginative play – it can also function as a 'performative' text which actively produces certain kinds of behaviour. Anyone – and not just a performer – who handles an object is acted on by it. To return to the example in Brecht's poem, the worn places in the knife's wooden handle instruct us how to hold it.¹⁸ For an actor, these 'instructions' can serve as a 'score' for improvisation or performance. Walter Benjamin defines two distinct uses of the material object – contrasting the reflective access to memories and emotions (gained by Proust through the famous *madeleine*) with the access to practices of work and usage (gained by Brecht through the worn pots and handles): 'if we designate as aura the associations which, at home in the *mémoire involuntaire*, tend to cluster around the object of a perception, then its analogue in the case of a utilitarian object is the experience which has left traces of the practised hand' (Benjamin 1970: 188).

The work that an actor does on an object, when using it as a source-text for character or historical research, is close to Walter Benjamin's imaginative reconstruction of the 'life' of consumer items in the Paris arcades. I suggest that the other way of working with an object – using it as a movement score – can also be seen as another way of 'bringing the mute object to speech'. These two aspects of work with a 'text-object' – accessing what has been invested in the object

(through its construction or subsequent use) both imaginatively and through movement – have been separated in actor training, reflecting the artificial divisions between movement and acting, Stanislavski and improvisation, discussed above.

The human-object relation as a focus for performance analysis: Stanislavski and Grotowski

I have described two ways of looking at objects in training: the object as a constraint which forces the actor out of habitual responses, and the object as a reservoir, a kind of text which both records its own history and proposes actions to the performer. While the object-treated-as-a-text and the object-treated-as-a-constraint are two sides of the same coin, it is nevertheless possible to define different kinds of theatre according to their emphasis on one aspect or the other. The ability to analyse the model of human relationship to the world which operates in a particular production is crucial for actors, if they are to make independent and subtle performance decisions. Below, I make a brief comparison of the work of Stanislavski and of Grotowski, analysing their implicit theories of human relationship to the material world through their use of concrete objects.

In the Stanislavskian tradition, objects are primarily seen as texts: actors can 'read' them to access an emotional or social history. In *An Actor Prepares*, the student actor, Kostya, relates with some embarrassment how he became lost in contemplation of a chandelier during a concert. The teacher, Tortsov replies,

You were trying to find out how and of what the object was made. You absorbed its form, its general aspect, and all sorts of details about it. You accepted these impressions, entered them in your memory, and proceeded to think about them. That means that you drew something from your object, and we actors look upon

that as necessary. You are worried about the inanimate quality of your object. Any picture, statue, photograph of a friend, or object in a museum, is inanimate, yet it contains some part of the life of the artist who created it.

(Stanislavski 1936: 195)

Although objects are primarily seen as texts in the realistic theatre, they are also recognised as having the potential to determine actors' behaviour in ways that might not be desired: an actor given a *really* scalding hot cup of tea would respond with *real* reactions, which might be inappropriate, or uncontrollable or otherwise 'obstruct' the planned progress of the drama. This type of material restriction is seen as undesirable. As a result, Uta Hagen devotes considerable attention to 'endowment' – that is, to techniques by which actors can simulate material qualities which might otherwise – if really present on stage – control them: actors using real alcohol might become drunk, actors using real, fragile antiques might be too afraid of damaging them to act freely.

However, Stanislavski and Hagen are very much interested in how material things can constrain *characters* – they are interested in the portrayal of drunkenness, cold, heat etc., and the character's response to restrictive material conditions. Uta Hagen gives a nice example of how a material object's awkwardness, a negative characteristic that might constrain an actor in full flow, can be turned to good use, in order to reveal character and add a level of material verisimilitude in which audiences delight. Once, in performance, Hagen found that the cardigan she was to don had been left turned inside out, but the resulting struggle with the cardigan was so theatrically interesting that she asked the stage managers to ensure that it was always set inside out thereafter.

Grotowski has claimed to be simply continuing Stanislavski's work on 'physical actions', by exploring the relation between emotions and physical

interactions with the material world.¹⁹ However, at first glance, Grotowski appears to occupy the opposite position to Stanislavski, being very much concerned with the constraint aspect of objects (in the theatrical period of his work), and with human struggle with the recalcitrant substance of the material world (in the 'paratheatrical' research which followed the period of performances by Teatr Laboratorium). For Grotowski, any specific object can be a metonym of matter in general, of material reality which resists human will. The resistance offered by matter forces the actor to produce unusual qualities of voice or to draw on resources of energy previously untapped. In rising to the challenge of intractable or unpredictable matter, actors can produce 'extra-daily' actions, or a quality of 'presence', or achieve creative, technical breakthroughs.²⁰ Kazimierz Braun suggests that the whole approach to training developed by the Teatr Laboratorium under Grotowski may have been prompted by a scene in the first production at the Theatre of Thirteen Rows, *Orpheus*. Cocteau's play calls for an angel to fly by. The playwright offers various mechanical solutions to this technical problem, but, as Braun writes,

...in the Theatre of the Thirteen Rows that scene was done very crudely – undoubtedly because of lack of funds and through haste. Quite simply Heurtebise (Zygmunt Molik) grasped the window-frame with his hand and hung there. I was sitting nearby and could see the veins standing out on his forehead with the strain...

I find something highly instructive and symbolic in the scene. An actor must rise in the air. But how? It's not possible. He hangs onto the window frame. He experiences all of his weight and his lack of skill, and most likely the humour of the situation, both physical and psychological. And thus he must learn to fly. In reality. Both physically and psychologically. He must free himself from the weight of his body. And he must free himself from the illusory demands – and the aesthetics – of old theatre.

(Kumiega 1985: 21)

When Braun writes that the actor must literally learn to fly, he is perhaps thinking of Grotowski's famous training exercise from *Towards a Poor Theatre*, which

begins in mimicry of a bird – ‘squatting on the heels in a curled up position, hop and sway like a bird ready to take flight’ – and ends with the literal instruction – ‘take off in flight’ and ‘land like a bird’ (Grotowski 1969:105).

This aesthetic of battling with the material world shaped Teatr Laboratorium’s performances. The actors were often required to perform dangerous stunts: in *Akropolis* one dropped backwards into a tin bath; if his partner failed to catch him, the edge of the bath would break his neck. Such actions cannot be ‘faked’, although they are not ‘everyday’ actions; like the flights of a trapeze artist, they highlight the physical laws of force and gravity to which they are subject, even as they appear to transcend them. The contest with the material world produces previously hidden resources in the performer, but it also serves to guarantee the ‘truth’ of the performance. For Grotowski, the actor is a messianic figure, standing on stage *for*, that is, *instead of*, the audience – he must be both extraordinary and ‘real’ in the ordinary sense for the miracle to work.

There is a clear connection between the gruelling contests between actors’ bodies and the material world in Grotowski’s earlier work (in training and performance), and his later, ‘paratheatrical’ expeditions (between 1975 and 1978), which went in search of ever more unyielding metonyms of material reality. The paratheatrical expeditions explored the effect of basic elements (water, fire, earth) and objects on humans. The world of the studio or theatre is always controlled to some extent; the long, exhausting hikes across unfamiliar hills in the complete darkness of the countryside were intended to expose participants to new, powerful encounters with the material world. The more resistant the matter, the greater was its power to bring out the truth. Through exhaustion, participants were to be

forced to surrender their daily masks and habitual gestures; in responding to the immediate reality of the situation they would reach a universal level of behaviour.²¹

Although Grotowski insisted that the paratheatrical expeditions were not examples of aesthetic or ritualistic theatre, and that therefore the material objects encountered in 'expeditions' were not to be understood as symbols – they were constraints, not texts – it was impossible for him to evade the spectator's tendency to read the 'text' of the objects. No matter how basic and functional the objects used, they took on a metaphorical meaning. Some critics interpreted the mountains and forests where the expeditions took place as 'sets', and the objects – candles, fire, water, stone and earth – as 'props'. Grotowski argued that

They are not metaphors. This is tangible and practical. It is not a philosophy but something one does; and if someone thinks that this is a way of formulating thoughts, he is mistaken; this has to be taken literally, this is experience.

(Kumiega 1985: 185)

Even the simple objects (staves and balls) used in training at the Teatr Laboratorium and in the Odin Theatre tend to take on a symbolic meaning in critical discussion: they are seen as metonyms of the whole material world -- when actors resist these objects, and through resisting, grow in strength and presence, they seem to enact a metaphysical drama of human struggle with the material world.

I hope that this outline of an analysis of performance through attention to human-object relationships might suggest a way to connect the analysis of theatrical forms to philosophical thinking about human-object relationships.²²

Overview of the study

Although the opposition between text objects and constraint objects tends to collapse, the distinction remains useful in discussing practice, and is used to organise this study. Sections One and Two look at objects treated as constraints and Sections Three, Four and Five at objects treated as texts. I analyse some specific exercises and discuss their function in the acting methodologies from which they are drawn.

Section One examines the simple, concrete use of objects such as balls and sticks in exercises intended to develop physical, mental and interactive skills. These skills are of general application, and not specific to the theatre, and so it is not surprising that the exercises are drawn from, and sometimes returned to, other spheres of life – the classroom, the playground, the gymnasium. In these exercises the object is mainly used as a constraint, or embodied ‘network of rules’, producing extra energy or unusual kinds of movement in the actor who works within the constraint. However, even at this basic level the work involves a certain ‘dialogue’ between the object and actor.

Techniques more specific to actors, intended particularly to develop their stage ‘presence’ are examined in Section Two. I look at how very different acting methodologies encourage actors to ‘listen’ to objects: in order to remain in the ‘here-and-now’ of the dramatic fiction (in the realistic tradition, following Stanislavski) or the ‘here-and-now’ of the actor and audience existing in the same space (in the tradition of the *commedia dell’arte*, and modern improvisational theatre). Here again, the object is mainly seen as a constraint: I argue that while

Stanislavskian acting teachers such as Uta Hagen and Lee Strasberg subscribe to an ideology of overcoming constraints, teachers such as Lecoq and Decroux suggest that the essential feature of human relations with the material world is permanent struggle. Teacher and director Enrique Pardo offers an alternative to both these positions; he suggests that by 'listening' to material objects, actors can develop a more receptive sensibility, and a different quality of stage presence.

Section Three looks at exercises in which the object is treated as a text which proposes, or prompts unusual or exaggerated movement or emotional responses. The actor and teacher Michael Chekhov suggests – with William James – that emotion is actually produced (in the actor or in the audience) by movement. In these exercises, the physical object, like the physical, printed text of the play, disappears in performance, having been translated into other signs.

In the exercises discussed in Section Four the idea of the object as a text is taken a stage further. The object becomes an equal partner with the performer, and its intrinsic material properties are used as part of the stage image. The actor and director learn to 'listen' to the qualities of the object and to make these visible in movement or stage images that juxtapose text and object, actor and object, etc. Such a text is far from being a mechanical 'trigger' of emotion: it requires an improvisational responsiveness from the performer, and an active, interpreting imaginative participation from the spectator.

Finally, Section Five discusses puppetry. Puppetry may seem to be an incongruous element in this study, for in classical puppetry, the object takes precedence and the performer disappears. However, recent theorists of the puppet have suggested that audiences enjoy a 'double-vision' of the material and fictional

aspects of the puppet, and I suggest that this concept can be extended to the performer's body. Puppetry seems incongruous for another reason – for while I have been arguing for the importance of being receptive to the material qualities of objects, puppetry requires performers to *add* qualities (in order to create the illusion of life, of weight, etc.). In fact, such techniques of illusion demand acute observation. Puppetry defamiliarises what is taken for granted in live theatre, and therefore opens up new possibilities in movement, staging and vocal qualities. This section necessarily contains less analysis of specific exercises than preceding sections, since it argues that, beyond the undoubted usefulness of particular puppetry training exercises, the practice of puppetry as a theatrical art in itself is helpful in developing actors' understanding of their own work. As Gordon Craig writes, 'the puppet is the actor's primer'.

¹ Eugenio Barba recounts some of the traditional techniques that were passed down through theatrical families or touring companies in Italy. For example, actors were advised to clench their buttocks before making a big entrance in order to increase their stage presence (Barba 1997a). Properly, religious or shamanic performance also requires specialised preparation and equipment.

² Lyn Gardner lists half a dozen actors in recent productions who are 'part of a growing breed of young actors who are taking centre stage without the time and trouble of a conventional drama training' (Gardner, 17 June 1998). Of course, this is not a new phenomenon, particularly in film.

³ Eva Mekler suggests that the 'studio system' in the United States, where acting students may take a portfolio of classes which they have assembled themselves, creates problems of contradictory advice. Lyn Gardner claims that in Ireland actors 'increasingly select workshops and coaches to give them the help that they need for particular parts' (Gardner, 17 June 1998).

⁴ For example, the Queen Margaret College BA Acting course mentioned above claims to be 'highly integrated', even though it separates voice from singing, improvisation from acting, and 'expressive movement' from dance.

⁵ The Drama Centre's prospectus explicitly counters such criticism: the Diploma acting course 'has evolved over the past thirty years. Its aim is to equip the professional player for the requirements of the majority of tasks likely to confront him or her on entering the profession. It is not and cannot be a reflection of the avant-garde since students will perforce seek employment in radio and television, at Chichester, Stratford-upon-Avon, the Royal Court or the National Theatre' (Drama Centre: 9). One British institution which has trained actors who now work in physical and visual theatre companies, such as Hayley Carmichael (*The Right Size, Complicite*) and Phelim McDermott (*Improbable Theatre*), is Middlesex University. The course at Middlesex integrates all the performing arts (music, drama and dance). This reflects the history of Middlesex – as a former polytechnic, it has a tradition of offering a degree that is intellectually stimulating but

vocationally orientated. This has led to its focus on the physical and improvisational training of actors, and the development of multi-skilled performers.

⁶ RSAMD, Glasgow, 26 October 1997.

⁷ However, Vladimir Mirodan, Director of the School of Drama at RSAMD, did mention his intention of staging Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her Life* in a student production in the near future. Crimp is the British playwright closest in style to the new French playwrights, and has translated Vinaver and Ionesco (in conversation, 24 March 1998). It is notable that many of the most innovative writers in English, including Crimp, are better known in the rest of Europe than in Britain.

⁸ Two quite different companies, Forced Entertainment and Theatre Pur, stand here for many others.

⁹ The benefits include a rigorous attitude to work learnt directly from practitioners; on the other hand, new members will have missed out on the evolution of the company, and may find it difficult to apply the techniques they learn elsewhere afterwards.

¹⁰ Etchells comments:

You should see the reports that the Arts Council gets on our work. Because we put flats on stage back to front. Or signs scrawled on cardboard with black felt pen. Because we're working with fragmentation, with a voice that splits itself up endlessly, with a refusal to kind of close, with an aesthetic that resists spectacle and actually wants to show you *work*. When you're not interested in the look of either very minimal black box kind of settings or very plus a kind of design, when you *like* cardboard and think it needs to be seen, people coming out of a different set of cultural references, a different *world* basically, don't understand. Whereas fine art people, looking at the work, understand it. If you use cardboard, you've *chosen* cardboard and you've chosen it for a reason. I do feel like we should label everything on stage: deliberate! Not a mistake! (Tushingham 1996: 56-7).

¹¹ Cheseman continues: 'But following a recommendation in the Dearing Report, Baroness Blackstone is producing a plan to introduce mandatory state grants for talented actors and dancers. They [...] will do more than any one-off casting to restore truly democratic access to the stage.'

¹² Lynn Bains, Course Leader on the Queen Margaret BA Acting, observed that applications from England to Queen Margaret College tripled when the course changed from Diploma to degree status (thereby attracting mandatory funding). Drama Centre's BA (Hons) Acting is validated by the University of Central Lancashire:

This course is distinguished from the Diploma Course by the stringent formal assessment procedures applied, as required by the University. Students are assessed on both practical and theoretical work throughout each term and at the end of each term and each academic year. It requires of the student a clear grasp of the theoretical basis and the philosophical principles upon which training is based.

(Drama Centre: 9)

Guildford School of Acting's three year degree course is validated by the University of Surrey but still attracts only discretionary funding. The prospectus for the Central School of Speech and Drama states that its BA in Acting

requires higher levels of student/tutor ratios and/or greater resources than are covered by the mandatory fee awards and public funding [...] Currently the difference between the mandatory award and the course fee for the BA Acting is £950 per annum. Students are required to pay the difference. The differential fee of the BA in Acting at Central compares favourably with the full cost fees of £7,500 approx. which students without discretionary awards have to pay for many of the other professional theatre training courses. The School is strongly urging all funding agencies to increase mandatory awards to a level realistic for the staffing and resources required for professional courses (Central, 1998/99).

¹³ Joe Kelleher, a teacher at the Roehampton Institute, part of the University of Surrey, comments that the department of Theatre Studies turns away countless students who apply with the hope of getting an acting training. Students' desire to get vocational, practical actor training through university courses puts an impossible strain on academic institutions which are taking on increasing numbers of students, with less time available for individual attention.

¹⁴ In conversation, 10 Jan 1998

¹⁵ An additional problem is that workshop participants can range from students in drama-school training to mature, established professionals, along with interested amateurs, and this can make it difficult to work effectively. Rivca Rubin, a movement teacher, claimed that 'the reasons [for attending a workshop] given by students were now rather vague, that teachers were becoming frustrated with mixed ability groups possessing too little basic technique, and that there were too many workshops driven by financial pressure blurring real choice in a glut of availability' (Keefe 1994: 31).

¹⁶ Ian Watson comments:

According to Barba, his fascination with Eastern performance stems from the ability of its actors to project a powerful presence on stage. [...] From the beginning of his research Barba

rejected the idea of western actors merely reproducing Eastern forms. He reasoned that Westerners could study forms such as *kathakali* or *no*, but since these, like most other traditional genres, involve a lifetime of study begun at a young age, the result would be poor imitations of the original. He further reasoned that the greatest values for people training in the West would be derived from using Eastern ideas to explore their own training.

(Watson 1993: 133)

Phillip Zarrilli, however, claims that 'Barba's vision of the "Oriental" actor is a composite devoid of sociocultural or historical contexts' (Watson 1993: xiii).

¹⁷ Allen Ginsberg's praise for the 'first thought' refers to a quotation from William Blake: 'First thought is best in Art, second in other matters' (*Radical Poetics* 1: 4).

¹⁸ I have used the word 'instruct', thinking of Kenneth Koch's poem *Aesthetics of Instruction*:

Do this, do that! is not instruction;
Instruction is a plausible bond
Between one patented enterprise and another.
A song instructs us to be singing;
A house, to live like women and men.

(Koch 1997: 69)

¹⁹ Thomas Richards recalls, 'One day Grotowski said to me: "After the "System" of Stanislavski, came his "method of physical actions". Do you think that Stanislavski would have stopped there? No, he died. *That is why he stopped*. And I simply *continued his research*' (Richards 1995: 105).

²⁰ Eugenio Barba uses this term: e.g. the precarious balance of a ballet dancer is 'extra-daily', compared to the 'daily' balance of ordinary walking; in daily life, energy expenditure is minimised, in 'extra-daily' movement, there is a luxurious expenditure of energy.

²¹ The Polish theatre company, Gardzienice, under the direction of Wlodek Staniewski, who previously worked with Grotowski, trains in a manner that recalls the paratheatrical work of Teatr Laboratorium. Night-runs form an important part of the group's training: both a shared experience and a preparation to creative work that aims to remove the superficial layers of the personality through physical fatigue. Staniewski described the function of exhaustion: 'It's not that you've got to be tired. But physical effort is necessary in order to become more resistant psychologically, to develop a real sense of togetherness, to prepare you for what is to come' (Allain 1997: 76). Paul Allain comments, that 'it is a cliché that breaking through the tiredness barrier can encourage thrilling developments in a creative process but this has been frequently evident in their work. [...] However, I have also witnessed many nights of staggering exhaustion and uncreativity' (Allain 1997: 76).

²² See Erickson (1995) and Sayre (1989) for discussions of the object in avant-garde art and performance.

THE IDEA OF WORK

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.

(Genesis iii: 19)

Labour, wide as the earth, has its summit in heaven.

(Carlyle, *Essays*)

This section shows how physical labour has been taken as an image for the activities of actors by various practitioners, using both the negative and positive aspects of the idea of 'work' that are in circulation. To take just two examples: for Etienne Decroux, work was a god-like, world-transforming activity, and physical labour a model from which art could learn clarity and directness; on the other hand, for Rudolph Laban, everyday physical labour was far from efficient, and art could teach labour about effective use of the body. I suggest that this opposition between 'the nobility of labour' and 'labour as a curse' is re-interpreted in acting theories through a distinction between artisanal and production-line work.¹ I will argue that the various approaches to creation and repetition which are proposed by acting theory are highly relevant for thinking about work in general – that, in other words, just as 'work' has been a useful concept in thinking about 'acting', so 'acting' could contribute to thinking about 'work'.

'Work' became a significant new theme for drama in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The meaning of work and the changing nature of work is discussed in plays such as Ibsen's *The Master Builder* (1892) and Hauptmann's *The Weavers* (1892), in Chekhov's *Uncle Vania* (1897) and, as below, in *Three Sisters* (1901):

Irena. Oh, I'm so miserable!... I can't work, I won't work! I've had enough of it, enough!... First I worked on the telegraph, now I'm in the County Council office, and I hate and despise everything they give me to do there... I'm twenty-three years old, I've been working all this time, and I feel as if my brain's dried up. I know I've got thinner and uglier and older, and I find no kind of satisfaction in anything, none at all. And the time's passing...

(Chekhov 1959: 305-306)

Vershinin. In the old days the human race was always making war, its entire existence was taken up with campaigns, advances, retreats, victories... But now all that's out of date, and in its place there's a huge vacuum, clamouring to be filled [...] If only we could educate the industrious people and make the educated people industrious.

(Chekhov 1959: 325)

A quarter of a century later, Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928) dramatises the effects of industrialisation. The play opens with a woman in an office that functions like a single machine in which the office-workers are the organic moving parts; she ends her life in the machine that carries out a judicial execution. The dominance of machinery over the human characters' lives can be seen in the stage directions:

Scene: an office: a switchboard, filing cabinet, adding machine, typewriter and table, manifold machine.

Sounds: office machines: typewriters, adding machine, manifold, telephone bells, buzzers.

(Treadwell 1993: 1)

In the post-war British theatre, work was once again explored, in Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen* (1959), David Storey's *The Contractors* (1969) and John Arden's plays about town councillors and architects. Wesker's harassed short-order cook sees the world as a steamy kitchen of constant labour:

Peter. This - this mad house, it's always here. When you go, when I go, when Dmitri go - this kitchen stays. It'll go on when we die, think about that. We work here - eight hours a day, sweat our guts, and yet - it's nothing. We take nothing. Here - the kitchen, here - you. You and the kitchen. And the kitchen don't mean nothing to you and you don't to the kitchen mean nothing. [...] The world is filled with kitchens - only some they call offices and some they call factories.

(Wesker 196C: 43)

Marango. Why does everybody sabotage me, Frank? I give work, I pay well, yes? They eat what they want, don't they? I don't know what more to give a man. He works, he eats, I give him money. This is life, isn't it?

(Wesker 1960: 61)

Meanwhile, as the dramatists explored work as a theme, directors and performers explored the structures of motion created by particular kinds of work. The analysis of movement was carried out in France, by the director and theatre reformer Jacques Copeau and his students Etienne Decroux and Jacques Lecoq; in Russia, by the physical education teacher Lesgaft and the director Meyerhold; in Switzerland by Jaques-Dalcroze; in Austria and Britain by Rudolph Laban. Their movement analysis was supported by new photographic studies such as Eadweard Muybridge's sequential action photographs of racehorses and people,² Copeau also made use of George Hébert's stage-by-stage diagrams analysing gymnastics.

Both these routes for the exploration of work – in written texts and in movement studies – fed into acting theory. 'Work' became a significant term in actor training: work was a new thematic element, and actors had to learn to represent the specific gestures and rhythms of the industrial world as it was dramatised. In addition, 'work' was also used as a conceptualisation of the process of acting, a way of describing the work of the actor and relating it to the work done by other members of society. Theorists of theatre looked explicitly to the world of work for models for actors. According to Christopher Fettes, Principal of the Drama Centre (in interview with Eva Mekler), the 'modern European' approach to acting had

an extremely strong emphasis on the body rather than the mind, and [a] view of actors as essentially rather mundane artisans, people with a craft, people who 'make' things, like glassblowers and dressmakers and so forth.

(Mekler 1989: 74)

Fettes traces the arrival of this 'modern European' approach in Britain to the influence of Michel Saint-Denis, who founded the Old Vic Theatre school. Saint-Denis was a nephew as well as a student of Jacques Copeau, for whom the idea of work was extremely important.

Copeau (1879-1949) was a theatre critic who, dissatisfied with the theatres of naturalism and spectacle, founded a theatre company in Paris in 1913. The company worked mainly on Shakespeare and the French classics, using a bare stage. The associated theatre school, the *École de Vieux Colombier*, was intended to instigate a radical reform of acting. In 1924, the school moved to rural Burgundy in order to refine its work away from metropolitan distractions. The training at the school included literature, history, speech and physical training. 'Corporeal mime' involved the improvisation of simple actions: 'a man trying to shoo away a fly; a woman strangling a fortune-teller; actions used in trade; a sequence of movements made by a machine' (Leabhart: 26). Copeau trained a great many actors and directors, and through his school and its teachers influenced many more. They include his own students Etienne Decroux (1898-1991), Michel Saint-Denis, and indirectly, Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999), who trained under Jean Dasté, Copeau's son-in-law, from 1945 to 1947.³

Decroux joined the school at the age of twenty-five. He brought a wide range of experience to his study of theatre: he had worked in a great many trades – as a painter, plumber, mason, tiler, butcher, navvy, docker, coach-repairer, dishwasher, hospital attendant and farm worker. In fact, Thomas Leabhart even speculates that Decroux was welcomed to the *École* partly because, as a trained butcher, he could be of practical use to the household. However, Leabhart also

mentions the comments of Hélène Dasté (Copeau's daughter and a teacher at the school), describing Decroux's way of working: 'Madame Dasté remembers Decroux's bare torso as he deftly cut the meat on a marble slab in the kitchen, his economical gestures already those of a mime' (Leabhart 1989: 36). At the École, craft and trade gestures were not only themes for improvisation, but models of an aesthetic based on efficiency and economy of gesture.

The modernist principles of refining and purifying the gesture remained central to Decroux's work. Both Decroux and Lecoq liked to quote Paul Bellugue, a professor of anatomy at the École des Beaux Arts from 1936 to 1955, as saying that 'the culture of the dancer and of the athlete rest on the same principles, simplifying, purifying, and ordering gestures' (Leabhart 1989: 10). After working with Copeau, Decroux went on to study with Charles Dullin, who had been a member of Copeau's first theatre company at the Vieux Colombier and ran Gémier's theatre school. Decroux's training there (1926-1934) included acrobatics and *commedia dell'arte*. He went on to investigate 'work' both as a performer and later as a movement teacher. Initially, he performed illusionistic mimes, but later became interested in exploring the influence of thought on movement, and the physical shapes of work, through studying force, counterweights and shifting centres of gravity. In 1931 he worked with Jean-Louis Barrault (who also had varied experience of manual labour – as a shepherd, a grape-grower and harvester) on the 'Evocation d'actions matérielles', including studies of *Le Menuisier*, *La Lessive* and *Le Machine*.⁴ For Decroux, the sequence of manual labour modelled the corporeal mime's struggle, 'first with his own thought, then with matter – the inertia of his own body, wood, rock, earth; then with one other person; then with

the group' (Leabhart 1989: 53). Tom Leabhart suggests that, like Rousseau, Decroux took the carpenter's work as a model of what 'work' meant in a broader sense: 'the struggle of the manual labourer against gravity, fatigue, the weight and resistance of material objects and his own inertia led Decroux to emulate the example in *Émile*, where Rousseau makes his ideal son a carpenter.'

Decroux's students recall that his studio was in the middle of a traditional workers' district in Paris, Boulogne-Billancourt, and emphasise his strong political and philosophical interest in the representation of manual labour. Decroux himself described his aesthetic by referring to the classical myth of Prometheus, the god who stole fire and gave it to humanity. This gift enabled humans to cook food, warm themselves, smelt metal and variously transform the material world in new ways – and thus to rival the powers of transformation which had formerly been in the hands of the gods:

Promethean art [is] an art in which man does things. Man was not content to live in a cave. He is the rival of God in that he makes things. He makes statues. It's as if he said to God, "The man you made is not beautiful. I'm going to make another. The cave you made is not beautiful. I'll make a monument."

(Sklar 1995: 109)

Prometheus was horribly punished for his revolutionary gift. A former student of Decroux's, the mime teacher Deidre Sklar, emphasises the centrality of the myth for Decroux:

Because the use of fire suggests that humans must work to live, it separates us from gods who do not. Symbolizing reason, artifice, culture, labor and suffering, Prometheus' gift thus defines the human condition.

(Sklar 1995: 109)

The movement studies Decroux set for his students often involved the concept of physical work, without necessarily involving the literal representation of a specific task. As Sklar comments, 'Actions such as sustained force, shocks of

effort, resistances and counterweights underlie even those pieces that are not concerned with manual labor or sports' (Sklar 1995: 114). Decroux studied particularly the movement of the artisan and early industrial labour – the kind of work he and Barrault had undertaken as young men. He looked for qualities of harmony, logic and efficiency in these practical trades and where he found these qualities, he found beauty. This was his model for the actor.

Like the laborer's work, the technique demands strength, endurance, force, weightiness and sustained energy. [...]When the actor moves with the harmony, logic and efficiency of the worker or athlete, Decroux finds him *beau*.'

(Sklar 1995: 114)

Decroux continued to teach until 1986, and he has had a powerful influence on a small number of students. Decroux demanded a long and total commitment from a few students. In contrast, Decroux's near-contemporary Lecoq, appears to have adopted a different approach to training, though springing from the same sources. A great number of students have passed through Lecoq's school, some for only a term, some for several years. They have been taught by a team of teachers, rather than Lecoq alone. The Lecoq school curriculum synthesises many different approaches (*commedia dell'arte*, mask-work, mime, improvisation, 'portable architecture' etc.), whereas Decroux was orientated towards the intense and disciplined exploration of a single route.⁵

Lecoq described himself as 'bringing together' two theatrical 'routes' – i.e. movement analysis and improvisation (Lecoq 1987: 108), and there are many similarities between the movement analysis teaching of Decroux and Lecoq. Lecoq's movement analysis classes break down gestures and activities into sequences of discrete actions. The subjects for analysis include 'activities such as cutting wood, throwing a disc, mixing a complicated cocktail in 181 steps, or

climbing a wall in fifty-three steps'. The sequences of movement 'freeze-frames' recall industrial time-and-motion studies: 'we are reminded of the photographs of Muybridge or the diagrams of Hébert' (Leabhart 1989: 95).

Observation is also emphasised in the school, and the worlds observed include the working world. Lecoq comments that: 'Each trade or profession imposes its particular print, which determines the movements of the walk' (Lecoq 1987: 23). Different types of labour, of interactions with different objects create particular muscular configurations, gestures and gaits. In a student's second term at the school, 'work' is taken up as a theme. Small groups are sent on '*autocours*' (self-study). They spend three weeks observing and learning a work activity that they have never done before and then present a performance to the rest of the class.⁶

Lecoq's students study work in factories, cafes and checkouts. If the workplace setting is lost, an important element of the students' research project - looking at how objective conditions, tools, furniture, and spaces influence movement - is lost. For example, Roger Croucher, a movement teacher at LAMDA describes an extended observation and presentation exercise, which is apparently similar to the *autocours*.⁷ However, the students observe customers in a particular Earls' Court café, rather than in a workplace: the subjects are at leisure, rather than work, interacting with objects used by everyone (cups and saucers), rather than specific to a trade. The exercise is subtly narrowed; the focus is on the peculiarities of individuals rather than the ways in which the material world shapes behaviour.

Decroux 'was often heard to say that working people perform the simplest, most efficient and least tiring movements, as they have to conserve their energy in

order to make it through the long days' (Leabhart 1989: 36). However, those who studied the movement of workers in factories or in situations where labour was highly specialised did not often admire the way the workers used their bodies. The pioneer of 'scientific management' of factories and the 'time-and-motion study', Frederick Winslow Taylor, lamented that workers' physical movements were 'among the least efficient in the whole factory' (Gordon 1995: 88). Taylor intended the scientific management of factories to co-ordinate the worker with machines in order to improve the factory's efficiency, rather than to make the worker more comfortable. He trained as an engineer before developing his theory of factory management, which partly explains his tendency to take the machine as a model for the worker, rather than vice versa. Taylor noted that 'while performing his prescribed task' the worker 'would often engage in superfluous and awkward motions, causing premature strain in his muscles and generally lowering his work output' (Gordon 1995: 88).

The contrast between the quality of movement in artisanal and industrial contexts can be seen in the career of Rudolph Laban (1879-1950), the founder of a system of movement analysis. As a child, he spent holidays in Bosnia, where his father was military governor for the Austro-Hungarian empire. He admired the local folksongs and dances, and was apparently 'interested to see how the local peasantry went about their labours and how the women managed to walk with grace and lightness as they carried heavy loads on their heads' (Newlove 1993: 15). Later, as he studied movement in a variety of contexts, he was shocked to see widespread misuse of the body, causing pain and permanent damage. Joan Littlewood reports his tale of an encounter in post-war Manchester:

'I'd hardly left London Road Station,' he told us as we crossed a windy street, 'when I saw this gang of loaders heaving crates on to a truck and stopped to watch.

"Looking for a job, guvnor?" said one of the men. He looked like the foreman.

"Not the way you're tackling it."

"Think you could do better?"

"I'm sure of it."

'And without more ado, I lifted a crate and swung it to the gentleman.

"Quick! Now, we bend, throw! Yes, find your own space! Have you got the rhythm? Lift and swing..."

(Littlewood 1994: 181-2)⁸

The difference in the attitudes towards work and human efficiency expressed by Decroux on one hand and Taylor on the other lies in the difference in the working conditions they observed. The butchers and plumbers, artisans and agricultural workers whose economy of gesture Decroux admired and emulated were able to control their own working rhythm, whereas Taylor observed workers on a production line, who had no control over the pace or organisation of their work. Taylor's attempt to integrate man and machine would reduce the worker's autonomy even further. According to the leader of the 1913 Renault workers' strike against Taylorism, scientific management 'eliminated, annihilated and banished personality, intelligence, even the very desires of the workers, from the workshops and factories' (Goodall 1997: 448).

There is a well-documented relationship between the theory of scientific management of factories and the Biomechanical training for actors developed by Meyerhold. In *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics*, Law and Gordon describe the convergence of several theories in Biomechanics, including Pavlov's research into reflexes and William James' theory that performing a physical action in itself generates the associated emotion.⁹ As Taylor was studying the way that workers become co-ordinated with complex objects such as the conveyor belt and objects in the process of mass-production, Meyerhold was developing exercises for co-

ordinating the actor with simple objects like sticks and balls. However, although Meyerhold was happy to 'ride the wave of Taylorist popularity in the early twenties', even being hailed as the "Taylor of the Theatre", there were significant differences between his aims and those of the social engineers who wanted to transform workers into efficient producers. The primary objective of Biomechanics was the achievement of 'maximum expressiveness on stage' (Law and Gordon 1996: 36).

The Biomechanical exercises were intended to form a complete and self-contained training system for proletarian theatre companies, intended to reform their acting (which was, according to Braun, bombastic and rhetorical, like the worst of pre-revolutionary theatre). The Biomechanics system was in part a pragmatic response to the politically led demand that the Soviet Union produce actors fit for the industrial age. However, Law and Gordon insist that discussion of Biomechanics has emphasised its *mechanics* at the expense of the attention Meyerhold paid to *bios* (life). The *études* – the exercises – actually call upon pre-industrial forms of work, both in the thematic content, and in the tempo of the exercises – that is, the individual's relationship to time. *Études* such as 'Carrying the Sack', 'Shooting the Bow', or 'Throwing the Stone' clearly call upon the muscular memory of various types of physical labour with which proletarian and rural actors would have been quite familiar.

However, the *études* are in no sense illusionary mimes; in fact they are so extended and abstracted that it is hard at first to see their sources in everyday actions. Each *étude* is a movement exercise, a 'bundle of complex physical actions' intended to develop strength, flexibility and reflexes. At the same time, each *étude*

is a miniature drama, having the potential to be developed into a longer sequence. For example, 'Shooting the Bow' might be developed into an improvisation on the theme of The Hunt. Thus each *étude* embodies a tightly-packed lesson in dramaturgy for those who perform it. As Eugenio Barba writes, 'A good exercise is a paradigm of dramaturgy, i.e., a model for the actor'. The aim of Meyerhold's exercises was to teach 'the essence of scenic movement' (Barba 1997b: 128). An everyday action is shaped into a dramatic structure, comprising 'preparation, enactment, recovery'. This three-part structure is also presented in the brief preparatory gesture, the *dactyl*, which precedes the performance of each *étude*.¹⁰

This brief introduction to the work of Decroux and Meyerhold shows how both were fascinated by the ways in which the material world constrains and shapes human behaviour, through tools, machines and ways of working. At the same time, both were fascinated by the manifestations of spirit which were produced in resistance to material constraints. The acting exercise became more than an exploration of the theme of work – it was to be a way of redefining the nature of work, of reclaiming work from the cash-for-labour relationship and recreating it as a transformation of the world, a Promethean act. For Decroux, the 'the Corporeal Mime actor expresses the contradiction between what we are and what we would like to be'. The opposition between aspiration and limitation is exemplified in the physical technique: 'The foot, "proletarian of the esthetic", stays rooted to the ground while the upper body fights against the pull of gravity to perform expressive attitudes' (Sklar 1995: 110). Like Decroux, Meyerhold saw labour as a necessity – but imagined it to have the potential to become joyful activity. In a lecture in 1922, 'The Actor of the Future and Biomechanics',

Meyerhold explained that in Soviet society, the 'art-amusement' would be replaced by 'art-work'; the actor would be 'working in a society where labour is no longer regarded as a curse but as a joyful, vital necessity' (Braun 1995: 173). In this lecture, Meyerhold envisioned a 'new actor', who

will himself labor as a worker, and in his free time he will show his art, his artistic craft to his fellow workers. The result will be a wondrously constant work process, the realization of that plan to which I called your attention when I referred to it as thus far utopian.

(Law and Gordon 1996: 142)

For both Decroux and Meyerhold, the movement exercise was an exemplar of joyful transformational work, a rehearsal for the utopia in which all work would be joyful.

¹ Only recently have there been attempts to examine other modes of work through theatre – for example, the binary or bureaucratic human machine created by the Theatre of Mistakes.

² See, for example, *The Human Figure in Motion* (1901). The eponymous hero of Thomas Mann's novel *Tonio Kröger* was heartbroken to observe his friend's admiration for sequences of photos of racehorses; he saw such scientific analysis as entirely opposed to the synthesising activity of poetry.

³ Eldredge and Huston describe a basic divergence in the ways in which Copeau's work has been taken up when, in writing about the use of masks in actor training, they argue that Copeau's work has been carried on in two main channels. One of those channels was defined by Michael Saint-Denis, Copeau's nephew; the other, by Jacques Lecoq. [...] The Saint-Denis teaching stresses the actor's service to text, and uses only character masks, though some of those are closer to neutrality than others. Lecoq's teaching, on the other hand, is concerned in its initial phase with matters that precede speech and character (Eldredge and Huston 1995: 122).

⁴ The 'illusionistic' mime which Decroux eventually rejected is beautifully presented by Barrault in his role as the famous mime artist Deburau in the film *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945). Decroux played Deburau's father.

⁵ At a Decroux Symposium at the Centre for Performance Research, Aberystwyth, in November 1997, Richard Gough noted that relatively few theatre academics were participating in the symposium, in comparison with previous conferences on Artaud and Meyerhold. Simon Murray, a participant writes that this lack of interest 'contrasted strikingly with the passionate identification so manifestly felt and expressed by many of the Decroux-trained practitioners present.' Murray argues that in Britain, 'Decroux is not fashionable – we see very little work generated from his movement codification and potentially austere aesthetics. Rather – for better or worse – the contrasting influence of Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier on many companies sometimes seems overwhelming' (CPR Newsletter: Spring/Summer 98: 5).

⁶ Beth Williams, an actor who studied at Ecole Jacques Lecoq in 1996-7, described this work in conversation on 14 November 1997. See also Simon McBurney in Tushingham (1994).

⁷ See Mekler 1989.

⁸ According to Littlewood, Laban went to Manchester because 'the head of a large engineering firm, F.C. Lawrence, had studied Laban's analysis of moving forces, his kinaesthesia, and wanted his engineers to understand the theory' (Littlewood 1994: 181).

⁹ James concluded that the body's automatic response to stimuli was itself the emotion, preceding the mental perception of emotion:

Using the dictum, "I saw the bear, I ran, I became frightened," James attempted to demonstrate the physiological basis of his theory. The act of running, not the bear, caused the fright. Or as Meyerhold put it: to trigger the sensation of fear, a person would only have to run – with his eyebrows raised and pupils dilated (Law and Gordon 1996: 36-7).

¹⁰ This can be compared to the three elements of Noh theatre which are known as *jo - ba - kyu*:

introduction or preparation, central section or peak, and conclusion. In Noh, this tripartite structure underlies the whole drama from the smallest to the largest element: each gesture, each movement phrase, each short drama and even the evening's programme as a whole, can be analysed into these three phases.

SECTION ONE: CONCRETE USE

The object as a constraint, and dialogue between actor and object

All methods of training actors recognise the need to develop actors' suppleness, co-ordination, dexterity and concentration. Even in the most naturalistic drama, actors require unusual dexterity and the ability to divide their concentration between verbal and physical scores. They may, for example, need to handle an awkward prop while speaking of an unrelated subject. However, although actors need faster reactions and greater suppleness than are required in everyday life, these physical skills are used in all walks of life, and are not peculiar to actors. The tools used – balls, sticks, handkerchiefs – are also familiar from everyday life. Perhaps this is one reason why many drama schools separate 'movement training' from 'acting'.

In this section I will be looking at acting exercises that use objects concretely, in an everyday way. The objects are sometimes used in unusual ways, but not for metaphorical, or narrative purposes – a ball is to throw, not an image of the earth. They are treated as forms of constraint, which paradoxically can release actors from their habitual limitations. By working within the object's arbitrary physical limits, the actor becomes aware of the 'otherness' of the object, and of the need to engage in a form of 'dialogue' with that otherness in order to work with it. In the exercises I will discuss, objects serve as tools for working on the following areas:

1) CO-ORDINATION AND AWARENESS OF HUMAN-OBJECT DIALOGUE

- a) suppleness, strength and co-ordination

b) awareness of the environment, the use of peripheral vision and the other senses

2) EXTENSION OF PHYSICAL CAPACITIES

a) speed of reaction, a range of different ways of using the body

b) concentration and focus

3) SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

the ability to work creatively and co-operatively with others

Most of the exercises have been used by many different practitioners. In each case, I indicate the source for the variation I describe.

The most important practitioner and theorist to make use of objects in actor training in Britain is Clive Barker. Barker's initial ambition was to write for the theatre, and later, to direct, but he joined Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop and became an actor by default: 'in the manner of anyone who goes there to do any job other than acting, I became an actor' (Barker 1977: 2). Littlewood had invited the Laban-trained movement teacher Jean Newlove to work with the company. Later, in Newlove's absence, a group of actors, including Barker, attempted to continue her work. Barker realised that children's games often involved the same patterns of movement as more formal routines, and looked for games that could replace particular exercises. Barker's book, *Theatre Games* records the children's games that were rediscovered as training exercises.

Jean Newlove argues that the Laban system of movement analysis is unique, and more useful for the actor than any separate movement discipline, such as ballet, yoga, or fencing, in that it relates directly to the actor's need to find movement appropriate to particular characters (Newlove 1993:13).¹ Barker's

theatre games also relate movement principles to the specific requirements of theatre. Theatre games can be seen as a practical version of Laban's system, in which the analysis of movement is totally embedded in practice. Unlike the analytical exercises of Feldenkrais or Laban, which demand patience and self-awareness, theatre games can be played without an intellectual understanding of the underlying principles – they are transmitted kinesthetically. (Of course, the theatre games teacher must nonetheless employ a sophisticated analysis of the exercises in order to balance the different kinds of muscular, intellectual and emotional work, and to extend and challenge the actors.) This 'learning through practice' approach makes theatre games ideal for non-professionals; the games have passed into the repertoire of every school and youth club drama workshop, and it is now hard to imagine a time when they were not used for warm-ups and to bring individuals together to work as a group. Familiarity with the games, along with their very accessibility perhaps, has bred a measure of contempt: although some companies use theatre games in rehearsal, building and extending the exercises day by day, games-based object work is rarely used as the basis for theatre training at an advanced level. It is a neglected resource.

1) CO-ORDINATION AND AWARENESS OF HUMAN-OBJECT DIALOGUE

a) Objects used to develop suppleness, strength and co-ordination

Drama school movement training is intended to provide a foundation that allows actors to maintain their physical fitness and suppleness throughout their

career. However, most actors, even those who are not especially anxious about movement, find it hard to train on their own. Sessions of 'physical jerks' can generate stress and tension. For example, a simple leg-stretch – reaching for the toes while seated on the floor – often leads to misuse of the back and lasting damage. In *Theatre Games*, Clive Barker argues that because this exercise is 'self-contained and self-justifying', the actor allows the back to droop, and 'introverts the flow of movement and energy' (Barker 1977: 74). Barker describes five ways to take the pressure off the actor and direct energy outwards: games with external objects, games with simple aims and objectives, competition, other people and imagination. This ball game achieves the same ends as the simple leg stretch.

Leg stretch using a ball (Theatre Games)

The players 'sit in a circle with their legs spread wide and straight, and with a foot touching the nearest foot of the player seated on either side of them. The ball is lobbed underhand to bounce somewhere within the triangle made by another player's legs. The player on the receiving end must catch it before it bounces, or have a point against him. The most effective way to score points is to bounce it just inside the ankle, which requires maximum stretch to catch it' (Barker 1977: 74).

The game stretches the legs, but also develops hand-eye co-ordination, group awareness and speed of reaction. From the physical point of view, it is effective, because 'players are prepared to go on for long periods, enduring the physical discomfort for the sake of the game'. More importantly, the game provides an external focus, which is more appropriate to actor-training than

introverted work on the body. The interaction with others is through an external object, and so when the player stretches out 'the energy flows from the centre out to the periphery of his reach and beyond.' This description recalls the principles of martial arts, in which external objects such as swords and sticks are regarded less as weapons than as concrete representations of the extension of 'energy', or of the self, beyond the limits of the body.²

Work with sticks (Biomechanics)

Though the practical success of Meyerhold's Biomechanics was 'largely responsible for the introduction of some form of systematised physical training into the curriculum of every Soviet drama school' (Braun 1995: 176), Meyerhold's influence on British actor training has been indirect. The writings of Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, who tried to re-invent Biomechanics in the 1960s and 1970s, working from photographs and written descriptions, have transmitted some elements of Meyerhold's work to British practitioners.³ However, there is increasing interest in Meyerhold in Britain, with a conference at the Centre for Performance Research, and several workshops led by Russian acting teachers who trained in the Biomechanics system in recent years.

It was Meyerhold's habit to hold an hour-long training session before daily rehearsals, according to Alexei Levinski, who studied Biomechanics with Nikolai Kustow (a former student and colleague of Meyerhold).⁴ In the first half of the session, students practised circus skills – juggling, acrobatics, balancing on a beam, and different ways of falling as well as exercises with sticks. In the second half of the session, students worked on the Biomechanics *études*. This daily sequence

demonstrates Meyerhold's understanding of the relationship between training and performance: a progression from physical training, through the miniature movement-dramas of the *études*, to a play in rehearsal.

Alexei Levinski led a week-long workshop on Biomechanics at the Centre for Performing Arts in Wales, in October 1995. He worked with long sticks, about the weight and length of a broom handle. Students stood in a circle at first, working individually but in time with the whole group. The sticks were tossed from hand to hand, spun before being caught, balanced laterally on the shoulders and allowed to slide down the arm before being caught, balanced vertically on the palm of the hand, the shoulder, the knee and the foot. The work resembles basic circus skills, and like the practice of those skills, develops hand-eye co-ordination and balance. Levinski explained that this work 'teaches you to work closely and carefully with an object - and that's fundamental'. He added that working with sticks is 'a very simple, initial kind of co-ordination, and it's very simple to show the criteria'. Co-ordination is a fundamental aim of the Biomechanics system - co-ordination both with external objects and with other actors.

Although the stick work is technically demanding, it makes simple, concrete use of objects. However, even at this level, the human relation with objects is not merely instrumental. Levinski described three kinds of human-object relation, saying that the actor needs to 'master', 'tame', and 'make friends with' the stick. He introduced the idea of a 'dialogue' between human and object, explaining that:

It is very important that you don't try to impose yourself on [the stick], to control it, but that you're having a kind of dialogue. The stick has its own qualities and the person has his or her own qualities and you need to co-ordinate these. It's very

important to feel its weight, size, and to know its possibilities for dynamic movement – to turn – and its possibilities to be static, immobile.

(Levinski:1996)

b) Objects used to provoke awareness of the environment, use of peripheral vision and the other senses

It is interesting to see that the concept of a 'dialogue' between object and actor also appears in the practice of a contemporary teacher at the Guildford School of Acting and Dance, Ian Ricketts. Ricketts comments that an important influence on him as a teacher was 'the fact that I was old enough during the war to learn about the economy with which physical tasks can be performed'. Like Decroux, Ricketts admires the directness of efficient labour. However, physical work with the inanimate world has a further significance: Ricketts notes that although the motor force (to move, lift, or transform a thing) may arise from the human, it can only be efficiently deployed when combined with perception of the pre-existing qualities of the inanimate:

In all action there is the ingredient of submitting as well as that of doing. You can only lift something if you receive from it information about its weight and texture and form, just as you can only relate to a person by receiving whatever it is that he or she brings to you. This feeds directly into the listening part of acting.

(Mekler 1989: 144)

Ricketts' reference to 'receiving' information from the object, does not, I think, imply an animistic attitude, but rather his intention of developing actors' receptivity to qualities existing outside themselves⁵. Like the Biomechanical stick work, the neurological-muscular 'dialogue' demonstrated by physical labour provides a practical analogy with acting. That is, the human-object interaction involved in a physical task is held to be analogous to a particular theory of

performance in which attention is paid to the emotional 'dialogue' between people and the material world, and also between one person and another – the 'listening part of acting'. Below, I discuss the specific object exercises presented by Ricketts; first, however, it is important to locate them within the context of 'object exercises' in the Stanislavskian tradition.

Among the acting exercises described by Stanislavski in *An Actor Prepares*, there are a number which involve concrete objects and are intended to help actors to become aware of their environment (the classroom and their home, the city and the natural world), and of the relations between the senses and their memories and emotions. These exercises have been developed in totally divergent ways by acting teachers, some explicitly placing themselves in a 'Stanislavskian tradition', others rejecting attributions of Stanislavskian influence. A comparison of this group of observation exercises shows how the various teaching methods which claim a common source in Stanislavski have quite different emphases, with totally opposed results. Stanislavski's sensory exercises are directed towards the communication of experience, and this is the aspect that Ian Ricketts emphasises, while Lee Strasberg's sensory exercises – as taught in his later period, and by other American 'Method' teachers – are inwardly directed. The contrast in approach follows from the teacher's choice of object: are students to observe and handle concrete objects, or imaginatively recreate 'sensory' objects? Both options exist in Stanislavski's writing, and I will begin by looking at how he treats the object exercises.

Observation of everyday objects (Stanislavski)

In Stanislavski's fictionalised account of actor training, *An Actor Prepares*, the Assistant Director, Rakhmanov, is responsible for the movement training. This tends to take place off-stage, and remains outside the pages of the book, while the acting classes of the Director, Tortsov, are described in great detail. However, one day, while Tortsov is away, Rakhmanov takes a class in what is described as 'drill'. He says to the students:

I shall select an object for each of you to look at. You will notice its form, lines, colours, detail, characteristics. All this must be done while I count thirty. Then the lights will go out, so that you cannot see the object, and I shall call upon you to describe it. In the dark you will tell me everything that your visual memory has retained. I shall check up with the lights on, and compare what you have told me with the actual object.

(Stanislavski 1936: 79-80)

The students are shocked to learn how little they habitually absorb of their surroundings. The exercise is to be repeated, and supplemented by 'homework' – the students are encouraged to go over the day while lying in bed at night, and notice which objects have drawn their attention, and what emotional content they carry. This awareness of emotional associations can then be transferred to a character's relation to a prop. Tortsov later comments that is it 'not necessary to endow every object with an imaginary life, but you should be sensitive to its influence on you' (Stanislavski 1936: 89).⁶

A box full of extraordinary things (Ian Ricketts)

Ian Ricketts describes an exercise with concrete objects, taught to students in the foundation year at Guildford School of Acting:

I have a box full of extraordinary things: some are very simple, like old tools, sheep shears, an otter's skull, a Civil war brass buckle, an Elizabethan schoolhouse key; all

of them are things that the students have not seen before. We sit in the circle and I pair off people and ask them to close their eyes. I open the box and put one of these objects into the hands of one member of each pair. The one who has the object describes it to his partner. They can name it if they choose, but they don't have to.
(Mekler 1989: 146-7)

As in Stanislavski's version of this exercise, the student gives a verbal description of the object to a listener. However, the simple 'test' of students' powers of observation is transformed into a communicative experience: the students jointly reach an understanding of the object by talking to each other about it. Ricketts intends to show students that what they perceive is determined by the previous experience of both the questioner and the person describing the object, and by the relationship between them – a dialogue:

Suppose it were an apple and suppose I knew nothing about apples. I would experience the object in my hand as being smooth-skinned, cool, and just filling my palm. That's it. I wouldn't be able to go further with my description. But supposing you, my partner, had been brought up on an orchard and your father had 106 species of apple trees that you knew. Your questions about the apple would direct me to a sensory perception of it that I would not have thought possible. You could direct me to the stalk and the area around the stalk and ask me to compare that to the rest of the skin. [...] So it doesn't matter who has the knowledge, the one who questions always determines in part what is experienced.

(Mekler 1989: 147)

Stanislavski seeks to develop the actor's intuitive sensory response to objects; Ricketts claims that most students already have this sensitivity – 'a rich intuition that will feed upon any material that is brought to them' – and need to go beyond intuition, to understand the concept of dialogue between objects and people, and between individuals – to 'see how much their behaviour depends upon what they receive from other people, upon the quality of attention in another, upon that other's listening in their presence' (Mekler 1989: 146). This understanding of communication as a dialogic process is fundamental for live theatre – it is what

turns the recitation of learnt 'lines' into an immediate communication with a particular audience.

Sensory exercises (Lee Strasberg)

Strasberg's sensory exercises were intended to develop the performer's kinetic recall of simple experiences, and at a second stage, to stimulate the recall of private memories. The 1935 course in acting that Strasberg formulated (with Elia Kazan and Joe Bromberg) begins with simple observation of the object, just as Stanislavski described:

One at a time, let each student observe, with as many senses as possible, one object.
(For example, a book - its form and color, cover texture, weight, smell, sound of turning leaves etc.)

(Kazan 1935: 35)

In the following class, the students' observation is checked by the performance of a 'suitable action': if the object is a watch, 'Let one student be a watchmaker to whom another student describes his watch so that the watchmaker can build another of the same kind' (Kazan 1935: 35). As in Stanislavski's 'drill' exercises, there is an emphasis on verbal communication. However, in later work at the Studio, this communicative element seems to have been lost.

The sequence of 'sensory exercises' now taught in acting studios across the United States involves the individual working privately on the imaginative recreation of a series of objects, as follows: drinking a cup of coffee, or other drink; putting on make-up, or shaving, in front of a mirror; putting on shoes or socks; putting on underclothes in front of a full-length mirror; touching three different fabrics; feeling sunshine on the face and body. The objects are chosen to involve all the senses. The acting teacher Terry Schreiber describes Strasberg's exercises as

'a way to get out of your head, into your senses, all five of them' (Mekler 1987:86). What seems extraordinary is that these sensory exercises do not use real material objects, but only the 'sense memory' of objects. The work on such imaginary stimuli is intended to help students learn to recall and use other memories in an analogous manner. Meanwhile, the banning of actual material objects from the rehearsal room has become a peculiar and absolute rule. Another 'Method' teacher, Ed Kovens insists, 'I don't want a student to work on the real thing, but the sensory object' (Mekler 1987: 134). This view might be justified if the exercise were intended primarily to develop concentration, for, as Stanislavski writes, 'imaginary objects demand an even far more disciplined power of concentration' than material objects (Stanislavski 1936: 87). However, the Method teachers' objection to real objects is not that they weaken the concentration, but that they provide dangerous short-cuts for the imagination.

Ed Kovens argues that often 'the student already knows what emotion is going to be elicited' by an object of personal significance, and therefore quickly exhausts it, so that an imaginary object is a more reliable trigger for emotion. Certainly, because an imaginary object has to be actively constructed, an actor may invest more energy in this work, and pay more attention to material qualities than when handling an apparently familiar object. However, I would argue that the emotion produced is far more likely to be 'predictable' when working with an imagined object, and that by removing the real object from the classroom, the Method teachers remove an unreliable 'other', and narrow the range of possible responses to the material world. Real objects vary according to the actual conditions of the environment and provide constantly changing stimuli.

Trigger objects (Lee Strasberg and Uta Hagen)

The Method teachers' search for a 'reliable' stimulus to produce a predictable volume of emotion ends with the 'trigger object'. In the writing of Lee Strasberg and Uta Hagen, Stanislavski's delicate suggestion of 'influence', 'interest' and 'interaction' between object and human is replaced by references to 'trigger' objects, which reliably – and as it were *mechanically* – produce emotion in the actor. Strasberg and Hagen both draw their theoretical justification from psychology: Hagen refers to a psychologist, Jacques Palaci, to justify her use of the term 'trigger object'; and, according to psychologist and theatre writer Eva Mekler, Lee Strasberg 'was a Behaviorist, a Pavlovian, and not a Freudian' (Mekler 1987: 132).

In these methods, the actor is taught to recall objects which trigger emotion as required. If an actor is not sufficiently stimulated by the given circumstances of a play to produce the required tears or laughter, she can use an emotional memory released by 'a tiny remembered object only indirectly connected with the [...] event: a polka-dot tie, an ivy leaf on a stucco wall, a smell or sound of sizzling bacon, a grease spot on the upholstery' (Hagen 1987: 48). Paradoxically, the concrete object itself tends to disappear from the classroom, even as it is given increasing significance in the 'actor's tool-kit', as a skeleton key to the emotions. The real object, which might, in its full, recalcitrant presence, be a less ambiguous 'trigger' of the required emotion than an actor would wish, has been replaced by a simulacrum. And similarly, the Method versions of Stanislavski's exercises, which were originally intended to sharpen actors' awareness of their surroundings, can

have the effect of isolating the individual. The actor and teacher John Lehne, who worked with Strasberg and Kazan and taught at the Studio for three years, comments:

After eight or ten years of [teaching Strasberg's sensory exercises] I began to notice that things were often missing in the work when it was used professionally. The actor's experience, if used to the exclusion of other things, isolates him, makes him more concerned with creating his own world in terms of his personal experience and less concerned with how that world is related to the situation and character of the play.

(Mekler 1987: 235)

I would suggest that the 'Method' and specifically the use of imaginary objects may be a useful initial teaching tool, but provides an inadequate preparation for performance, and a narrower range of experience than is available through encounters with real objects.

2) EXTENSION OF PHYSICAL CAPACITIES

a) speed of reaction, a range of different ways of using the body

The exercises in this section, like most formal movement training systems (Laban, Feldenkrais, Alexander), are meant to offer the student a range of movement *choices*, rather than a specialisation of the body. However, these exercises also show how games can be further developed in the direction of drama: a game like 'Stealing the handkerchief' can be used both to condition the body, and to develop movement qualities, gait and tempo for performance. It can also be played as a miniature version of the drama – an abstracted yet totally physical representation of the relationships in an existing play – which demonstrates the play's dynamics to the actors and establishes those dynamics between the actors at an instinctual, somatic level. The games involve the actor in a 'real' context – there

may be a playful agreement to stick to some arbitrary rules, but these nevertheless *really* require 'extra-daily' use of balance, tempo, flexibility, etc. As in Stanislavski's exercises, actors are required to observe their own behaviour in a real context; the difference is that the context provided by the game is more extreme, more 'theatrical' than real life.

Stealing the handkerchief (Theatre Games)

A handkerchief (or a sock, or a strip of paper – the particular thing used is irrelevant, as long as it is a real, concrete object) is tucked into the back of a belt. Players attempt to steal each other's handkerchiefs while protecting their own. If they only watch their backs, they cannot get close enough to steal a handkerchief, but if they pursue handkerchiefs single-mindedly they will lose their own. This aspect of the game is comparable to many children's games (such as 'stealing coins' described below), but is a more dynamic version – the whole room is used. The game produces sudden, quick movements, particularly sudden swerves and rotations of the hips. This game demands speed and suppleness, as well as developing the awareness of other players and a 360 degree awareness of space, making use of peripheral vision.

Barker suggests that this game can be used to provide a physical analogy to the opening situation of *Romeo and Juliet* if additional information is fed in: 'the law demands that any duelling attack shall be punishable by death, unless the killer has drawn in self-defence. The players, therefore, try to provoke situations in which other players will be moved to attack them, or will back down from the confrontation and lose face' (Barker 1977: 129). 'The relationship patterns

established between the actors by the game become physical habits, and shape the actors' interaction on stage at a somatic level, while the generalised defensive-yet-alert carriage produced by the game can be made specific to individual characters in the play.

Pirate's Treasure (Theatre Games)

One player – the Pirate – sits blindfolded, near a bunch of keys, or a few coins scattered on the ground. All the others attempt to creep up and steal the treasure. On hearing a sound the Pirate points to where it seems to come from; if the Pirate is accurate, the player identified must retire to the starting line.

The exercise develops particular qualities of movement (the noisy keys need to be handled in a light, sustained manner) but also listening skills, and acute awareness of the self in a particular environment. It is important that a real, external objective is provided, since this changes the game from a mime of stealth for the teacher's approval to a real task that produces a special kind of movement. Barker, like Stanislavski, is interested in the accurate observation of real behaviour. He notes that students' movement in the 'real' dark of a blindfold is very different to the pre-conceived idea of darkness they present when their eyes are open: with eyes blindfolded, the posture is more erect, there is 'a marked improvement in balance', 'much more use of extensions in space as they feel around, and a dramatic change in the relationship between them' (Barker 1977: 59). The open-eyed actor is 'concentrating on the *result*, consciously trying to create the illusion of darkness'. If the circumstances are created, 'as they never are in the theatre', the actor 'plays a game, instead of pursuing an effect' (Barker 1977: 60-61). Stanislavski's famous

'search for the brooch' exercise similarly draws attention to the difference between the students' preconceived ideas of 'searching' and their behaviour given 'real' circumstances. Neither Barker nor Stanislavski argues that the circumstances on stage in performance will be 'real'. The 'real' is provisional, a pedagogical tool that reveals 'real' responses in the body, which can later be transferred to the fiction on stage.

b) Objects for concentration and focus

Stealing coins (children's games)

The game is played in pairs, the players facing each other, holding out their hands, palms upwards, at waist-height. Each player holds a coin in one outstretched hand and tries to snatch her partner's proffered coin using the other hand. These games might seem to belong more in the previous section, since they involve fast reactions and quick, light movement of a specialised kind. However, their importance for theatre is rather different. Clive Barker comments that in the game: 'You must risk what you have in order to gain what you want', and again, suggests that this framework can be placed under an existing dramatic relationship, such as that of Hedda Gabler and Judge Brack. More important is the fact that the only way to be successful at these games is to learn to hold eye-contact with the partner rather than watching the object of desire. This develops the players' ability to 'read' a partner's intentions – as useful for gamblers as actors.

The quality of open alertness which this game requires is a valuable attitude to adopt on stage. Like a tennis player, the actor empties out extraneous

intentions in order to be able to respond in any direction to the movement of the ball, or the partner. The quality of attention achieved through this game recalls Kleist's description of a bear in his essay 'The Puppet Theatre'. The narrator's friend, the dancer Herr C., describes his fencing match with a bear: the bear was fastened to a post, 'his right paw lifted in readiness and his eye fixing mine' (Kleist 1997: 415). When Herr C. tried to hit the bear,

he made a very light movement with his paw and parried the thrust. I tried to mislead him with a feint; the bear made no move. [...] Not only did the bear, like the foremost fencer in the world, parry all my thrusts; when I feinted – no fencer in the world can follow him in this – he did not even react: looking me in the eye, as though he could read my soul in it, he stood with his paw lifted in readiness and when my thrusts were not seriously intended he did not move.

(Kleist 1997: 416)

I will discuss how this sought-after quality of attention is related to the quality of 'presence' in Section 'Three. Clearly this work can also be used to develop the quality and range of interaction between actors and between characters.

Warm-up with sticks (Steve Tiplady)

Light rods or dowels about five feet long are used. First, the actor moves around the rod, keeping it steady in a horizontal or vertical position. This develops controlled movement. It is more useful as a general training exercise than the classic illusionary mime exercises using imaginary fixed points (in which the actor creates vertical and horizontal poles through mime) because the actor can see exactly when the stick moves, and correct her own movement.

In the second stage, the actors work in pairs. They bring their sticks together to form an inverted 'V', leaving a gap of an inch between the ends. They maintain this 'inch' while moving slowly around the room, alternating the lead. This appears similar to other 'leading and following' exercises, such as 'mirroring',

or the Augusto Boal exercise known as 'Columbian hypnosis', but by using sticks, the actors share an objective measure of their concentration.⁷ As the aim is to maintain a gap, rather than to lead or follow well, the responsibility is shared, and it is often hard to say who is leading at any moment. The mental effect is akin to meditation, but as the focus-point is external, this exercise is perhaps a more appropriate preparation for performance.

In the third stage, actors use two sticks each. Each leads with one stick, and follows with the other. The awareness is split: most of the actor's attention must be directed to following, but the leading stick must also be controlled. These exercises are particularly useful for puppetry, where the manipulator must focus entirely on an external object while maintaining a peripheral awareness of the environment, and has to use each hand separately even while working with a partner on a shared action.

The exercise can be extended, with groups of three or four working together on two 'inches', or a whole company focused on a single inch supported by all the sticks. The exercise requires, and produces, extraordinary concentration, through the use of a concrete, external point of focus.

3) SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Objects used to develop the ability to work creatively and co-operatively with others and to change the interaction with texts

Throwing and catching a ball, or playing pat-ball, around a circle, is a clear example of interaction with others through an object. Ball games can be used as

warm-ups and concentration activities in themselves, but they also serve as a language to describe dramatic interactions. For example, playing 'catch' successfully is a template of good dramatic 'playing': the player with the ball must make eye- or verbal contact before throwing the ball; the other players should all be 'on their toes', ready to catch the ball. A successful catch is redefined – neither a sign of athletic prowess nor a happy accident, it is the result of a good throw combined with alert receptivity. On this model, the dramatic scene is also a shared venture, not an opportunity for virtuoso playing. This is the aspect of object games that has been most important in youth theatres, adult education, etc.⁸

By extension, many practitioners have been interested in taking sport as a model for theatre – including Brecht, Artaud, Meyerhold and Decroux.⁹ The model of sport is also useful for actors' work with texts. The acting teacher Bud Beyer discusses his teacher Alvina Krause, who,

asked herself, while she was watching an acting class, why she was so bored by what she was seeing, why it was so passive and unexciting. So she decided to approach acting like sports. For instance, she used to say that good comedy was like a good basketball game: everybody gets the ball and everybody passes it, but only one person makes the basket, although everybody is focused on that goal. So she would have actors playing basketball while they were doing lines, or she would have them throw a ball back and forth.

(Mekler 1987: 312)

In a similar vein, Krause asked the actors playing Hedda Gabler and Judge Brack to play chess as they rehearsed their conversations. There is an interesting tradition of using objects to help speakers achieve a more physical relation to the text. Michael Chekhov describes work on a 'modern' *Hamlet* in 1923,

We silently threw balls to each other while the text of the play was read slowly and loudly to us [...] We learned to achieve in a practical manner the deep connection of movement with words on one hand, and with emotions on the other.

(Gordon 1983: 11)

In rehearsals for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Peter Brook made use of batons, passed from hand to hand between the actors as they walked or danced about the space. John Kane describes the equation of the batons with the words of the play: 'As we passed the sticks from hand to hand, to the rhythm of the drums... so we were to learn to handle words and speeches, sharing and experiencing them as a united group' (Mitter 1992: 35). That the word can be felt to be a concrete object is shown in the metaphors for speech: beside Kane's mention of learning to 'handle' words and speeches, there are images of 'tasting', 'rolling words around in the mouth', 'biting', 'chewing' or 'spitting' words. Hélène Cixous gives an example of writers finding their words through the movement of the body:

Mandelstam asks very seriously in his 'Conversation about Dante': how many pairs of shoes Dante must have worn out in order to write *The Divine Comedy*, because, he tells us, that could only have been written on foot, walking without stopping, which is also how Mandelstam wrote. Mandelstam's whole body was in action, taking part, searching.

(Cixous 1993: 64)

If a text is written through the rhythm of the body, a speaker can discover the rhythms of the text through concrete rhythmic action, and objects help to achieve this.

Concrete exercises with objects offer actors a form of discipline: a series of exercises of increasing difficulty within which individuals can make their own variations, that is, improvise. There is a gradual process of learning, mastering and developing the game; as in many children's games, 'the "rules" constitute a resistance against which the players struggle to raise the skill to a higher level' (Barker 1989: 233). More importantly, this discipline can be made specific to

acting – developing kinetic skills in handling everyday material objects, and integrating movement with verbal and emotional responses and interactions with other actors.

¹ Newlove writes:

Most aspiring actors today know that it is essential to be able to move well. Their problem lies in selecting the appropriate discipline that will best meet their needs as actors. Courses in tap, jazz and 'modern' dance, yoga, T'ai Chi, meditation, relaxation and the Alexander classes are some of the options usually available. [...] However, none of these classes will inform you about acting. They will not help you to find the right expressive movement in the elusive search for a character's behaviour in a given situation, nor to develop a technique which will extend your range of movement in the fullest sense. (Newlove 1993: 13)

² See, for example, the work of the dancer and teacher Henry Smith, which relates the principles and movements of Aikido to theatre and dance. A video is available from Arts Archives, Exeter.

³ In 1996, Barba said that he had seen the Biomechanics exercises performed by Gennadi Bogdanov for the first time only eighteen months previously (Barba 1997a).

⁴ Levinski, Alexei (1996) *Meyerhold's Biomechanics: a workshop* Exeter: Arts Archives. All subsequent quotations from Levinski are transcribed from this video.

⁵ There is an echo in Ricketts' comment of Walter Benjamin's discussion of the 'aura':

'Perceptibility,' as Novalis puts it, 'is a kind of attentiveness.' The perceptibility he has in mind is none other than that of the aura. Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return (Benjamin 1970: 184).

⁶ Stanislavski's appreciation of the power of objects to carry emotional memory is nicely suggested by the detailed notes on the contents of Ranevskaya's handbag in *The Cherry Orchard*: a scarf, a French novel, a purse, perfumes and sal volatile. As Hristic points out, apart from the purse, 'all the objects the Stanislavski so carefully enumerates will remain forever hidden in her handbag' (Hristic 1995: 178).

⁷ Boal describes the game thus:

One actor holds her hand palm forward, fingers upright, a few centimetres away from the face of another, who is then as if hypnotised and must keep his face constantly the same distance from the hand of the hypnotiser [...] The hypnotiser starts a series of movements with her hand, up and down, right and left, backwards and forwards, her hand vertical in relation to the ground, then horizontal, then diagonal, etc. – the partner must contort his body in every way possible to maintain the same distance between face and hand. [...] The hypnotiser must force her partner into all sorts of ridiculous, grotesque, uncomfortable positions. Her partner will thus put in motion a series of muscle structures which are never, or only rarely, activated. He will use certain "forgotten" muscles in his body. (Boal 1992: 63)

Although Boal emphasises the physical benefits of this exercise, I have found it also produces a useful state of concentration, which is full-bodied and not too serious.

⁸ See, for example, Chrissie Poulter's book *Playing the Game*, which provides many examples of suitable games and describes the methodology carefully. Drama warm-ups have found an important place in adult education, particularly language learning. Although the members of a class, strangers to each other, need to interact through language in order to achieve their educational aims, they are often very inhibited. Concrete objects of all sorts (balls for name games, Cuisenaire rods to represent elements in a narrative) are very useful in providing a means of non-verbal interaction that enables verbal interaction. See also the Work, Interaction & Technology Research Group at King's College, which studies interactions mediated through objects in the workplace.

⁹ Decroux created movement studies of 'Le Boxer' and 'Le Lutteur'.

SECTION TWO: OBJECTS AND PRESENCE

Exploring different ways of being through interaction with objects

The exercises in the preceding section develop mental and physical skills such as observation, reflexes and suppleness which have a very wide application. However, some of the exercises, such as Stanislavski's 'search for the brooch', which involve the observation and recreation of 'real' action, show how concrete exercises can move into more specifically dramatic territory. This section looks at an issue specific to performers – the question of 'stage presence'. Human-object relations become particularly important in this area because the very concept of 'presence' raises questions of the relationship between the world of the performer and the world of the audience: is 'presence' a transcendental quality, which sets the performer apart from the mundane world, or a quality of 'presentness' which emphasises the existence of the dramatic fiction in the world, among the 'things' of the stage and the theatre building, and among the people of the audience? In this section I suggest that particular kinds of relationship to material objects define specific 'ways of being' on stage – ways of being that relate to what is commonly understood as 'presence' but also offer alternatives to it.

Philip Auslander has argued that 'stage presence' is subject to the same critique as the 'metaphysics of presence' that Derrida discusses; if, as Derrida argues, all Western philosophy depends upon some pre-existing foundational order of meaning – truth, reason, logic – then, in the theatre, it is the text, the director's 'concept', or the actor's presence which function as the logos, or grounding concept. He notes that acting is often praised as being 'honest', 'self-revelatory' or

'truthful', and that 'when we feel we have glimpsed some aspect of the actor's psyche through her performance, we applaud the actor for "taking risks", "exposing herself"' (Auslander 1997: 29). For Auslander these critical clichés reflect a more widespread, if unspoken assumption: he considers that Stanislavski, Brecht and Grotowski 'all implicitly designate the actor's self as the logos of performance; all assume that the actor's self precedes and grounds her performance and that it is the presence of this self in performance that provides the audience with access to human truths' (Auslander 1997: 30).

In *Acting (Re)Considered*, Philip Zarrilli introduces a number of essays which criticise those acting theories which make the actor's personal feelings the foundation or essence of acting. Such theories were of course developed alongside, or in response to, the 'psychologically whole' characters of 'realistic' drama. Oddly, subsequent attempts to destabilise the autonomous, coherent character came through a new emphasis on the actor's personal presence:

Many productions since the 1960s attempted to dispense with 'character'. Ironically, a metaphysics of 'presence' which reifies the immediate actor/audience interaction helped to destabilize the 'normative' fictional character.

(Zarrilli 1995: 19)

The movement Zarrilli describes here is associated with 'performance' or 'live art'. In contrast, several theatre companies have attempted to evade the 'dangerous charisma' associated with 'presence', the imbalance of power implied by 'star quality', with productions that lead audiences to question their notions of the actor's identity, self-exposure, and playing a role.¹ Auslander contrasts the concept of 'performance' to 'theatre', quoting the writings of Josette Féral and Chantal Pontbriand, which make use of Michael Fried's concept of 'presentness' – 'the condition [...] of existing in, indeed of secreting or constituting, a continuous or

perpetual present'. Pontbriand describes the 'characteristic presence of performance' as just this quality of presentness, 'that is to say, performance unfolds essentially in the present time' (Auslander 1997: 55). So 'presence' becomes a refusal of representation, a focus on the 'here and now'. This is a useful description of a recognisable performance quality, but can hardly serve as a final definition of 'performance', which (like theatre) often plays with the relationship between presence and absence, between the things and people which are physically and temporally 'present' and the representations of people, places or times which are elsewhere or non-existent.

In both of the contrasting approaches to actor training, which have been earlier characterised as the Stanislavskian tradition, and the improvisational tradition, teachers oppose 'acting' or 'theatricality' to 'presence', and being 'in the present', the 'here-and-now'. They identify 'presence' with theatrical 'truth'. However, in neither case does this imply a rejection of technique, since technique can clearly be used to generate what is called 'stage presence'. For example, the actors Stanislavski directed had a repertoire of pragmatic techniques which they used in conjunction with 'emotionally truthful' acting². Rather, there is a rejection of 'stageyness', that is, the conventions of an earlier period which now appear artificial. The techniques taught by Uta Hagen (drawing on Stanislavski) and Jacques Lecoq or John Wright (drawing on clowning or *commedia dell'arte* techniques) aim to give actors 'presence' by stripping away 'acting' - the protective habits of their daily life as well as their performance habits, their social masks as well as their favoured theatre masks. 'Presence', then, means different things to different practitioners, but is taken here as a desirable quality of 'watchability'.

Crucially, 'presence' is opposed to 'self-consciousness' in all the acting theory I have examined, that is, actors may be fully conscious of their own effect on the audience, but they are not obscured by shyness or awkwardness. An interesting commentary on the idea of self-consciousness is provided by Kleist, whose essay 'On the Puppet Theatre' was discussed in the previous section. For Kleist, self-consciousness is an inevitable state in adult human life, as a consequence both of the Biblical 'Fall', and of the individual's 'loss of innocence'. The narrator of the essay says that he is 'perfectly well aware of the damage done by consciousness to the natural grace of a human being'. A young man of his acquaintance had, he says, 'by a chance remark lost his innocence before my very eyes and had afterwards, despite making every conceivable effort, never regained that paradise' (Kleist 1997: 414). A loss of physical 'grace' accompanies the metaphysical 'fall from grace' in the history of humanity and of the individual. This is illustrated by comparing humans to those inanimate objects which are made to resemble them - puppets. Herr C. argues that puppets, having no troublesome consciousness, are in a state of grace, manifested in their physical gracefulness. They are 'incapable of *affectation*' because they are obliged to obey the law of gravity (Kleist 1997: 413). All objects obey the laws of gravity, force and motion rather than the logic of the post-lapsarian fictions of the stage; water, clocks, and mirrors, are examples of objects that follow their own laws - sometimes in awkward, glaring contradiction to the logic of the fiction. In this sense, all objects are in a 'state of grace', like children and animals. If there is no piece of theatrical wisdom concerning objects equivalent to 'Never work with children or animals', it is only because in realist drama, objects are usually required

to function within a very narrowly defined range of behaviour. However, two examples from different traditions suggest that even apparently straightforward everyday objects can (according to the conventions which prevail) prove as disruptive as children and animals. The actors of Meyerhold's company for *Tarelkin's Death* (1922) certainly had reason to coin such a maxim: Varvara Stepanova's 'acting instruments' each concealed a trap: 'the table's legs gave way, the seat deposited its occupant on the floor, the stool detonated a blank cartridge' (Braun 1995: 185). As Braun comments, the 'acting instruments' 'functioned so capriciously that the young performers soon lost all confidence in them' (Braun 1995:186). However, even unmodified furniture could be problematic. In early nineteenth-century French theatre, real chairs and tables were neither required (since the actors kept mainly within a semi-circle downstage) nor desired (since it was held that tragic characters did not *sit* – an attitude inherited from the ancient theatre). Furniture was sometimes painted on the flats or backcloth. Bert States claims that the introduction of real furniture in the 1850s 'created a temporary frenzy among the actors, since the art of acting – or grand acting at least – had never required skill in moving around household obstacles' (States 1985: 41)

In the following discussion I show how the approach to objects in training reflects two fundamentally opposed ideologies of the human relationship to the material world: the 'Stanislavskian' approach is to control or limit objects, and to ban particularly awkward stuff or objects from the stage; the 'improvisational' approach is to accept everything that is offered by the situation.³ I conclude by looking at another mode of being, represented here by Enrique Pardo, which involves an 'artisanal' relationship to the material world.

Throwing and catching a ball... (John Wright)

A pair of actors stand facing an audience of fellow students. One actor throws a ball high into the air and runs away; the other rushes in to catch it as it falls. The pressure of the physical task makes it almost impossible for the actors to 'act' - that is, to use stereotyped gestures to 'show' that they are trying to catch the ball, to present a sophisticated attitude towards the childish game. The actors are encouraged to acknowledge the 'reality' of their situation: the demands of the physical laws of motion and gravity, the limits of their own ability, and the 'here-and-now' situation of performing a difficult task in front of an audience. This demand can in fact result in the actor's presentation of an 'attitude' again - the eye-contact with the audience, grimace or grin, can become stereotyped as any social mask - part of the process of 'reification of the immediate actor/audience interaction' as Auslander puts it. But ideally, the direct look at the audience (an important element of popular forms of performance such as cabaret, stand-up, music-hall and *commedia dell'arte*) is not fixed, but a real - and therefore changing - response to the audience, shifting between involvement in the dramatic fiction and complicity with the audience.

John Wright makes two suggestions about the spectator's attitude towards the performer: firstly, that spectators are always interested in the performer's immediate responses - whether succeeding or failing, demonstrating physical ease or a heroic-cum-comic struggle with the material world, and secondly, that spectators are delighted when the performer acknowledges their existence. This theory of spectatorship directs the performer towards a particular 'mode of being' on stage.

Le Jeu (Lecoq)

Wright's ball game shares the principles of Jacques Lecoq's exercise *Le Jeu*, 'the game', which is, for Lecoq, at the heart of theatrical interaction. Two, three, or more actors stand in a line in as neutral a stance as possible, facing the audience. They have no task to perform – they are simply instructed to respond to the fact of the audience watching them and to 'follow' any inadvertent gestures made by the other actors. So, for example, if one actor shifts his weight from one leg to another in his discomfort at the scrutiny of the audience, all the other actors will do the same, which may amuse the audience. The laughter may gratify the actors, who then attempt to further entertain the audience, or discomfort them, leading to more (amusing) nervous behaviour. The actors discover that their anxiety about the confrontation with the audience is (when demonstrated and amplified) a source of amusement or interest for the audience. This discovery teaches the actors that they do not need to 'be interesting' or attempt to 'entertain' the audience in order to do so.

Throwing and catching a ball ... while telling a story (John Wright)

An additional task is added to the game of catch. The actors tell a story together, alternating the narrative as they continue to play the game, alternating catches. They are encouraged to throw away the ball when they can't think what to say, to pass the story to their partner. Wright encourages the actors to throw the ball away immediately, both to be rid of the responsibility of 'holding' the scene, and to work their partner hard. Again, the physical task makes any kind of

'advance planning' impossible; the actors only succeed in entertaining the audience if they allow the unavoidable accidents to become part of 'their performance'.

Like *Le Jeu*, Wright's ball game demands that actors make a real response to the fact of the audience, and their immediate surroundings. The ball is a constraint, a metonym of the awkward, unmanageable physical world, rather than a tool of interaction, as in the apparently similar work with text and balls of Alvina Krause and Michael Chekhov, described above. The use of a ball in Wright's exercise adds a very unpredictable concrete element to *Le Jeu* – and therefore it tends to produce comedy of the unsuccessful human relationship with the material world, whereas *Le Jeu* can produce very different kinds of relationship between the actors and the audience – tragic or tender as well as comic.

The game demands an immediate physical response, and could alienate those actors who consider themselves to have 'butterfingers'. However, in Wright's day-long workshop, this exercise was preceded by a morning's work on encouraging actors to accept 'failure' as part of the creative process. Wright emphasised that the actors were in a workshop situation, and not working towards a finished production: he encouraged prolific production of material as a way of releasing creativity and energy.

I know all the moves (John Wright)

The actors worked in pairs, alternating as performer and spectator, and following a formulaic script:

'I hear you know all the moves.'

'That's right.'

'Can you show me?'

The performer makes a gesture, jumps in the air or strikes a pose. The spectator demonstrates a delight incommensurate with the 'quality' of the gesture and offers warm encouragement, exclaiming, 'That's great! That's really wonderful! Is there any more?' Wright, demonstrating the exercise, insisted that the gestures themselves are 'crap - it's all complete rubbish'. His aim was to disable the actors' own 'quality-control' censors through unstinting praise, to enable actors to enjoy whatever they did, even making the most banal or silly gestures. This exercise later helped actors to accept the fact that they were sometimes 'rubbish', and sometimes dropped the ball, without trying to conceal it.

The 'look' between the performer and audience acknowledges that they share the same physical space. The ball game is an example of the *via negativa* for performers, a refusal of theatrical trickery - because spectators see performers struggle with an element of the material world that they recognise and understand (the spectator knows how the ball 'works' - the physical laws of force and gravity), the performer has no place or time to hide in 'role', in 'acting'. Wright and Lecoq insist that performers must be comfortable with that direct 'naked' contact, before they can play in front of an audience without acknowledging its presence.

'We could act better if the stage was not so bare' (Stanislavski)

Stanislavski approached the problem of the actor on stage from the opposite direction. In this tradition, actors are allowed to become comfortable doing everyday actions on stage, but as if they were alone, without taking the audience into account. Concrete objects are used to help actors feel at home on

stage, and to build up their confidence by getting them used to performing everyday actions before an audience before they attempt extraordinary actions. The security that can be provided by familiar objects is vividly evoked by Stanislavski's account of the student actors in *An Actor Prepares*. Vanya suggests that they 'could act better if the stage was not so bare; if there were some properties about, furniture, fireplace, ashtrays' (Stanislavski 1936: 41). Their teacher, Tortsov, provides an entire room setting from the prop store and rings the curtain down. When the students still find themselves unable to 'be' in this new setting, he sets them various exercises such as arranging the room for a party, writing a letter, looking for a lost object. The students use the objects both as 'texts' and as 'constraints' – texts, in that they prompt certain kinds of familiar activities, and constraints, in that they limit the students to those banal activities and remove their paralysing sense of an artistic obligation to be sublime. However, in both senses the use of the objects is limited within the framework of 'realistic action'. Interestingly, Stanislavski draws attention to this, as Tortsov chides the students for their feeble imaginings: they lack an inner justification, the 'if' which 'acts as a lever to lift us out of the world of actuality into the realm of imagination' (Stanislavski 1936: 46).

After allowing the students some time playing in an enclosed room setting with the curtain down, Tortsov raises the curtain, and introduces the students to the convention of the 'fourth wall', which has – literally in this case – been removed from a box set. The actors need never look at the audience. They behave 'as if' the audience were not there; by developing their sense of a 'fourth wall', they are able to look into the auditorium and not 'see' the audience.

Objects now assume a greater importance, not as stimuli for imaginary actions, but as foci which relieve the actors of their awareness of the audience: 'In order to get away from the auditorium you must be interested in something on the stage' (Stanislavski 1936: 75). The narrator Kostya recalls,

I remember helping a man to pick up nails that had fallen on the stage when I was rehearsing for my scenes from *Othello*. Then I was absorbed by the simple fact of picking them up, and chatting with the man, and I entirely forgot the black hole beyond the footlights.

(Stanislavski 1936: 75)

This process of 'acclimatisation' to the stage must be distinguished from the 'method of physical actions', in which simple physical *activities* become motivated physical *actions* expressing a character's intentions. In the acting methodologies that follow Stanislavski, the familiar object becomes a tool to help actors feel at home on stage, comfortable doing nothing, 'not-acting' before they ever encounter a character.⁴

A Private Moment (Uta Hagen and others)

Like Stanislavski, Hagen offers a method for escaping the overpowering awareness of the audience through the intense focus on concrete objects. Hagen prepares students for a form of theatre governed by the 'fourth wall' convention, with realistic sets, and no direct address to the audience. Her 'object exercises' are based on the exercises described by Stanislavski, such as 'Solitude in Public'. In Hagen's first exercises, 'Physical Destination' and 'The Fourth Side', students recreate 'two seemingly routine minutes of life when alone at home' (Hagen 1991: 132). They bring cosmetics, bed-linen, brushes and mirrors from home to perform these private moments in the acting studio. In 'Changes of Self', actors change

their outfit, noticing how different clothes affect their mood; in 'Moment to Moment', students search for a lost object. Hagen jokes that 'people who know me will recognise anyone studying with me as they approach the Studio, because they are usually lugging so many shopping bags full of props' (Hagen 1973: 88).

Terry Schreiber describes his version of these exercises: 'I ask the student to bring in something that he does at home that would be private and hard for him to do in front of others.' The theoretical justification for this approach is that some written drama seems to require it:

Private Moments are important because writers like Odets, Miller, and Williams put them in their plays. So did Ibsen [...] Ideally good acting is like watching somebody through a keyhole. To me the defining thing about a Private Moment is being able to be private in public.

(Mekler 1987: 78-80)

It hardly needs to be mentioned that the keyhole model of acting is totally unsuited to non-naturalistic plays, or spaces such as the Globe, or the Olivier Theatre. Schreiber discusses a problematic stage performance, but attributes the difficulties to 'size' rather than the application of an inappropriate model of acting:

I was amazed when I saw Shaw's *Arms and the Man* at Circle in the Square. The problem with American actors was just laid out in front of me [...] John Malkovich and his wife Glenna Headley were much too small for these roles. Their work was honest and real and it was good acting, but it belonged in someone's garage. It never rose to the size of the material.

(Mekler 1987: 83)

In a first-year acting class at Queen Margaret College, in which students were working on Uta Hagen's object exercises, the teacher, Lynn Bains, asked 'How was the fourth wall for you?' as, I believe, a means of gauging the students' own sense of their increasing powers of concentration. The obvious risk in this method – in which the actor's ease on stage is based on ignoring the audience – is that actors will come to believe that this is the *only* mode available to them.⁵

The American followers of Stanislavski have produced a method that provides actors with internal and external objects of attention which allow them to blank out distractions such as audiences and stage-hands. John Lehne, quoted earlier, argues that the sensory exercises tend to isolate actors from the situation and characters of the play. Further, I suggest, they isolate actors from the situation of performance, from the audience in front of them. This makes the 'Method' particularly appropriate for the crowded world of the film set, humming with people focused on technical problems rather than the scene. However, how appropriate is this peculiarly introverted absorption for live theatre? Surely, performers who learn to ignore audiences must restrict their ability to react to a particular audience, to alter the timing, volume, and meaning of their speeches according to the audience's response? I would agree with Richard Hornby, who suggests that Strasbergian, classroom-based 'Method' acting should be reserved as a specialist training method for film and television and banned from the theatre, while recognising the usefulness of Stanislavski's far broader, nuanced approach.⁶

Hagen's object exercises are useful as an initial course of study, to build actors' confidence on stage. However, there is a fundamental contradiction in Hagen's work, which turns on the potential of any object to be either a text or a constraint. Although she uses objects as texts, to produce emotion and characterisation, she attempts to limit the power of props to control the actor. Faced with objects with 'physical properties which would otherwise control you' (Hagen 1973: 115), actors learn to 'endow' objects with qualities they do not possess: a glass of water becomes a glass of whisky, an apple becomes an onion, a dull knife, sharp. An undistinguished object can also be provided with an

emotional history – a dime-store ashtray is filled with ‘sentimental value’. ‘Endowment’ is the opposite process to the ‘listening’ approach to the object as text – the actor *adds* rather than experiences the object’s qualities.

At the same time, Hagen maintains an exaggeratedly literal position with regard to the actor’s material surroundings:

I would find it as impossible to come to a rehearsal for Blanche in *A Streetcar named Desire* dressed in slacks and sneakers as it would be for me to work on *St Joan* in a frilly chiffon dress and high-heeled shoes. I could barely get the words out of my mouth sitting around a rehearsal table at a reading.

(Hagen 1973: 70)

In this model of acting, the actor can only perform when entirely caught up in illusion, surrounded by as many signs of the fiction as possible. Hagen claims, in opposition to most of the other theatre theorists dealt with here that it is ‘obvious that no one can “act” or learn the principles of acting in empty space’ (Hagen 1991: 139). One could hardly be further from Peter Brook’s idea of theatre as an animation of ‘empty space’, or Brecht’s model of the actor as ‘demonstrator’, who takes his example from the witness to an accident, who stands on a street corner and tells what happened. In ‘The Street Scene’ Brecht proposes that make-up and costume should only be used ‘conditionally’, and not to create a complete illusion. The Brechtian actor who, in prolonged ‘reading rehearsals’, struggles to keep reading, to resist the fixing of characterization, is the antithesis of the actor imagined by Hagen.

Hagen’s own anecdote about the inside-out cardigan, recounted in the introduction, shows the way that a constraint object can produce additional energy or characterisation, and that audiences seem to enjoy a visible struggle with the material – appreciating not only verisimilitude but the demonstration of the

actor's skill in handling matter. Yet Hagen ignores the implications of her own experience (and the cardigan incident is recounted in both her books), ruling out the possibility of working constructively with the constraint aspect of objects.

Stanislavski recognises the conflict between the text and constraint aspects of the object, if only in ironic anecdotes. Instructed to build a fire on stage, the student actor Kostya reports,

I did as I was told, laid the wood in the fireplace, but found no matches, either in my pocket or on the mantelpiece. So I came back and told Tortsov of my difficulty.

'What in the world do you want matches for?' asked he.

'To light the fire.'

'The fireplace is made of paper. Did you intend to burn down the theatre?'

'I was just going to pretend,' I explained.

He held out an empty hand.

'To pretend to light a fire, pretended matches are sufficient. As if the point were to strike a match! [...] When you play Hamlet – will you need a life-sized sword? You can kill the King without a sword, and you can light the fire without a match. What needs to burn is your imagination.'

(Stanislavski 1936: 43)

This passage recognises the contradiction between the young actors' need for props to help them 'act better', and the fact that some elements of material reality cannot be entirely controlled by the actor, and so have to be banned from the stage when a realistic drama is to be performed. Those elements which most noticeably follow their 'own logic' independent of the written drama – like children and animals, clocks, fire and running water – disrupt the stage conventions with their own 'reality'.⁷ What is at issue here is the nature of representation: how much of a material 'carrier' do the actor and spectator require to set their imaginations alight?

Hagen does not seem to recognise that the conventions of representation are provisional, and constantly changing. She writes definitively that:

truth in life as it is, is not truth on stage. If I bring real snow into the theater it will melt, even before the curtain goes up. I remember a play in which real milk boiled over on cue on the stage stove. The audience was disillusioned as they audibly speculated on how this had been mechanically achieved. In *Look Back in Anger*, Mary Ure ironed with a real steam iron. Not only did the audience murmur, 'Real

steam!' as they missed what she was saying, but at one performance she was scalded, and the curtain was rung down.

(Hagen 1973: 75)

Hagen suggests that there is a clear line between a representable everyday reality and the 'unrepresentable'. She can only avoid considering the question of representation because realistic plays have tended to conform to certain conventions, avoiding the presentation of extreme states of life and death, sex and violence, as well as the extremes of the physical world, such as boiling milks, steam and snow. However, more recent drama, although still cast in the realist mould, does not obey these unwritten rules. Precisely these areas of intractable, unpleasant reality are presented in recent plays such as *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *Ashes and Sand*, *Blasted*, and *Some Voices* which all call for extreme violence to be presented on stage. Hagen's method may have been an adequate preparation for a limited naturalistic theatre, but if it is used as the sole basis for actor training, actors are not provoked into considering questions of convention and representation.

It is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that Hagen's theory, with its techniques for mastering props, for eliminating all the risks and restrictions that material objects can entail, reflects her situation in twentieth-century America, and the prevailing ideology of the 'mastery' of nature. After all, 'endowment' plays an important role in the operation of commodity culture, which instead of recognising the object's intrinsic material qualities, endows them with imaginary qualities.⁸

Finally, I will turn to an approach to 'stage presence' which is quite different from the two I have contrasted above. In the teaching and writing of Enrique Pardo various different 'ways of being' on stage are presented as simultaneous options. I suggest that Pardo's analysis and development of these modes depends on his close attention to the various possibilities of the human-object relationship, and that his work shows how such attention to the material can expand the human range of behaviour and attitude. Pardo studied and taught Fine Art in England before studying voice with the Roy Hart Theatre. He now works as a director and teacher, and his approach to the question of presence seems to me very much informed by his background in the visual arts. I will look particularly at one 'mode of being' on stage, in which the performer relates to the material world and to other performers with a respectful yet creative attitude – akin to a sculptor's attitude to raw material.

Choreography by 'following' (Enrique Pardo)

Pardo directly confronts the problem of the 'constraint' aspect of objects. Like Barker, he creates situations in which performers are constrained by rules, by each other, or by objects, in order to provoke an energetic response, a release of energy and emotion. In a workshop in 1997, he spent a week working with a basic 'following' structure.

Three performers are named as 'leaders'; the other performers 'follow' their movements, able to change from one leader to another as they wish, at an

appropriate moment. The performers who are 'following' aim to respond to the impulse of the movement proposed by the leader, rather than slavishly copying every action⁹. Even if the leader moves out of sight, the follower can use peripheral vision, follow other performers in the same group, or simply use her intuition as a prompt. The type of movement varies greatly according to the training and previous experience of the leaders: in September 1997, the group included professional dancers, actors and visual artists.

An actor who is perceived as 'having presence' is, I would argue, experiencing time or circumstances with a peculiar intensity. In his description of Grotowski's 'Watching' exercise, an exercise very similar to Pardo's 'following' work, Thomas Richards describes a difficult year-long process of becoming 'attentive', both to the sounds made by his own body (breathing, feet landing on the floor) and to the propositions made by the leader. Too often, he would 'lose concentration and longer be present in order to hear if I was making noise or not' (Richards 1995: 57). He would no longer 'see' anything, and would

just look down and go into "my own world"... I lost contact with the others and the leader, drowning in those moments in my own thoughts. For someone who observed, my absence was apparent, but I, being lost, did not even know I was stamping my feet. It was as if I were fast asleep. When I remembered, and succeeded in not making noise and in seeing the others, it was as if I had woken up for a moments out of an inner stupor.

(Richards 1995: 57)

This way of working has interesting effects when used with text. Pardo asks a performer to speak her memorised text while following the movement of her leader. The movement is likely to be totally unrelated to the text: a tender speech will be spat out between frog leaps; an angry speech spoken while the

actor's limp body is rolled over the other actors. This forces the performer to break the text in unaccustomed places, to use the voice differently, to emphasise unconsidered words. From this seemingly random work, new meanings in the text emerge. Sometimes Pardo directs a particular kind of movement to release an aspect of the text or the performer; sometimes it is left to the performer to discover what the random juxtaposition produces.

The Academy of Boredom

Pardo uses objects in an analogous way. Objects, both in training and performance, can be 'stumbling blocks' that make it impossible to be 'natural', that is, to respond in the trained, socialised manner, or to 'act'¹⁰. Faced with a recalcitrant object, the actor is put in the situation of Kleist's Herr C. in his fencing bout with the bear – neither the bear nor the material object is 'taken in' by acting, by a feinting gesture. Pardo sees such objects (and animals) as pedagogical tools for the actor. When directing a one-man show performed by an all-too-fluent monologist, Pardo set a live chicken loose on the stage, forcing the performer to respond to his immediate circumstances at every moment of every performance. The chicken is an extreme example of how inanimate objects are used in Pardo's 'Academy of Boredom'. A mundane task (such as sweeping the floor, moving furniture) is undertaken while a speech is spoken. This work seems at first to show no 'respect' for the text; in fact, it shows a passionate engagement with words, an avoidance of the lazy reading, the obvious, sentimental traps.

The absorption in an everyday object (which Stanislavski described in Kostya's encounter with the dropped nails) is one means of achieving stage presence, a combination of ease and focus that is, in itself, interesting to the audience. The opposite of 'self-consciousness' is acute consciousness of the other, that is, a 'listening' absorption in an object or another performer. In *An Actor Prepares*, Tortsov leads Maria to experience this attitude on stage. He tells her that they will act a scene together and they go on to the stage.

The Director stood near her, and seemed to be looking for something very carefully in his notebook.

Meantime, gradually, Maria became more quiet, more concentrated, and finally was motionless, with her eyes fixed on him. [...] Her pose was life-like, natural.

[...]

'How do you feel?' the Director asked, as they returned to their places in the auditorium.

'Why? Did we act?'

'Of course.'

'Oh! But I thought...I was just sitting and waiting until you found your place in the book, and would tell me what to do. Why, I didn't act anything.'

'That was the best part of it,' said he.

(Stanislavski 1936: 36)

To adopt this attitude is to adopt a deferential position towards the other. Pardo describes how such 'listening' absorption can 'de-pressurise' the actor, taking away 'the pressure that places the responsibility of imagination on the actor's ego and the ego's emotional output' (Pardo 1988: 170). There are obvious parallels with the de-pressurising work of Clive Barker and Keith Johnstone. Pardo suggests that the 'listening' actor, responsive to, and respectful of the material world, might be described as 'depressive'. He re-evaluates the term 'depressive' with reference to the work of Julia Kristeva.¹¹ The 'depressive position' is not only a workshop tool to 'de-pressurise' the actor, but a valuable, continuing alternative to the conventional modes of being for actors. These modes include the archetypes of

the 'child', the '*puer*' (young boy) and 'drama' itself. According to Pardo, all three serve the idea of '*imagination as surprise*':

Their emphasis is on 'over-taking' the present (the literal meaning of 'surprise'), and as such, they turn their dynamics constantly to the future. They are actors of the future, anticipating, original, unpredictable, wonderful, but too pervasive and shallow.

(Pardo 1988: 167)

The 'child' represents the drive of curiosity; the '*puer*' represents invention and the search for newness and change; the archetype of 'drama' craves 'contrasts, scandals, catastrophes to sustain itself on intensity alone'.

Receptivity to objects (Pardo)

In the work of Enrique Pardo 'presence' is associated with receptivity and 'respect for *the object world*'. He suggests that depression 'is a tool to establish a dialogue with the object-world, beyond personal psychology and its expressivity' (Pardo 1988: 170). Conversely, learning to interact with the object-world allows actors to understand the quality of the 'depressive sensibility':

The observation of an actor dealing with nothing other than an object is probably the most revealing exercise for this kind of sensibility. Usually it will be a large and abstract object, too large to control cleverly, like a large piece of material, or cardboard, or a metal coil reel, or a set of bamboo sticks, etc. Respectful handling of such an object (and not 'manipulating' it) will bring out its autonomous movements and sensual qualities, its 'will' and caprice. [...] 'Thus without words or scenario, the actor has only the inherent metaphorical potentialities of the object to develop as 'text'. [...] The emotion one encounters in these exercises comes from dealing with 'otherness', what I have called 'objective imagination'

(Pardo 1988: 170-1)

Just as the actor in the 'following' exercise described above, followed the leader's impulses without reproducing the movement exactly, the actor here follows the

object's impulses – the movement potential that is specific to each material or object.

Deleuze and Guattari link the activity of 'following' to a particular mode of 'work', that practised by the artisan. The artisan who planes a plank of wood 'follows the wood, the fibers of the wood'. But, Deleuze and Guattari continue,

artisans are obliged to follow in another way as well, in other words, to go find the wood where it lies, and to find the wood with the right kind of fibers. [...] We will therefore define the artisan as one who is determined in such a way as to follow a flow of matter, a *machinic phylum*. The artisan is the itinerant, the ambulant. To follow the flow of matter is to itinerate, to ambulate. It is intuition in action.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 409)

I suggest that the 'following' attitude defined for the actor by Pardo can be linked to the artisanal mode of work, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari. This particular mode of stage presence can therefore also be linked to a wider debate about work and the physical transformation of the world.

If, as I have argued, absorption in an object can give access to a quality of unselfconscious, attentive 'presence', are all objects equally suitable? If this attitude to the world is described as 'artisanal', how can humans relate to mass-produced objects, electronic devices or even industrial machinery in the artisanal mode? In classical economic analysis, the industrial mode of production is distinguished from artisanal manufacture, as in Hegel's description of a pin factory, which shows the transition between these two modes: 'Labor becomes deader as it becomes the labor of machines; the aptitude of the individual shrinks immeasurably and the consciousness of the factory worker declines to a state of utter apathy' (Asendorf 1993: 2). Mechanisation, and the division of labour it entails,

causes the relation between the producers and things to lose its basis in repetitive experience, continuity, and an overview of the entire process of production. The new relation that ensues, one already evident in the workshop, is based on partial experience. The essential characteristic of this mode of labor is the temporal and

spatial separation of individual work steps from one another. The sequential character of the work process, the 'and then', disappears - what follows is always the same.

(Asendorf 1993: 3)

Artisanal work depends upon a continuity of experience. Walter Benjamin distinguishes between two kinds of 'experience', *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. *Erfahrung* is a quality of experience which balances continuity and variation, exemplified by storytelling. The ability to tell stories is linked by Benjamin to artisanal work: 'If peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university'. He asserts that 'an orientation toward practical interests is characteristic of many born storytellers' (Benjamin 1970: 85-6). If the art of repeating stories is being lost it is 'because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself.' (Benjamin 1970: 91) *Erfahrung* disappears under the pressure of the production line - it is replaced by shock experience, the discontinuous experience called *Erlebnis*.

The individual's relationship to the machine seems not to require the operation of consciousness, and yet it is quite different from the unselfconscious 'following' attitude of artisanal work. Although 'stage presence' is an issue specific to actors, the acting exercises which deal with it present theories of the human relation to the material world, theories of work, spontaneity and experience. For Hagen, the material world offers a repertoire of experiences, which the individual has little power to transform. The concept of 'work' no longer has a concrete meaning. John Wright, on the other hand, makes the human attempts to

transform the meaning of objects part of the story, the content of the drama: meaning-making becomes a concrete process, giving the illusion that meaning is infinitely variable, and that there are no stereotypical associations of object and meaning. Finally, Pardo offers an artisanal approach to the world. The 'artisanal mode' may be pre-industrial in terms of a history of production techniques, but it is still available as a mode of being. It is a vital counter to the post-Enlightenment, 'rational' attitude to the material world, which sees nature, animate and inanimate, as raw material to be exploited.

¹ As, for example, in the work of Forced Entertainment.

² The methodology of *An Actor Prepares* was intended to counter the lazy employment of such techniques with the criteria of 'emotional truth'. In *Building A Character*, Stanislavski felt obliged to redress the balance and consider the stage techniques which he had taken for granted.

³ This can be compared to the approach to sound and music proposed by John Cage. In an interview reprinted in *The Exact Change Yearbook*, Cage explains that he learnt to tolerate amplified music and other 'noise pollution' by considering all the sounds he heard to be elements of his own composition.

⁴ Hagen comments melodramatically on the 'danger' of exposing immature actors to the great roles too early.

⁵ Bains argues that object exercises are a foundation for all types of drama. Hagen's method is 'organic', based on 'expressing yourself truthfully', and the actor needs to address 'absolutely the same questions whether you're doing Chekhov or Richard III or whatever' (in conversation, 27/1/98). In rehearsals for the play *Road* at Queen Margaret College, which includes many speeches addressed to the audience, actors were discouraged from talking about their characters in the 3rd person, and finally succeeded in creating a 'fourth wall' performance even in a 'promenade' setting.

⁶ See Richard Hornby, *The End of Acting* (1992). Philip Zarrilli quotes part of Hornby's polemic against the 'method': it is a

mimetic theory, reflecting the influence of realism that prevailed in the theatre during Stanislavsky's early years, but has been adapted to suit the needs of a highly individualist, capitalist society. The result generally ignores Stanislavsky's later work, specifically the 'Method of Physical Action', which is why I prefer to call it Strasbergian rather than Stanislavskian. (Zarrilli 1995: 223).

⁷ See Bert O. States 1985.

⁸ A nice example of the literal 'endowment' of a commodity with physical properties is given in the urban myth which reports that, to standardise the McDonald's 'Fillet O' Fish', the fillet is steamed to remove its 'fishy taste' (which is variable), with a measured quantity of 'fish flavouring' added in the mayonnaise. More troubling still has been the introduction of chocolate-flavoured frozen broccoli and carrots. Both chocolate and carrots contain sugars which humans are naturally disposed to like, but the use of an artificial flavour reduces the likelihood that children will learn to appreciate the natural flavour of the vegetable.

⁹ As Deleuze and Guattari write: 'following is not at all the same thing as reproducing'. Reproducing implies the permanence of a fixed point of view that is external to what is reproduced' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 372). A director, having a viewpoint external to the stage, might reproduce an image by using actors' bodies to create a *tableau vivant*; actors working without external direction have to respond to the stimulus but cannot reproduce it exactly.

¹⁰ See 'The Stumbling Block its Index' by Brian Catling in *Conductors of Chaos* ed. Iain Sinclair (1996). The Stumbling Block is not a coffer, disguised by a wig of artifice. It cannot offer erudition or substitute lame emotions with its materiality. There is some recognition between it and other objects that attempt to trough or synthesize a human essence, but it is always a shallow

exchange. The block expands in its sturdy isolation, it will not be groomed for curation; the matted waxen direction cannot be combed. (Sinclair 1996: 15)

¹¹ See *Soleil Noir: Dépression et Mélancolie* (1989).

SECTION THREE: THE OBJECT AS A TEXT

Objects which propose 'extra-daily' movement or emotion in training and rehearsal, and disappear in performance

When an object is used in a simple, concrete way -- as in the exercises described above -- the particularity of the object is irrelevant. The ball used as a tool of interaction can be a football, tennis ball or a ball of scrunched-up paper held together with sticky tape; the furniture and props Stanislavski used to make the student actors feel at home on stage were taken at random from the theatre's store-room. The object is not treated as a specific, unique 'text', but as an interchangeable metonym of 'reality'.

The situation changes when an actor 'listens' to a particular object, paying attention to its specific characteristics. An object 'works' on an actor or spectator by virtue of its specific form, colour, weight etc. These qualities are never neutral facts; they embody human labour, imagination and habits in concrete form, and so can affect both emotions and physical movement. Therefore 'listening' to material qualities always leads the actor beyond the material level, whether it is to abstract movement, image-metaphor or psychological realism. As Andrew Benjamin puts it, matter is always 'given with meaning'. It is important to note that any ordinary object can function in this way, like an art object, if the art work is re-defined, as Benjamin suggests, according to the work it does on the actor, or spectator: 'art work is not a description of an object at rest. On the contrary art work is the work -- the action -- proper to art' (Benjamin 1994:7).

In the following exercises, 'listening' to an object prompts extra-daily movement (Julia Varley, John Wright), provides imaginative access to historical and social background (Stanislavski, Brecht), or triggers extra-daily emotion (Strasberg, Hagen). My categories reflect the conventional divide between 'movement' and 'acting', but the section concludes with the work of Michael Chekhov, who demonstrates the inseparability of the two aspects of the actor's work. Chekhov, like William James, held that emotion was produced by movement. He developed a series of exercises which organised kinaesthetic responses to the material world as a system for training and expressing the emotions. Importantly, in all the exercises in this section, the object acts as a 'text' which prompts certain kinds of movement or emotion, but may itself then disappear.

The book (Julia Varley)

Julia Varley is a member of the Odin Theatre, based in Holstebro, Denmark, led by Eugenio Barba. Varley was one of the 'second generation' of actors to join the company. After being inducted into the training exercises which were developed collectively by the Odin actors, actors new to the company develop individual exercises which they pursue for as long as they are useful:

Members of the Odin have trained regularly, six days a week, since the company was formed, and over the years the training has undergone many changes. At times it has been physically demanding and rigorous, lasting between eight and ten hours per day for months on end. At other times it has been much less intense, and for periods some actors have not trained at all.

(Watson 1993: 130)

These training exercises, exploring different qualities of movement, rhythm etc, are also used as the basis for improvisation and, eventually, performances. (The

influence of Meyerhold on Grotowski and Barba can be detected in this progression.) Roberta Carreri describes the training as 'improvisation structured by the application of principles' (Watson 1993: 135). Watson gives a description of a training session, as it appears to an observer:

Actress 1 is sitting in a deck chair. She moves her right arm across her body, then her left arm. She moves her head from right to left, then up and down. All actions are slow, precise and punctuated with a brief pause. She sits up in the deck chair, she sits back, she sits up again, then repeats this up and down action several more times.

The work is not at all athletic, and it is difficult to perceive the purpose of the small adjustments. Watson afterwards discovered some of the principles the actress was exploring that day. They included: 'moving with one part of the body at a time, leading all movement with the eyes, and segmenting various sections of the body.' The apparently haphazard movements 'were, in fact, movements strictly monitored by adherence to consciously chosen principles' (Watson 1993: 135). In the descriptions of the Odin's work there is an important definition of a particular form of improvisation, involving free play within constraints. During Varley's first year at Odin Teatret, she felt that 'the training, improvisations, and performance belonged to separate worlds' (Varley 1995: 170), but gradually she understood how they were integrated.

The actors of Odin uses various types of stimulus for improvisation exercises, including physical objects. Varley describes how she has

built sequences of actions starting from the verbs of a text, from how I could sit in a chair, from the opposition between eyes and head, from walking on stepping stones in a river, from the impudence of being young, from ten ways of holding a handbag, or infinite ways of using a handkerchief.

(Varley 1995: 171)

She describes the process of responding to a material object in an improvisation exploring 'the book', and the nature of 'paper':

whatever a piece of paper could do -- through its noise, form, resistance, quantity, direction -- was translated into a reaction of mine. The paper which was torn, folded, made into a ball, flapped, eaten; the paper used to blow through, to dry, to cut, became the point of reference to create a sequence of actions. [...] [T]he actions were a direct reaction to the information I received from the paper

(Varley 1995: 170)

Another example of a performance developed through this devising process is Odin actor Roberta Carreri's 'autobiography with a silk scarf', a performance which combines movement, text and song, a 'dance' with a large scarf. The scarf acts as a 'text' in two respects: it evokes specific autobiographical incidents for the performer which are presented indirectly through associated songs or rhymes, but it also proposes an abstract movement score through which these isolated incidents can be linked and organised as communicable experience.¹

Shoe Swap (John Wright)

John Wright is a director, and a teacher at Middlesex University. He uses shoes, wigs and masks in 'physical theatre' workshops to lead actors towards new ways of moving, arguing that rhythm and gait, individual as faces, can be the basis of characterisation: 'We can generally recognise who is coming into the house by the rhythm of their movements. If you know the person well you can recognise what mood they are in or even what they are wearing.'

Participants remove their shoes and place them in the centre of the room. They choose a shoe -- that more or less fits -- from a different pair, and walk around the room, exploring the kind of movement suggested or demanded by the shoe, according to whether it is narrow or wide, flat or high-heeled, hard or soft-soled etc. They play with the idea that the shoe has 'a life of its own': while the actor attempts to walk round the room normally, the shoe shoots off in another

direction, stays stuck to the floor, or moves in its own tempo or rhythm, dragging the rest of the body with it.

In a variation on this exercise, two or three actors are seated facing the rest of the group. With their eyes shut, their own shoes are removed and replaced with another pair. One by one they stand up (still with eyes closed) and move around the chair. Wright speaks to them, and they respond in character, according to the sensations provoked by the shoes. It is striking how powerful an imaginative stimulus this appears to be. The strange shoes act on the body of the actor directly, by shifting the centre of gravity, the alignment of the bone structure, the use of muscles, the points of pressure, and indirectly, through the cultural associations of the design and material properties of the shoes, such as their hardness, springiness, tension, warmth etc.

As was argued in the previous section, objects and performer are in 'dialogue' in even the most straightforward interactions. Shoes and clothes have a particularly intimate connection with the actor's body. The actor Beryl Reid has said that she begins work on a character by finding the right pair of shoes, and the rest of her characterisation follows. Uta Hagen's exercises with clothing, such as 'Aspects of Self', develop the actor's awareness of how clothes influence mood and determine movement.

Aspects of Self (Uta Hagen)

First year students at Queen Margaret College showed their work on this exercise, which involves changing from one outfit to another, and showing the resulting change in mood. One changed from heavy clothes and waterproof jacket

into a pair of baggy shorts; another changed into her pyjamas; a third put on a newly purchased shirt. After each scene, Lynn Bains asked the rest of the class to analyse the performance, directing the class through questions such as 'How did the yellow shirt make him feel?', initiating general discussion about the effect of clothes on mood, and asking the performer how comfortable he or she had felt on stage. Students commented on how -- through repeating the exercise over several weeks -- they were becoming increasingly confident about undressing in front of their classmates. The emphasis of the exercise is on improving observation skills, rather than creating 'extra-daily' movement. Because the audience cannot predict the personal associations attached to a particular garment, the performers are required to communicate clearly, and the audience to observe carefully -- making it an effective basic acting exercise.

Students use their own clothes in this exercise, and therefore the transformations the garments effect are less exaggerated than the grotesque walks generated by Wright's exercise -- more appropriate to the realistic theatre than physical theatre. When Hagen's method is encountered through her books, it appears to offer acting students a very narrow range of experience; students draw only on their own material, both emotionally and literally -- bringing shopping bags of their own props to the acting studio. The risk must be that the world of the play is reduced to the world of the performer and real differences -- between actor and character, between one country and another, between a fictional setting and the actor's 'present' -- are erased. In practice, however, Lynn Bains noted and approved moments in which the students' behaviour was surprising, even 'unnatural' -- an outburst of anger, an extended pause. She warned the class about

the dangers of referring only to their own behaviour: 'something that people coming out of Hagen do too much is to say - "That's not what *I* would do" -- because so much comes out of observation of yourself.' Rather, students should ask "what would the *character* do?" Bains offered a valuable corrective to Hagen's generalisations -- an example of how written exercises and methodologies receive new inflections and re-interpretations as they are transmitted by teachers.²

Both Stanislavski and Brecht are interested in the way the object gives access to a world beyond the actor's own experience. Stanislavski wrote, as quoted earlier, that 'any picture, statue, photograph of a friend, or object in a museum, is inanimate, yet it contains some part of the life of the artist who created it. (Stanislavski 1936:195) Brecht's appreciation of the meaning and history embedded in objects accompanies his understanding of the work the actor does in selecting appropriate props:

As the man who grows millet will choose
The heaviest grain to plant in his
Experimental plot, and as the poet
Searches for words that are fit,
So too does she select with equal care
The properties her characters possess.

from 'Weigel's Props'
(Brecht 1961: 22)

The objects are understood to be entirely specific, not generic:

Impossible to mistake
The working woman's much-used bag
Crammed with her son's leaflets
For the one that is filled with the change
Of the sharp-tempered follower of battles.

There is a friendly association between Brecht's sense of the past in objects and Walter Benjamin's sense of the past as

somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us), though we

have no idea which one it is. As for that object, it depends entirely on chance whether we come upon it before we die or whether we never encounter it.
(Benjamin 1970: 160)

In writing about the storyteller, Benjamin makes a revealing analogy with craft work: 'traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel' (Benjamin 1970: 91) Brecht too appreciates hand-made objects. In a world of mass-production this can seem nostalgic. However, he seems to appreciate the slow involuntary changes wrought by daily use as much as the deliberate shaping of an object: 'The copper pots with their dents and flattened edges/The knives and forks whose wooden handles/Have been worn away by many hands: such forms/Seemed to me the noblest.' (Willett 1984: 139) Here, it is everyday use, rather than production, which dignifies the object. Brecht does not celebrate the production-line with the Futurists, for if production is totally mechanised, only 'wear and tear' remain as expressions of human practices, and Brecht does not accept that this is the only sphere of concrete expression remaining. There is a utopian impulse in Brecht's delight in expressive objects in the theatre; despite his awareness of the disappearance of artisanal labour, he celebrates non-specialised workers, who are 'good with their hands'.³

The prop-maker provides an interesting example of this impulse at work. The prop-maker works, like an artist, with the material properties of objects, adding 'distress' or decoration, so that a newly-made object 'works' just like an authentic object. In an image that recalls Benjamin's world-shaping storyteller, Brecht praises the designer Caspar Neher:

there is no building of his, no yard or workshop or garden, that does not also bear the fingerprints, as it were, of the people who built it or who lived there. He makes visible the manual skills and knowledge of the builders and the ways of living of the inhabitants.

(Willett 1984: 139)

What distinguishes the maker from the user who accidentally shapes an object, is this responsibility to 'make visible' the imagined use, so that it can work on the spectator. The actor has the same responsibility, not only to 'choose', but to 'make visible' the object's meaning, the history embedded in it. The gestures of practice – knowing *how* to do something, *how* to use a tool – have to be known kinesthetically by the actor. This is why Weigel is described as choosing her props both with her 'knowing eyes' and with her 'Net-making bread-baking/Soup-cooking hands/At home with reality.'

Psychological Gesture (Michael Chekhov, as demonstrated by Felicity Mason)

Michael Chekhov was an actor who worked with Stanislavski at the Moscow Arts Theatre, before moving to Britain and then the United States. His work as a teacher of acting follows another route from Stanislavski's teaching: travelling in the opposite direction from Lee Strasberg and the 'Method' teachers, and taking his starting point in Stanislavski's later work on a 'method of physical actions'.

Felicity Mason was an acting student at the Old Vic School under Saint-Denis, before studying with Chekhov at Dartington and in New York. She recalls her surprise at Chekhov's idea that a physical gesture could -- in itself -- provoke emotion, having been taught that acting was a matter of natural talent controlled by the intellect. She defines Chekhov's concept of the Psychological Gestures as a 'physical movement which makes you feel something' (Mason 1993).

Mason demonstrated Chekhov exercises on characterisation using three contrasting objects: a scarf, a ball and a stick. 'The actor takes each one in turn and handles it, exploring its movement qualities -- 'first of all, take in the *quality* of the object' -- and then moves about the room, holding the object, reflecting the quality of the object in his movement -- 'now you're a *ball-type* person, bouncy and rubbery [...] now you're *stick-like*, a rather strong person, but rigid...' These three objects provide sensory experience of three contrasting sets of material properties: the scarf -- lightness and fluidity; the ball -- resistance and springiness; the stick -- rigidity and brittleness. It is important that the student has sensory experience of the real objects. I have found it useful to work with eyes shut to reduce the influence of pre-existing cultural associations (for example, when perceived visually, a silk scarf brings associations of summer, luxury, seduction, India etc.). The second stage of this work is to re-create the qualities in the body without touching the object.

The scarf, ball and stick provide an introduction to Chekhov's work. However, four different 'movement qualities' or kinds of interaction with the material world are taken as co-ordinates for development: *moulding, floating, flying and radiating*. These are based on interaction with archetypal material substances, rather than specific objects. The performer creates these 'movement qualities' through the imaginative recreation of the sensory experience of earth, water, air and fire. These are the 'primary colours' of movement which can be contrasted or combined in performance. The internal 'direction' to 'mould' or 'float' may produce minimal outward signs, but thinking of a particular 'quality' will radically transform the tempo and energy of a gesture or posture. It can be used to define

character, or to direct choral movement -- a group of actors may perform various activities on stage, and be unified by the fact that they are all 'moulding'. 'Radiating' in particular, provides a royal road to the elusive quality of 'presence' -- it can be 'turned on' for a star entrance -- but, being a royal road, is broad and somewhat crude, and can obscure more subtle acting.

The actor works through a series of exercises using the 'movement qualities': exploring one quality at a time while walking, sitting or performing other simple activities; varying the 'volume' of the movement quality on a scale of one to ten; switching abruptly or gradually from one quality to another; combining two or more qualities over a period of time to create dramatic development, or across different parts of the body to create character (e.g. head and shoulders flying with legs moulding). The qualities are also transmitted to everyday objects. Chekhov argues that this work has positive repercussions on all 'everyday' uses of props:

When coming in contact with different objects, try to pour your strength into them, to fill them with your power. This will develop your ability to handle the objects (and props on the stage) with utmost skill and ease.

(Chekhov 1953: 9)

A paper cup which is moved with the quality of 'moulding' appears far heavier than it is. The mastery of this physical illusion is fundamental to puppetry, but it might also provide a practical route to the understanding of emotional 'endowment'.

There is an obvious comparison between Chekhov's four 'qualities' of movement and the four 'elements' (earth, water, fire and wind) which Lecoq uses in first year movement work. Lecoq too explores the qualities of the elements in abstract movement, and then transfers these qualities to improvised scenes; both

Lecoq and Chekhov offer ways of amplifying and refining gesture. Chekhov approaches movement from the point of view of the sensual actor, appealing to the physical memory of a response to the elements: when 'moulding' the actor imagines herself moving in a resistant medium without attempting to *show* this. Lecoq approaches the elements from a mental conception which seems harder to translate into movement at first. Both systems bear a relation to Laban's more detailed system of analysis of the qualities of movement (sustained/direct, light/heavy, etc.). Chekhov and Lecoq were both interested in the movement analyses of Delsarte and Dalcroze: Chekhov through Volkonsky, Laban and Kurt Joos (all at Dartington College in the 1930s); Lecoq through Copeau and Decroux.

Chekhov and Lecoq make their systems of movement analysis accessible by referring to material substances which record and provoke particular sensations. They choose to work with archetypal elements, rather than the specific personal objects that Strasberg and Hagen use, and this distinction relates to a fundamental difference in their conceptions of acting. Chekhov did not accept Stanislavsky's concept of emotional memory, which was the cornerstone of Strasberg's method. Chekhov appealed 'not to memories of everyday life, but to the subconscious and to the whole of human nature.' (Senelick 1992: 149) Strasberg and Hagen value the specific object as a 'personal text', and see the actor's job as involving the development of their sensitivity to the individual, specific feelings evoked by that object.

The difference between these two approaches can be seen in the discussion between Bud Beyer, an American acting teacher who trained with Decroux, and the writer Eva Mekler. Mekler suggests that an exercise he has described 'sounds

very much like classic sensory work' (i.e. Strasbergian). Beyer reveals his affinity with the approaches of John Wright and Michael Chekhov in the following description of his approach:

Yes, in a way it is. But the emphasis is different. I also ask students to allow the object they are creating to find them. For instance, I will try to make the point that any object we pick up causes in us a total kind of response. If you pick up a piece of delicate crystal, your whole body takes on the sense of that object as you touch it. It's not just the mechanical handling of the object in space, but its effect on the body that is important to focus on.

(Mekler 1987: 321)

For Chekhov, as for Beyer, material objects are repositories of shared kinetic responses, rather than interior, singular memories. Where Hagen uses objects to help actors look inwards in self-observation, Chekhov calls for inward, mental searching for an image, but aims to produce an archetypal result:

Everyday gestures are unable to stir our will because they are too limited, too weak and particularised. They do not occupy our whole body, psychology and soul, whereas the Psychological Gesture, as an archetype, takes possession of them entirely.

(Chekhov 1953: 79)

In these exercises, the object disappears. The experience of the object is embedded in a movement as it disappears in concrete reality.

¹ Centre for Performance Research, Aberystwyth, Easter 97.

² Bains' emphasis on the text as source accords with Alice Spivak's description of Hagen's priorities in teaching (Mekler 1987).

³ See Michel de Certeau (1984) for a discussion of the way in which tools are marked by use. In a reconstructed village in Vermont, the display 'includes innumerable familiar objects, polished, deformed, or made more beautiful by long use; everywhere there are as well the marks of the active hands and laboring or patient bodies for which these things composed the daily circuits' (Certeau 1984: 21).

SECTION FOUR: TOWARDS PERFORMANCE

Objects treated as texts, remaining in performance as images

The previous section discussed how the potential of an object can give actors prompts or scores for movement or emotion. Objects can also be seen as embodying complex stories, capable of being 'read' to devise dramatic action, rather than as keys to acting. In these exercises, unlike those in the previous section, it is the object which 'performs'. In Varley's paper improvisation, the body performs, inspired by the object; in object improvisation, in contrast, the object moves, and the movement of the manipulator's body is ancillary, and not the focus of the audience's attention. A scale of human-object relationships could be constructed which runs from a very rudimentary human-object dialogue, in which the human pays attention to the properties of an object only in order to make use of it, through to a classical model of puppetry, in which the human is invisible and the object takes centre stage. Half-way between these extremities is the model of the human-object relationship I discuss in this section. Here the actor and object have equal status, and the spectator's attention may shift between performer and object, or consider the shifting relationship between them. 'Listening to the object' in this work, actors have to combine the functions of a human 'body' at the service of an inanimate object, a 'performer' who may interact with the object, and a 'director' who has to be receptive to the stage image being created: these functions are combined in the revived concept of the 'devising' actor.

Portable Architecture (Jacques Lecoq)

Lecoq occasionally works jointly with actors and architectural students, to explore the movement potential of structures and the process of following the inclinations of an inanimate object. Students build large 'portable structures' – abstract forms made of paper, flexible rods, cardboard tubes, coloured spheres etc. The constructions are sculptural, expressive forms, and each one is different – in the rhythm of the forms, their density, their colours and textures.

In the second stage of the workshop, the forms are moved around the studio by the students. They are encouraged to allow the form to dictate the movement, and to avoid trying to express the meaning of the sculpture: one structure is streamlined and swoops through the air; another has a very high centre of gravity, and tends to topple over; a third is inclined to spiral through the space. The operator simply follows the inclination of the structure, running, stretching or leaning as it demands. A simple title – such as 'Barcelona', or 'Cowboys' – which is provided by the maker, can add an extra dimension for the spectator.

The 'portable structures' provide a more abstract 'text' object than the shoes or clothes used in John Wright's *Shoe Swap* exercise; Lecoq describes the work with portable structures as an abstract continuation of mask work. In all cases (whether using masks, costumes or portable architecture), character or feeling has been sublimated in a concrete object. To express or release this character or feeling in dramatic movement, the operator need only *follow* the directions proposed by the object. According to Lecoq,

a theatre mask contains a more or less expressive character that refers to the human face which it hides behind another – larval, stylised, or even symbolic. But the mask is also a form, which acts in space like a vehicle, which moves according to the directions which it itself suggests. It turns, it corners, like a real tool, following its own planes, lines, points and masses.

(Lecoq 1987: 121)

In a similar way, the portable structures 'organise space in the rhythms which give them life'. They are used in movement training to explore abstract themes, rather than anecdotal material.

They are played with like masks, carried on the body or manipulated at arms-length, moving in space according to their signs and their forces. They should not be used like marionettes in which you can imagine that you recognise a human figure with eyes, a mouth... and from which arise conflicts which are situations from our daily life.

(Lecoq 1987: 121)

Lecoq suggests that this kind of playing might have wider applications in theatre, leading to interesting, non-literal use of everyday objects: 'The portable structures make us discover the 'play' in various objects which, taken out of the utilitarian function for which they were built, take on another meaning' (Lecoq 1987: 121). This is one of the reasons why learning about object manipulation is not only useful for actors who might be asked to use puppets, and is not just a peripheral 'skill among others', like acrobatics or historical dance, jostling for a position in a crowded drama-school timetable. Many teachers, like Michael Chekhov, explicitly connect the work done in abstract 'object exercises' and the handling of props on stage.

A similar progression from 'play', exploring the material characteristics of objects to 'making plays' with objects is seen in the teaching of object animators such as Stephen Tiplady and Julian Crouch. Although manufactured objects are invested with meaning through a complex process involving dozens of different people (designers, builders, publicists etc.), Lecoq's principles for working with portable structures can also be applied to mass-produced objects: attention to the

form, texture and weight of objects will propose countless non-literal ways of using an object to the performer.

Newspaper animation and object animation (Steve Tiplady and Julian Crouch)

The following sequence of activities is used in the training of puppeteers, developing the performer's sensitivity to the physical properties of materials and objects. Raw materials such as newspaper, cloth, tinfoil, paper or plastic can be used as well as household or other 'everyday' objects. I will describe the process of improvised animation as it was applied to newspaper, because this is a simple, common material, and because, being very far removed from the realistically rendered marionettes that are often meant when 'puppets' are discussed, it demonstrates the principles of object animation particularly clearly. However, the same approach can be taken with any object.

Participants spread a sheet of newspaper on the floor in front of them, and, with eyes closed, place their hands flat on the paper. Sliding, crumpling or lifting the newspaper, they explore its 'movement potential' – the ways in which it tends to move. They note the changes in the texture and physical characteristics of the newspaper as it is crumpled, compressed and unfolded again. After being worked, the paper becomes a quite different material, changing from a crisp, fresh sheet to crumpled rag. Participants select one kind of movement from those they have discovered, and repeat and refine it, giving it a name that can be descriptive ('quivering', 'rolling', 'flapping') or associative. They then search for the opposite 'movement quality' – if the first quality is light and fluttering, can the paper also move heavily and slowly? Each movement is rehearsed at different levels of

intensity, from 1-10 along an imagined scale, as in Michael Chekhov's work on the actor's movement qualities. Finally, participants are asked to imagine an 'event' which causes the transition from one movement quality to another. The 'event' is named, and the whole sequence is rehearsed. When the sequence is presented to the whole group, with the name of the event standing as a 'title', it becomes a miniature drama, which presents a simple dramatic sequence involving transformation, and contrast of pace or mood.

The most important aspect of this approach to objects is the double emphasis on 'listening' to the inherent material properties of the object (that is, analysing these properties through tactile perception) and 'following' the object's inclinations (that is, manipulating the object in such a way as to activate and display its movement potential). This work parallels Lecoq's approach to the 'portable structures', as well as Enrique Pardo's 'depressive' approach to the object, described above in Section Two. Pardo works with large, abstract objects - 'too large to control cleverly, like a large piece of material, or cardboard, or a metal coil reel, or a set of bamboo sticks, etc.' Like the animation teachers, he encourages 'respectful handling' of the object, aiming to 'bring out its autonomous movements and sensual qualities, its "will" and "caprice"' (Pardo 1988: 170-1). Puppet theatre in general, and particularly when created by visual artists who see themselves as 'animating sculpture', often explores the specific characteristics of materials, and how these dictate movement:

Tin, cloth, wood, plastic, willow-cane - every one of these materials has its own peculiarities, and that is why Craig, in *Puppets and Poets*, has rightly remarked: 'I mean you don't move it, you let it move itself; that's the art.'

(Jurkowski 1967: 26)

Although 'letting it move itself' (or, the subtle perception of and reaction to an object's capacities and properties so that it *appears* to move itself) is crucial for the performer, it is balanced by the manipulation of illusion, which gives objects properties they do not have.

In the object animation workshops, participants also learn to 'transmit' or 'give' various kinds of movement to objects. For example, they may learn Michael Chekhov's four qualities (moulding, floating, flying and radiating) as performers, and then attempt to transmit these distinct qualities to a newspaper. The imagined sensation of resistance or support in the air creates a corresponding quality in the performer's body. This can be transmitted to the newspaper, which then moves as if it has mass and weight, belying the physical facts. Penny Francis describes this 'transfer of energy' as the first principle of animation.

These movement studies are not intended to produce recognisable human or animal 'characters'; the movement is abstract. Yet, once the paper begins to crumple, it takes on volume and an apparent relationship with gravity: it becomes a low, creeping creature, or an elongated figure, perhaps with a more compact area where the hand of the manipulator has crushed the paper, which we read as a 'head'. If this 'head' moves from left to right while the 'body' is held down to the ground, we read it as a face, looking at us, the audience. Minimal movement and rudimentary forms are interpreted by an audience as signs of 'life' – as Crouch insisted, 'we *want* to believe'. Some movement studies are interesting at a purely abstract level, demonstrating changes in tempo and movement quality, while others represent mood, or character. They can communicate powerful emotion: for example, in one memorable drama, a newspaper figure repeatedly rose into the

air and then swooped to the ground, crashing heavily. The rhythm and action were reminiscent of the work of one of the couples in Pina Bausch's *Café Muller*: they attempted a classically romantic pose, with the woman lifted in her partner's arms, but kept failing, and trying again. In this case, the particular movement of the newspaper – flying and crashing – is not within human possibilities, but the feeling evoked – a sequence of aspiration and frustration – is.

Julian Crouch – a designer and co-director of Improbable Theatre – explained that he became interested in the 'usability' factor, the creative potential in objects when the financial and time constraints on a particular production led to him adopting a more fluid role as a designer, reducing his concern with perfection and detail, and giving the performers a greater responsibility for the creation of meaning.¹

The work of transferring human or animal movement qualities to inanimate objects leads directly to 'animation', but it is also useful for performers who do not intend to work with puppets. Firstly, by developing a tactile and sculptural awareness of the material world in actors who may be more accustomed to paying attention to their own heads and bodies, the exercises have beneficial effects on the realistic, 'everyday' use of props.² Secondly, the creation of the illusion of independent life, and movement subject to the laws of force and gravity, in an inanimate object requires the constant practice of a range of activities which are highly useful for the actor: the observation and analysis of the laws governing movement, human and animal gaits; the ability to direct the focus of attention on stage accurately and strongly; concentration and coordination of physical and mental tasks. Finally, the miniature dramas of object animation can be used to

illustrate the principles of improvisation and dramaturgy in a simple, clarified form. Like Meyerhold's Biomechanical *études*, the three stages of the miniature drama embody a basic dramatic structure, with a definite beginning, middle and end: a state or quality is established (by movement), an event occurs which transforms the state to its opposite, the new state is developed and drawn to a conclusion. A class can discuss fundamental issues of performance and dramaturgy, comparing the performer's perception with the audience's experience. One might look at *pacing* (was the movement sufficiently developed, or held for long enough? did the improvisation become boring at any point?), *structure* (was the transition clear? were the opposed qualities well differentiated?), and *meaning* (what did the audience see? how did this relate to the title?). For the actor, this work on basic dramatic structures is equivalent to a poet's essaying of established poetic forms – both involve learning a structure from the inside, not just as 'reader' but as 'writer'. Anyone who does this, becomes a better 'reader' of structures and their multiple variations, on the large scale and in the smallest detail, in 'reading' both the overarching structure of an existing play; and the dramatic structure of a scene, an exchange, or a single phrase.

Object improvisation

When two objects meet – whether it is two sheets of 'animated' newspaper or an Anglepoise lamp and a cheese grater – the issues raised are close to the concerns of 'live' performers. The encounter between animated objects is an excellent means of teaching the principles of improvisation. These have been well described by Keith Johnstone, in his book *Impro*. He argues that improvisation

requires that performers relinquish their feelings of responsibility for a scene, and accept the 'offers' made by their partner, or the environment. The book suggests various ways to think of a scene, a story, or even a picture as growing automatically from its own first 'offers'. A simple example is the game in which players tell a story round a circle, a word at a time. The story 'tells itself: if someone begins by saying 'Once', the next players will inevitably say 'upon ... a ... time...', or 'there ... was ... a...' The 'rules of grammar' of both language and narrative (which all the players unconsciously share) practically dictate the tale, so long as the players don't plan ahead, or refuse the word that first comes to mind.' Meanwhile, any elements of 'content' which are introduced become 'promises' which the story 'wants' to fulfil - if a monster is mentioned, the listener wants the monster to eat someone, destroy a city or be vanquished by a hero...

Object animation is useful for teaching the principles of improvisation for several reasons. In many ways, newspaper figures and objects demonstrate the principles more clearly than human performers. In object improvisation, what might be called the 'raw material' of the scene (scenario, setting, characters) is precisely that: a heap of tangible stuff, formed to a greater or lesser degree. Therefore the actors' focus is directed to the characteristics and potential of the 'material', rather than their own skills and imaginative resources. And as two or more performers might have to manipulate a single sheet of cloth or paper, in order to create a puppet with articulated head and limbs, the work of improvisation is defined from the start as people 'making a scene' together. Beginners in improvisation (and in acting in general) are often so self-conscious that they ignore the other people on the stage, while more experienced actors can

conceal a lack of dialogue with a repertoire of mannerisms and clichés. Using objects makes it harder to avoid 'listening': animators have to be acutely aware of each other; they work together by breathing together.

Johnstone's concept of the 'offers' made by the raw material of a scene is also more easily analysed in object animation than in verbal improvisation. For example, if a box and a sheet of newspaper are to 'play a scene' together, there is a 'promise' that the newspaper will wrap the box, or will get inside the box. Because this 'promise' is 'on the table from the start, the performers have time to absorb and act upon it, whereas verbal 'promises' are often ignored, or not recognised until it is too late; because the 'promise' is embodied in the object's form, the performers can return to it at any time.

A recurring problem raised by the theories of acting and actor training has been the fact that the actor combines performer and instrument in one body. Meyerhold and Coquelin conceive of the actor as the synthesis of an instrument and its player ($A = A1 + A2$). This image of the body as an instrument has been criticised for reinforcing a false mind-body division. Eugenio Barba, for example, argues that the psycho-soma must be treated as a unity. He insists, 'my body is not an instrument - it is myself'. However, the model of the actor as instrument-player has more subtlety than Barba credits it with, for playing involves constant feedback - the player feels and hears the vibrations and the sound produced, and responds to them both emotionally and critically, adjusting the body. The players are influenced by the impressions received and build and correct the result - an audience for their own work. Puppet training involves listening 'from outside' - to the quality of the audience's attention. This kind of listening can never

substitute for an actor's internal attentiveness, but it is a useful second string, with an additional element of objectivity. An 'external awareness' gives actors more control over the signifying processes of their own bodies, and awareness of the workings of stylisation and symbolisation, of different levels of representation. For actors who are involved in devising theatre, this 'external eye', the sense of creating images for an audience, is crucial. Object improvisation allows actors to explore and enjoy this dualism. As performers cannot see the images they create when manipulating objects, they have to listen very attentively to the audience, in order to sense whether they have happened upon a form, or pattern of movement that can be 'read'. This acute yet subliminal awareness of the audience remains when the actor performs without an object.

The particular pedagogical value of object improvisation as compared to verbal improvisation, appears to lie in the function of the object as a medium which channels away the actor's personal fears (of embarrassment, self-revelation, failure etc.) and allows critical response to be introduced to the actor indirectly. Improvisation is essentially free and unrepeatable, and yet technical direction must be given if actors are to benefit from the process. How can these two aspects be integrated? Once an improvisation is finished, notes seem redundant, but if notes are given during a verbal improvisation they destroy the scene, and the performers are often unable to continue. Objects provide a means of channelling directorial criticism, making it easier to give and receive. Comments are externalised and depersonalised; technical direction can be given; direction can be given in mid-improvisation. As Phelim McDermot puts it 'You can say "Act better!" to a spoon - not that I'd ever say that to an actor - but you can say "Bend more this

way” etc., whereas if you say that to an actor it makes them freeze.’ Masks function in a similar way, although they often need to be addressed ‘in character’ e.g. “Excuse me, Captain, could you turn this way so we can see your face? Thank you.” The performer using an object, whether manipulated or worn on the face, appears to enjoy a divided attention which can focus on the object and the scene while listening and reacting to external comment. Direct feedback can be given to an actor and object while they are working, and actors gain an idea of how things look from the outside, of how their feelings communicate. ⁴ [move this to ‘freeze’ * and change font of all footnote superscripts] The performer does not feel personally criticised for not sustaining the performance, but feels a responsibility for the entertainment (in the broadest sense) of the audience, and a responsibility to the work, to the potential of the material. The manipulator learns to monitor the audience response, while the puppet keeps acting. And this is what experienced actors describe themselves doing on stage – thinking of technical elements while acting.

Towards performance: devising

In object animation exercises, as Enrique Pardo writes, ‘without words or scenario, the actor has only the inherent metaphorical potentialities of the object to develop as “text”’ (Pardo 1988: 170). Learning to recognise and play with the object’s meaning potential is vital. This allows actors to enrich or complicate the juxtaposition of objects and verbal text, opening up further meaning potential. How are objects and words brought together?

In the object animation exercises described above, the 'titling' of the movement qualities and of the transitional event introduces a narrative element, encouraging the audience to read the object improvisation as drama. If, further, a spoken text is juxtaposed with the object drama, both can be electrified by the encounter. The dynamic sequence of the object drama can highlight a recognised 'turning point' in the text, or enforce a change of mood or tempo; and the complexity and ambiguity of a text can steer object improvisation away from clichés.⁵

This work with text can be compared to Pardo's 'following' exercise, in which text is set against an unrelated movement score. However, Pardo also considers the deliberate juxtaposition of text and objects, as here:

For example, let us take an actor saying the word 'father'; next to him there is a clock. The academicians of boredom will watch intently how he allows/makes word and object meet. What metaphorical syntheses (images) are achieved through his presence? Presence becomes here the manifest intelligence of the image, a quality of *poiesis*. The word 'father' and the clock meet through the actor's body and voice. Does he carry the clock? shout at it? ignore it? turn it upside down? This requires presence of mind, a receptivity to what the image (clock + father) is saying - its metaphorical radiation.

(Pardo 1988: 168).

Pardo describes the actor's receptivity to the object world, and to the possible meanings of object-word combinations as metaphor-making activity. He invites actors to take on part of the responsibility for the stage image, that is, for dramaturgy. This synthesis of acting and directing responsibilities in what I will call the 'devising actor', has always been practised by the performers in popular theatre - in *commedia dell'arte* for example⁶. The 'devising actor' is capable of taking on different roles during the development of a production - designing, directing, writing, making props and set, and making music - all in collaboration with other members of the company.

Recently, the 'devising actor' has been re-evaluated by drama schools. In a recent book, several members of staff at major drama schools stressed the importance of preparing students to research and devise their own material, as this is a working method used by many Theatre-In-Education companies.⁷ RSAMD's new BA in Contemporary Theatre Practice (commencing September 1998) has been announced with the declaration that,

Theatre today is more than being on stage and learning lines. It's about creating new work through devising and collaboration. It's about bringing drama to new people and new places. It's about communication and imagination.

(RSAMD leaflet)⁸

The relation between the actor and the object is much more significant in this new job description. The change in drama courses reflects the collaborative working methods that have been long established among some of the small and medium-sized British touring companies.⁹ John Wright, who teaches on the Acting BA at Middlesex University, says he adopts the same approach to devising theatre with students and with the professional companies – such as Trestle Theatre Company and *Told by an Idiot* – he directs. The work is always developed out of workshop exercises, and often inspired by concrete objects: 'We often start off with putting a big heap of stuff in the middle of the room, and have objects all round while we're working'.¹⁰ Rehearsal work on a 'physical objective' which is opposed to the 'plot' elements of the scene may produce some 'real' actions which can be used in the production (the 'shoe swap' exercise shows how simple objects, like masks, can propose movement qualities to an actor), or a concrete object may inspire a story which becomes part of the text.¹¹ As Wright shows, objects can propose characters, narratives and gestures; the object is a text, embodied dramatic potential.

¹ In a series of improvised shows at Nottingham Playhouse, Crouch saw objects that he had designed used in totally unexpected ways – for example, a castle standing for a double-decker bus. However, in conventional theatre, although actors may sometimes choose their costumes, the selection and building of props is usually left to the designer, and actors often work with rehearsal props until late in the process. In a discussion with choreographers and architects at the CCA, Glasgow, the audience learnt that Bunty Matthias's company got their complicated 'giant steps/pyramids' set only for the technical rehearsal; on the other hand Jean-Pierre Perreault only begins creating a piece once the whole set, lighting plan and costumes are in place. The delay in working with 'real' props can lead to resentment on both sides: actors are forced to adapt quickly to a new weight or shape, and complain that the real prop is not as 'right' as the rehearsal prop; designers feel that their object is not being used fully, or as intended. The simple but extended 'play' with materials in Crouch's workshop suggested the importance of developing an awareness of *imaginative use* on both sides.

² Eldredge and Sears describe an exercise in which a neutral mask is used to produce this attitude of discovering the world as if for the first time:

the actor carrying the mask assumes a position of sleep, while the teacher places around him objects of various shapes, weights and textures. The assignment is to wake up, to explore several of the objects as if one had no experience of them, and to return to sleep. Familiar objects are treacherous; it is tempting to hold a knife by the handle, to pick up a book and read the print, to open an umbrella, to bounce a ball, but these familiar actions may assume a history of interaction with the object. The neutral mask might discover the working of the umbrella, but only as a result of an exploration; and that discovery, if it comes, has not psychological or intellectual purpose. The mask does not impose a concept on the environment, but accepts the experiences contained within the environment. (Eldredge and Huston 1995: 127).

Other ways of achieving this openness to the material world include the inducement of a 'regression' to a childlike state; working in darkness, so that the visual sense is disabled (Stephien Tiplady); an improvisation based on the actors imagining that they come from a planet with different laws of gravity, and waking on Earth, in their own bodies for the first time (Edward Argent); deliberately mis-naming everything in sight (Keith Johnstone).

³ As mentioned in the Introduction, Johnstone discusses various reasons for the common problem of actors being unable, or refusing to say or do the first thing that comes to mind; 'refusing offers', or 'blocking', always stalls improvisation. Johnstone's concepts of 'offers' and 'promises', 'accepting' and 'blocking' have entered the vocabulary of theatre-makers.

⁴ In conversation, 21 November 1997.

⁵ For example, an improvisation with a piece of wrapping paper, which contrasted weight and lightness, accompanied the sonnet 'If the dull substance of my flesh were thought'. The sonnet's turning point coincided with the transition from one movement quality to the other in the object drama.

⁶ See Perrucci in Cole and Chinoy (1970) or Fo (1991).

⁷ Guildhall and LAMDA, in Mekler (1989).

⁸ The course is designed to develop 'deviser-performers and/or directors' who might go on to work in Community Theatre, Theatre-in-Education, Street Theatre and Site-Specific Theatre. (The course will run alongside the existing BA in Acting.) The RSAMD modular postgraduate one-year course includes an option in which the student devises a one-person show [càk]. Central also offers a post-graduate diploma which makes devising drama the main way of working; it is intended to bring students who are following separate 'strands' (acting, directing, puppetry) together to collaborate on productions and extend their skills.

⁹ See Oddey (1994).

¹⁰ In conversation 10/1/98.

¹¹ For example, in *She'll Be Coming Round The Mountain* (1995), a circle heaped with shoes formed the basis of the set; an individual's experience achieved a wider meaning as she told a story about the loss of one of those shoes – clearly there were stories like hers attached to every one of the hundreds of shoes we could see.

SECTION FIVE: OBJECTS BROUGHT TO LIFE

The lessons of the puppet theatre for actors

'The puppet is the actors' primer'

(Edward Gordon Craig (1921) in Jurkowski 1967: 26)

Puppets are for kids. Real actors don't do puppet shows. And how could learning to animate puppets be at all relevant to actors, when puppeteers are invisible 'non-performers', hidden behind a screen or veiled in black?

It is of course not true that the human performer must disappear in puppet theatre. In Indonesian shadow theatre, in Japanese Bunraku theatre, and in contemporary European puppet theatre, the relationship between the human and the puppet is complex, shifting and frequently open to view. The boundaries between puppet and 'live' theatre are increasingly permeable. In 'object animation' actors may improvise a puppet on stage from newspaper or kitchen utensils, and then improvise dialogue for the puppets, just as in a verbal improvisation. Actors are also being asked to animate puppets in productions which freely combine live actors and puppets – such as the highly successful *Grimm Tales* (Tim Supple at the Young Vic), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Theatre de Complicite at the National Theatre), and Improbable Theatre's *70 Hill Lane*, *Animo* and *Shockheaded Peter*. The increasing popularity of these mixed forms means that learning puppetry skills at drama school may prove more useful to the actor than fencing or historical dance.¹

However, beyond these immediate career considerations, I believe that the approach to the material world which is taught through puppetry is highly valuable for *all* actors, and that the neglect of puppetry as a performance art and as an element of training is a reflection of the wider lack of analysis of human-object relations in actor training which I have examined through this study. I suggest that relationship of the performer to the puppet should be considered as a special case of the performer-object relationship described in the previous section. A puppet, whether specially made, with features that represent humans or animals, or improvised from raw materials and utilitarian objects, is simply an object which has been given the illusion of independent life. Like the objects treated as texts in the previous section, a puppet has a set of intrinsic material characteristics (weight, texture, colour etc.), and a performer sensitive to these qualities realises their potential, both for movement and meaning.

In this short section, I merely want to point out some directions in which puppetry can be useful for actor in training, rather than analysing specific exercises. I argue that puppetry is, in some respects, a concentrated form of theatre, which can help actors to analyse how meaning is made, as well as offering a new angle on the actor-spectator relationship, and that puppetry is also a significant practical discipline which develops actors' physical awareness, focus and control, and the meaningful handling of objects in all theatrical contexts.

A theoretical tool

Modern theorists of the puppet, including Henryk Jurkowski and Steve Tillis, are particularly interested in the relationship between a puppet's 'character'

and the material substance that carries that meaning. In their consideration of the spectator's shifting perception of both the 'fiction' and 'substance' of the puppet, the spectator's 'double-vision' as Tillis calls it, they offer a model of spectatorship which, I suggest, also applies to 'live' performance. This model of the spectator moving between the semiotic and the phenomenal is a powerful way of thinking about the work actors do, and so I suggest, practical puppetry is a useful theoretical tool in actor training.

Many semioticians have been attracted to puppets as a field of study, because, being specially made and externally controlled, the signifying systems of design and movement appear to be entirely intentional.² Puppets provide an opportunity to examine how meaning is made on stage in a restricted and controlled system. The puppeteer and critic Annie Gilles gives the example of a puppet show by Yves Joly in which a set of umbrellas were made to represent a policeman, an old woman, and a young girl – demonstrating the principle that the signifier has an arbitrary relation to the signified, but is made meaningful through a system of differences. However, the materiality of animated objects (whether designed as puppets or not) always exceeds this first level of intentional signification, just as the materiality of the actor's body always exceeds the intended meanings relating to a character.

In the writing of Steve Tillis, 'double vision' is described as a movement between different types of perception, a movement between awareness of the semiotic, the intentional meaning which is found in signs of 'life' and characterisation (such as visual features, movement, and speech) and awareness of the material, which offers unintentional, or 'excess' meaning potential (through

qualities such as texture, weight, colour and their cultural associations). This double-vision also applies to spectators of live theatre. Susan Melrose writes that 'we can separate what we perceive as "actorly" in one instant, and "characterly" in another'. She points out that Brechtian tradition 'demands that we separate out these two semiotics' (Melrose 1994: 27). The Stanislavskian tradition shows some ambivalence about the relationship of these two 'semiotics' – on the one hand recognising the personal charisma of a great actor, and the audience's appreciation of visible craft, and on the other, attempting to erase the distinction between character and actor.³

According to the semiotic theory of live theatre, no detail is excluded from semiosis, but details that seem extraneous to a character are ascribed to the actor. Keir Elam writes that in live theatre, an audience 'starts with the assumption that every detail is an intentional sign and whatever cannot be related to the representation as such is converted into a sign of the actor's very reality' (Elam 1980: 9). He quotes as an example of this process Groucho Marx's description of a performance in which he noticed scratches on an actress's legs, and assumed that they were part of the intentional meaning, a sign relating to the character:

At first we thought this had something to do with the plot and we waited for these scratches to come to life. But... it was never mentioned in the play and we finally came to the conclusion that either she had been shaving too close or she'd been kicked around in the dressing room by her boyfriend.

(Elam 1980: 9)

In puppet theatre, in contrast, there are 'no unintentional signs', and no living person to function as a 'sump' for extraneous reality, according to Tillis. The material aspects of a puppet are as carefully selected for their meaning as the

explicitly semiotic elements such as speech and movement, and both aspects can be active at once:

Everything is what it is, plus something else: a recognizable object and a transformed object at the same time. On the puppet stage a feather-duster may symbolize a fairy prince illumined by glory, but we must never forget that it still remains a feather-duster. While the objects lose their original purpose and become transformed into something else, they still faintly preserve their original character.

(Péter Molnár Gál of the Budapest State Puppet Theatre in Tillis 1992: 62)⁴

Therefore the suggestion that the audience enjoys a 'double-vision' of 'material reality' and 'imagined life' should be understood not as an opposition between reality and fiction, but as a description of different systems of signification which can operate in harmony or in contrast.⁵

The usefulness of the concept of 'double vision' for the live actor is that it suggests that actors need not worry about a spectator noticing material reality (the feather duster, the actor's body) showing through the illusion (the fairy prince, the character). Moreover, spectators are actively interested in the interplay between the material and the semiotic. Susan Melrose was quoted above as saying that we 'can separate what we perceive as "actorly" in one instant, and "characterly" in another'. However, she goes on to say that,

this notation offers us no insight whatsoever into the play of dramatic theatre, where that process is conjugated in terms of a movement from one sign system to another, rather than the site of its effects (i.e. the spectator's work). It is that movement, and not the "goal" or pole, which produces the felt-memory.

(Melrose 1994: 27)

For audiences, Tillis suggests, 'double-vision' is a fundamental imaginative activity; for Melrose too, it is a crucial element of the process of theatre. She asks whether, for example, a chair on stage ceases to be 'theatre sign' if she, as a spectator, 'loses her gaze' in the 'richness of its fabric, in its pleasing curve of frame - without

'translating' it into another sign? Without this 'translation', does it cease to be part of 'theatre communication'? (Melrose 1994: 26). Melrose concludes that,

what in part makes theatre work is its capacity for creating those events which enable us to experience the blur where one system insinuates itself into another, with which it might be logically at odds; the blur where two options – and not one – from a given system, are simultaneously made available.

(Melrose 1994: 27-8)

The theatre is a space where the translation into other signs is impeded, where 'double-vision' is the norm – it is a metaphorical in its very means of communication.

I suggest that puppetry offers a new viewpoint on one of the issues raised in the introduction – the problematic attempt to distinguish 'acting' from 'being'. 'Double vision' implies that the fiction of character and the 'here and now' of the performance situation are always both present and intertwined. Like warp and woof, these threads run in different directions, and it is the task of criticism not to untangle them, but to describe the particular texture of their intertwining, the degree of tightness or looseness in the weave, the degree of 'play' between fiction and reality. I believe that actors will not be able to engage with the most interesting elements of contemporary performance (whether driven by explorations in 'live art' or in writing) unless they are given the opportunity to analyse and play with both modes, with both 'being' and 'acting', and the confusions between them.

Puppets can be a particularly useful tool in performance analysis because they draw attention to the role of the spectator in creating theatrical meaning.

George Bernard Shaw writes,

I have often suggested that the Academy of Dramatic Art try to obtain a marionette performance to teach the students that very important part of the art of acting which

consists of not acting, that is, allowing the imagination of the spectator to do its lion's share of the work.

(Baird 1965: 17)

Shaw points to the aspect of puppet theatre most valued by practitioners and poets – that it suggests rather than states, and leaves gaps to be filled in by the audience.⁶ Puppet theatre, lacking the ‘sump’ of human reality, is forced to select its signs. This leaves ‘gaps’, which the spectator fills imaginatively, a process which can surprise both practitioners and theorists. The pictures that children draw of puppet shows they have seen often depict in great detail characters and events that were suggested but not actually presented on stage.⁷ The object animation exercises described in the previous section give actors a sense of an ‘external eye’ on their own work, and develop their awareness of the audience’s responses – the process externalises the performer’s work and emphasises the role of the spectator.

A practical method: movement training and image-making

Puppeteers require physical skills of a high order – muscular strength, fine control and the ability to observe and reproduce gestures and movement – as there is a direct relation between the accuracy and sensitivity of the manipulator and the quality of a puppet’s movement. The movement training for puppeteers is often highly analytical, as shown in the following examples. In the early years of the century, the Russian puppeteer Nina Efimova followed a course of daily physical training in the Lesgaft method at school – the exercises combined movements involving two or three parts of the body at once, and were directed by verbal instructions rather than by imitation of the instructor. This, Efimova claimed, gave her the mental and physical co-ordination needed to operate two hand-

puppets at once. Stephen Mottram, a contemporary puppeteer who trained at the Budapest Puppet Theatre, works intensively with students on the anatomical analysis of human movement before they are allowed to approach the marionettes. They then attempt to reproduce their own particular gaits in the puppets. Such analytical movement training has been far more common in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe or America, where puppeteers tend to learn their art as apprentices, or begin as makers, rather than performers.

The attention to material qualities elicited by object animation exercises has a far deeper importance for theatre-making than simply promoting observation and thereby leading to more 'realistic' representations. Take, for example, the performer's awareness of the weight of the puppet-object. Because a puppet made of cloth or paper is not as heavy as a living body of the same size would be, a puppeteer has to observe the effects of gravity on bodies with great care in order to actively create the illusion that the puppet has a 'real' relation to the material world. Thus puppetry both draws attention to the actual substance of the object used ('how heavy, how streamlined is this cheese-grater?') and defamiliarises the ordinarily unnoticed movement of living bodies ('what movement quality defines that man there, and can it be transferred to the cheese-grater?'). The attention to the material which is required by puppets makes the performer very much aware of the laws of force and gravity which apply to objects, and this in turn, frees the performer-as-deviser to play with those laws - to create 'a' world, and not 'the' world, to escape the limits of realism, but with full consciousness of the possibilities of making meaning through the metaphorical collision of objects and concepts from diverse realms.⁸

Object improvisation provides many examples of the interplay between the material and the fictional, the 'actorly' and the 'characterly'. Annie Gilles discusses a performance -- *Tragédie de Papier* -- by Yves Joly in which the audience moves from the pleasure of signification to the pleasure of rediscovering the material. At first the spectator is taught to accept paper figures as characters: 'Neither the nature of the material nor the creation in full view, prevent the spectator from "reading" an individual in a cylinder of paper'(Gilles 1981: 14). Once the story has been grasped, Joly forces the spectator to consider the pure materiality of the signifier, as the characters are destroyed by means specific to paper, by fire and scissors, in a 'tragédie de papier' -- both a tragedy made out of paper, and the tragedy of paper itself.⁹

The audience's pleasure in rediscovering the materiality of the sign in these performances recalls Shklovsky's definition of art: it 'exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony'. The puppet theatre of Eastern Europe and much of the 'new' puppet theatre of Western Europe 'defamiliarises' reality, by drawing attention to the material.¹⁰ A comparison can be made with phenomenological philosophy, which, according to Max Scheler, attempts 'a continual desymbolization of the world', so that the object becomes 'self-given'. Something is 'self-given only if it is no longer given merely through any sort of symbol; in other words, only if it is not "meant" as the mere 'fulfilment' of a sign which is previously defined in some way or other' (Scheler in States 1985: 23).¹¹ So Julian Crouch's workshop exercise of 'animating a sheet of newspaper is an exemplary animation: it revives the material that in day to day life merely carries a message. The pleasure in this animation is related to

sound-effects in poetry, and the Dada or Futurist ambition to restore the materiality of the 'word as word', as well as to our pleasure in seeing concrete actions done on stage -- actors eating, dressing, putting on make-up -- when these do not 'merely' signify something.

Theorists of live theatre are aware that the objects which operate as signs in theatre are not 'transparent', and yet theatre criticism still indulges in what Cleanth Brooks calls the 'heresy of paraphrase', describing theatre as if pre-existing ideas or statements were 'expressed' in theatrical form. The study of non-naturalistic theatre demands that we move definitively away from models of representation based on language, that we go beyond semiotic analysis and consider the relation between the materiality of the sign itself and its referent, and puppet theatre, in particular, makes the 'heresy of paraphrase' impossible, because the 'stuff' it is made of, whether designed or chosen, is so insistent. There are implications for the theory of live theatre, and I hope that the study of animation might illuminate what Susan Melrose calls the 'space between', the 'ephemeral' elements which are considered 'beyond' semiological analysis: 'It is time to take these elements back off the shelf, in response to the feeling that there [is] something missing' (Melrose 1994: 23).

I have suggested that puppetry both teaches performers how to deploy consciously the semiotic potential of objects (whether that potential resides in the material qualities or the cultural associations of the object), and teaches performers that an equal part of the work of making meaning is done by the spectator who makes the imaginative leap of seeing a fairy prince in a feather duster. The combination of these two aspects -- so that performers are creating juxtapositions

of high potential in order to enable spectators to make meaning -- is vital in training independent theatre-makers, which, I have argued, is how we should see actors..

¹ Puppetry is one 'strand' of the Postgraduate Diploma in Advanced Theatre Practice at the Central School of Speech and Drama; all students on the programme have to use animation at some point.

² See, for example, the work of the Prague School, especially Veltruský and Honzl.

³ The position adopted by Uta Hagen can be seen in her preference for Duse over Bernhardt, for what she calls 'presentational' acting over 'representational' acting.

⁴ Tillis comments that the Budapest Theatre 'consciously bases its work on the tension inherent in the dual nature of the puppet, and Gál considers this to be his theatre's greatest strength' (Tillis1992: 63).

⁵ Other explanations of the spectator's 'double-vision' of the puppet offered refer to child psychology, or to the psychology of perception. Annie Gilles employs object-relations theory in her book *Le jeu de la marionette: l'objet intermédiaire et son métathéâtre*. She argues that unconscious processes cause an alternating 'forgetting' first of the materiality of the signifier and then of the nature of the signified. Gilles describes the correct recognition of the objective conditions of representation as 'adult', in contrast to 'childlike' misrecognition, but claims that both forms of perception operate in the same spectator, alternating over the course of a performance and varying according to age, or to the type of performance. The match between signifier and signified which we take for granted in everyday use of language, and which is an aim, if a near-impossible one, for naturalistic acting, is treated by Gilles as a psychic satisfaction, compensating for the original splitting between the baby and the maternal body, which is never finally 'healed'. The puppet is a substitute for the transitional object which was itself the substitute for the mother:

Even though perfectly aware of the true nature of the puppet, an adult spectator may intermittently have the illusion of an autonomous life for the puppet, a sort of coincidence of the signifier and the referent of the sign, the imaginary realisation of the impossible.

(Gilles 1981: 141)

Other writers see the audience as 'oscillating' between 'perception' (of the material reality of the puppet) and 'imagination' (of a fictional 'life' in the puppet), by analogy to philosophical figure/ground problems, such as the 'duck/rabbit' image. As Gombrich writes of this optical illusion, 'we can switch from one reading to another with increasing rapidity; we will also 'remember' the rabbit while we see the duck, but the more closely we watch ourselves, the more certainly we will discover that we cannot experience alternative readings at the same time.' (Gombrich 1960: 5) However, 'oscillation' is a mechanical process, which bears little relation to the shifts in a spectator's consciousness which occur throughout a performance, which are neither regular, nor 'either/or' states. Although we cannot 'watch ourselves having an illusion' (Gombrich : 6), we can perceive reality and illusion simultaneously. The Polish writer on puppets, Henryk Jurkowski proposes instead a poetic image, likening the spectator's consciousness to an opal, which changes its character according to the mood of the wearer. (Jurkowski considers that this 'opalescence' applies only to puppets since the eighteenth century - before this period, the ludic (emphasising the material) and educational (emphasising the story) functions were clearly separated.)

⁶ See *Pinocchio's Progeny* for a discussion of puppetry as a metaphor and model for other art forms

⁷ John Blundall, of the Scottish Mask and Puppet Theatre Centre, in seminar, 31/10/97

⁸ Toby Wilshire of Trestle Theatre in Total Theatre debate (24 October 98)

⁹ Jan Svankmajer's object animations for film provide many more examples of a performance that makes the material visible, with characters that melt and are deformed, showing the modelers' finger-marks in the clay.

¹⁰ Of course, not all puppet theatre is 'defamiliarising'; there is a long tradition of puppet theatre using marionettes which are realistic in design, movement and speech, to make miniature versions of the live theatre of realism.

¹¹ Compare Robbe-Grillet's aim to present objects 'in themselves', freed from the burden of symbolism.

CONCLUSION

Work, repetition, experience and improvisation

Underneath the stew pot, there's the flame. That's why it boils. That's why the lid lifts off. There must be something underneath. Whatever one says or does, there's something underneath and that something is work. And work is not agitated movement. It is discipline.

Etienne Decroux (Decroux 1978:23)

Exercises teach how to repeat.

Eugenio Barba (Barba 1997b: 129)

In the introductory section on work I described the modern interest in work both as a theme for drama and as an image for acting: acting was related to manual work in that it involved repetition and transformation. In acting theory, the image of the actor as a craftsman or worker sometimes displaced the image of the actor as possessed or inspired. The adoption of the idea of work and the redefinition of acting as work could be seen as a tactical move, another example of theatre's voracious absorption of the 'real' world, turning 'reality' into theatrical convention,¹ or more cynically, as an attempt to revitalise the form by importing that blue-collar reality which had remained 'real' because unrepresented, a borrowing of proletarian chic.

I would like, however, to follow the acting-work analogy in the opposite direction – to trace the connection between acting and work out from the theatre to the wider world. I have examined, in the five sections which analyse acting exercises, the theories of human-object relations which are implied in various acting methodologies. I suggest that while certain theories of acting present a

modernist view of the world as matter to be possessed, mastered and overcome, others offer a model of the human relation to the material world which involves dialogue and interdependence. I hold that a view of the material world as raw material to be exploited is neither sustainable, in terms of the depletion of non-renewable resources and pollution of air, water and land, nor ethical, because it is based on global inequality and exploitation. So the question of the human relation to the material world is inextricably linked to the question of the relations between people. All acting methods transmit a particular attitude to the world. I argue that the approaches which I have defined as 'improvisational' (although found in a range of different theatre practices) are to be preferred from an environmental, ethical and theatrical point of view.

Decroux and Meyerhold regarded the acting exercise as work, but as a special kind of 'joyful' work, a rehearsal for the utopia where all work would be creative, fulfilling and socially useful. As I have suggested above, their models of work, of the active transformation of the world, came mainly from artisanal or craft-work, rather than from factories and offices. Similarly, the contemporary acting teacher, Christopher Fettes, sees actors as 'people who "make" things, like glassblowers and dressmakers and so forth' (Mekler 1989: 74). In Section Two and Four, I analysed acting exercises (such as Pardo's depressive 'following', and object improvisation) which transmit an artisanal approach, a receptive attitude to the material world. However, Fettes' choice of hand-crafts as examples of 'work' implies that there is little for actors to emulate in the work of data-inputters, or call-centre operatives.² Yet all workers, whether actors, glassblowers or

production-line operatives, experience one feature of work in common – repetition. And although all work includes some repetition, the specific character of the repetition varies enormously. Actors may be doomed to repeat – that’s their job – but the quality of repetition, and therefore of experience, can be significantly transformed. I suggest that an understanding of the different types of repetition gained through studying performance illuminates the understanding of work in the wider sense.

Objects, tools and machines play a crucial role in determining the character of the repetition in their use. While some simple objects may be used in infinitely various ways, as has been suggested in earlier sections, objects of more complicated design tend to have fewer possible modes of use, and therefore the occasions of their use become more and more alike. The production line makes it impossible for machine operators to transform their work by changing their attitude, or mental images, by improvising. If, as I suggest, the principles of improvisation drawn from performance are applied to ‘everyday’ work, it is clear that the objects with which we work must be designed or chosen to allow a free exchange of information, a dialogue between the object and human, and to give scope for improvisation. The factory machine is an extreme case of a complicated object which, having a very narrowly defined mode of use, demands carbon-copy repetition from the people who use it. For Walter Benjamin, as for Hegel and Marx, the machine’s strictly limited potential puts into effect a reversal of the relation between humans and objects. Benjamin sees the machine as a concrete embodiment of the ‘use’ capitalism makes of the worker, quoting Marx: “It is a

common characteristic of all capitalist production...that the worker does not make use of the working conditions. The working conditions make use of the worker; but it takes machinery to give this reversal a technically concrete form" (Benjamin 1970: 171). Benjamin notes that some workers experience this reversal more painfully than others, because they are not able to shape the material with which they work: "The unskilled worker is the one most deeply degraded by the drill of the machines. His work has been sealed off from experience [*Erfahrung*]" (Benjamin 1970: 172).

Benjamin's distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* is unfolded in the contrast between craft work and production-line work, and is based on the specific character of the *repetition* involved in each. The production-line worker suffers because the separate actions performed do not lead one to the next: each action is discrete and totally identical to the previous action. "The manipulation of the worker at the machine has no connection with the preceding operation for the very reason that it is its exact repetition" (Benjamin 1970: 173). This exact repetition is unlike any other human interaction with the world, as it does not permit learning: previous experience can never influence the action performed. Repetition without experience, without learning, is quite unnatural for humans, who find it hard to adapt to the conditions which demand mindless repetition – as Winslow Taylor found, when measured in a purely mechanical way, humans are the least efficient element in a factory. In discussing Walter Benjamin's distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, Andrew Benjamin contrasts the exact repetitions of unskilled work with the very different kind of repetition involved in the

process of storytelling – inexact repetitions, variations in which the storytellers forget and re-create the story each time it is told.³ The quality of experience labelled as *Erfahrung* is characterised by continuity with slight variations; work involving exact repetition makes *Erfahrung* unattainable. For Walter Benjamin, mechanisation leads both to a loss of experience and a loss of the capacity to experience, since the capacity to experience depends on being able to receive impressions and change behaviour in response.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, everyday work – which was increasingly automated – was sometimes compared to actors' work; actors' eternal struggle to remain spontaneous in successive performances was linked to the question of how workers could remain human and spontaneous when adapted to the rhythm of the machine. In an interesting article, Jane Goodall describes the loop that connects automata and live performers: in ballets such as *Coppelia* (1870) and *The Nutcracker* (1892), dancers played inanimate objects, representing the process of 'coming to life' by moving from 'mere activity' to 'expressiveness'. A few years later, chorus lines of identically dressed and identically moving dancers – Tiller Girls and Ziegfeld's Follies – were explicitly modelled on automata. Some performers, claims Goodall, even parodied their own reification: the banjo-playing black minstrels, whose images were copied by the makers of automata, 'responded by stylising their movements into machinic jerkiness and wearing expressions of fixed exuberance on their faces' (Goodall 1997: 445). Goodall argues that there is a strong link in the 'cultural imaginary' between the performer and the machine: 'In performance, automatism is associated with enchanted beings (swan maidens,

animated dolls), with puppetry and with 'wooden' actors who can express nothing more than careful programming by their trainers' (Goodall 1997: 441-2).

This comparison between 'everyday' work and acting is fruitful because of the inherent paradox in the actor's relation to repetition. For actors, repetition is both burdensome and a creative necessity. Repetition is perceived as an occupational hazard for actors - it is in the nature of the job that actors must repeat their lines, their performances night after night, and if they're lucky, week after week. Training is intended to help actors withstand repetition. At the same time it is clear that there is no 'original' performance which is then repeated; it is through repetition that a performance is developed.⁴

This paradox is based on a distinction between organic and inorganic repetition.⁵ For organic life, what appears to be simple repetition is in fact always a highly complex process of variations on a theme. Imagine a child throwing and catching a ball against a wall. However careful and patient the player, the action is never an exact repetition (as the action performed on the production line is), for the trajectory and speed of the ball depend upon the previous impulse given to it by the player, and upon minute variations in the surface of the wall. The game involves 'learning' through 'listening' to the object, because every catch and throw requires slight adjustments with repercussions through the whole body. This is similar to the process by which living bodies regulate their own temperature, chemical composition, rate of metabolism etc., according to environmental circumstances. In a game, however, the interest is in varying these conditions, creating new challenges. When the adjustments become easy, because they are

performed wholly at the subconscious level, i.e. when they are 'automatic', the player introduces a new level of complexity, adding turns or claps between throws. This dialectic of 'listening' and variation was described in the analysis of exercises in Section One.

The simple ball game, in which every cycle involves minute variations on the previous cycle, fits Eugenio Barba's definition of an acting exercise very well. Barba claims that acting exercises teach repetition; moreover, he claims that learning how to repeat is the most important lesson for actors:

Exercises teach how to repeat. Learning to repeat is not difficult as long as it is a question of knowing how to execute a score with ever greater precision. It becomes difficult in the next phase. Here the difficulty lies in repeating continuously without becoming dull, which presupposes discovering and motivating new details, new points of departure within the familiar score.

(Barba 1997b: 129)

At first, Barba asserts, the performer's energy is expended in filling out 'empty forms' with 'the concentration necessary for the successful execution of each individual phase'. However, once the forms have been learnt and 'mastered', 'either they die or they are filled by the capacity for improvisation'.

The dynamic form of an exercise is a continuity constituted by a series of phases. In order to learn the exercise precisely, it is divided up into segments. This process teaches how to think of continuity as a succession of minute but well-defined phases (or perceptible actions). An exercise is an ideogram made up of strokes and, like all ideograms, must always follow the same succession. But each single stroke can vary in thickness, intensity, and impetus.

(Barba 1997b: 129)

In the organic world, repetition is mastered and transformed by improvisation. The potential for improvisation which exists within a repeated succession of gestures, words or notes is perhaps illustrated most clearly with reference to music. John Tilbury is a pianist who has a particular interest in improvisation and the

'open' scores of the composers Morton Feldman, Cornelius Cardew and John Cage. In a lecture at the CCA, Glasgow in May 1998, he played a short piece by Howard Skempton called *Highland Dance*, in which only the chords are notated and the player is responsible for deciding how long each chord lasts and the overall dynamics of the piece. Tilbury demonstrated two contrasting ways to play the piece: firstly, by imposing a 'classical' structure of crescendo and diminuendo; and secondly by 'listening' to each chord as he played it and adjusting the following chord in response. In this second approach to the 'open' score, the player listens to the balance, tone and volume of each chord played, and responds to the inevitable variations that arise with different instruments, audiences, and spaces, as well as the variations caused by the player's technique, mood, etc. No chords will ever be played exactly the same way twice and no pre-existing idea is imposed on the playing. There are obvious comparisons with the child's ball game and improvisation in performance. In all of these kinds of improvisational repetition, there is a quality of 'listening', a response to environment and to the specific characteristics of the source materials provided. In musical improvisation, as in the work of Cage or Cardew, these source materials include conventional musical instruments, other sources of sound such as radios and tape recorders, and everyday objects such as nails and cutlery used to 'prepare' a piano (placed between the strings to alter the sound) or to produce sound from other instruments. The score is not seen as a written representation of a piece of music imagined to pre-exist the performance, but as another 'source material' for improvisation. The score may provide musical notation or graphic symbols which have to be

interpreted to a greater degree. (The score for Cardew's *Treatise* uses straight and curving lines, extended across the stave or cross-hatched, and circles of different sizes, both white and black, in sequence or overlapping.) In dramatic improvisation, the source materials can be seen as including both the text and the 'text objects' provided on stage: both provide a set of stimuli, a set of possibilities to which the performer responds.

Although Cardew's *Treatise* does not stipulate specific notes, time values or instruments, it is still a musical score, which requires an improvisational 'listening' performance, but structures that performance (or provokes the performer to activate their own sense of structure). Tilbury argued that there is an ethical aspect to the distinction between 'open' scores, such as Cardew's *Treatise* and Skempton's *Highland Dance*, as compared to the 'closed' scores of the classical composers, which are published with specifications for every aspect of the performance, from dynamics to metronome markings, often added by the editor if not included by the composer. Tilbury suggested that the 'closed' score is implicated in the process of mechanical reproduction of music – it is a means of ensuring that all performances sound the same and can be produced without any creative work – a trained player can produce the required sound without rehearsal or other preparation. In the narrowest understanding of the classical musician's work, s/he reproduces a pre-existing piece of music, aiming to be as accurate and consistent as a mechanical recording.

The narrow view of musical performance as reproduction of a score has been considered a distortion of the ideal of music-making by some critics. When

the musician Jaques-Dalcroze (who was to devise the 'eurhythmics' method of musical training) was appointed as Professor of harmony at the Geneva Conservatoire in 1892, he found that

the education of future professional musicians was in many ways radically wrong, in that the training of individual faculties was made the chief object, without consideration of whether or no these faculties stood in any close relation to the inner consciousness of the student. In other words, the aim of the training was to form means of expression, without consideration of what was to be expressed, to produce a highly trained instrument, without thought of the art whose servant it was to be [...] it was found that pupils, technically far advanced, after many years of study were unable to deal with the simplest problems in rhythm and that their sense for pitch, relative or absolute, was most defective; that, while able to read accurately or to play pieces memorized, they had not the slightest power of giving musical expression to their simplest thoughts or feelings.

(Jaques-Dalcroze 192C: 34-35)

Dalcroze argued that, to avoid producing mechanical players who cannot make music, technical training must always be underpinned by the development of artistic judgement. Similarly, I would suggest, the practice of improvisation – defined here as the combination of listening and creating in relation to material or other constraints – is necessary for independent actors, giving them the power to create, rather than reproduce, theatrical meaning.

Tilbury's discussion of the open score connects two concepts that have been important throughout this study: the idea of 'listening' to the material world, and 'improvising'. Improvisation begins with the work that the world does on the performer – the performer 'listens' to what is 'given' by a score or a script, an instrument or a prop; improvisation continues with the work that the performer does on the world. It is a dynamic relationship. The 'ethical' aspect of the open score inheres in its capacity to provoke such improvisational relationships with the material world. Tilbury quotes Iris Murdoch:

The world is not given to us 'on a plate', it is given to us as a creative task [...] We work, using or failing to use our honesty, our courage, our truthful imagination, at the interpretation of what is present to us, as we of necessity shape it and 'make something of it'. We help it to be.

(Murdoch 1992: 215)

That this view of the relation of the human to the object world relates closely to the actor's work is underlined by Grotowski's assertion that

The real challenge is life. That challenge is always difficult, as is the reply, and the reply is nothing other than the creative process. The impulses which come from art are merely one of the many kinds of impulse in which life abounds.

(Kumiega 1985: 184-5)

The transformations of the material world which are implied in the physical term 'work' are not mechanical – they require receptivity to the material world, a 'listening' approach. As I have suggested above, acting teachers from diverse traditions use the idea of a dialogue between the material world and performer. For, as Iris Murdoch puts it, continuing the comments quoted above: 'We work at the meeting point where we deal with a world which is other than ourselves. This transcendental barrier is more like a band than a line' (Murdoch 1992: 215).

Barba suggests that the function of exercises is learning how to repeat. I would argue rather that exercises with concrete objects can allow students to learn how to 'listen'. Both 'listening', or receiving information from the material world, and 'creating', or adding qualities to the material world, are required by actors if they are to improvise – to play within the given limitations, or to transform those limitations. It is the capacity to improvise – to vary emphasis, tempo, mental imagery, intention – which distinguishes the repetition performed by actors from the mechanical repetition carried out by data-inputters, machine operators, or Tiller girls. I have emphasised the first of the two skills necessary for

improvisation – ‘listening’ – in this study because it seems to me to be neglected and undervalued both in actor training and in western culture in general. However, a whole range of exercises from simple ball games to puppetry, in which objects are sometimes treated as texts, and sometimes as constraints, have shown the interdependence of these aspects, and the interdependence of ‘listening’ and ‘creating’. This study has shown some of the great range of possible human interactions with the material world which are presented through practical acting exercises, and suggested that theatre’s exploration of human-object relations can perhaps make a valuable contribution to the repertoire of human relations with the material world.

¹ See Erickson (1995) on the circular process by which art and theatre first absorb elements of reality, then turn them into artistic conventions, before expelling them.

² Like artisans, Fettes suggests, actors should be independent, disciplined, and able to judge their own work. The following discussion of shoe-making suggests the difference between artisanal and mechanical production: The shoe designer Andrés Hernández says, “There are on average five hundred holes on a good brogue. that means you have five hundred chances to get it right or get it wrong. At Lobb, each hole is punched as an individual action from a hand-operated machine. A mass-produced brogue is made in one cutting’ (Sherwood, 1998). On the other hand, call-centre operatives, are asked not only to subordinate themselves to the demands of the computer (operatives must ‘ask permission’ of the computer to go to the toilet, and ‘log-on’ when they return), but to produce the signs of humanity (warm speech, ‘selling their smile’) mechanically, on demand and with endless repetition, like automata. Calls to call-centres are randomly monitored, and operatives deviate from their scripts at risk of their jobs.

³ Some historians of folk song argue that once a song has been recorded in a ‘definitive version’, which can be reproduced exactly an infinite number of times, it dies as a folk song.

⁴ A rehearsal is called a ‘repetition’ in French.

⁵ Cancerous cells threaten life precisely because they reproduce exactly, without being modified by external signals.

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Observations of classes and rehearsals

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John Blundall (Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre) 23/10/97
RSAMD/ENSATT Contemporary French drama discussion 26/10/97
Malcolm Knight (Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre) 31/10/97
Andrew McKinnon (Director of Postgraduate Studies, RSAMD) 3/11/97
Beth Williams (Actor) 14/11/97
Phelim McDermott (Director, Improbable Theatre) 21/11/97
Penny Francis (Head of Puppetry, Central Postgraduate Diploma) 26/11/97
John Wright (Head of Acting, Middlesex University) 10/1/98
Lynn Bains (Course Leader, Queen Margaret College) 27/1/98
Vladimir Mirodan (Director, School of Drama, RSAMD) 24/3/98
Joe Kelleher (Lecturer, University of Surrey, Roehampton) 29/5/98
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