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Judo as a devising practice: Yves Klein, La Mancha and Chile

Ellie Nixon

This article describes the creation process of *Arquitectura del Aire* (Aerial Architecture) devised by La Mancha Theatre Company, Chile, a company I co-founded. The point of departure was the ‘Painting’ exercise initiated at the Jacques Lecoq International Theatre School in Paris and continued in La Mancha Escuela Internacional del Gesto y la Imagen (La Mancha International School of Image and Gesture). The aim of this project was to explore the exercise’s potential for developing a theatre production, inspired by the work of French artist Yves Klein (1928–1962). What was unanticipated, was the intimacy and intricacy with which Klein’s fascination and expertise in judo infused the work. A devoted practitioner of judo, Klein became a fourth *dan judoka* in the early 1950s, a level that no other French person had achieved at that time. Training with a judo *sensei* (teacher) for this project, the actor-devisors, including me, experienced a rigorous system of preparation: *ukemi* (falling safely), *kuzushi* (breaking the opponent’s balance), throws, counter-throws, grappling techniques, falls, and recovery. Judo’s principles of giving way, maximum efficiency and mutual respect became the essential cornerstones of our approach. In this production, judo shaped both the process and outcome, in effect as co-creator, prompting the question: what performer training practices might engender an imagining disposition for attending to the creative possibilities, movements and dynamics of martial arts as a material devising practice?

Keywords: judo, devising, Jacques Lecoq, Yves Klein, new materialism

Introduction

Martial arts are generally understood as systematised and traditional disciplines of combat or self-defence and, in rare instances, as performer training methodologies. In my own educational experience at the Jacques Lecoq International Theatre School (1987–1989), these techniques did not form part of our training. Lecoq’s approach to movement cautions

against ‘gymnastic methods’ (Lecoq 2000, 72) or purely athletic exercises that stiffen or formalise gestures. I can see how martial arts might well be included in his rejection of any physical training that privileges ‘the outer, aesthetic form’ over the ‘true physical education of the body of an actor who lives in the world of illusion’ (Lecoq 2000, 73). This article explores an example of theatre practice in which the opposite appeared to occur: *Arquitectura del Aire* (Aerial Architecture), devised by La Mancha Theatre Company, premiered in Teatro Mori, Santiago and then toured throughout Chile in traditional and non-traditional performance venues (2005–2007). Combining eight co-creators and performers, lighting, sound, dance, text, acrobatics and judo, this multi-dimensional performance explored the universe of French artist Yves Klein. During the devising process, what came to the fore quite unexpectedly were the compositional possibilities of judo, prompting questions around what the material base and enactive characteristics of judo as a training methodology can provoke in performer training and creative practice. Can judo training encourage an imagining disposition for attending to the creative potentials, movements or relationships of devising?

It is not my intention to advance a universal solution or unique system of training here, but rather to draw out key aspects that constituted a particular training environment in which judo may be understood as an interweaving dimension of training and performance activity. The point of departure for this project was the ‘Painting’ exercise undertaken in the first year at the Lecoq School. This exercise functions as a key training vector for drawing together and integrating a universal poetic sense: ‘an abstract dimension, made up of spaces, lights, colours, materials, sounds which can be found in all of us’ (Lecoq 2000, 46). In groups, students observe the paintings, then they identify with the light, colour, lines, drips, materials, elements, rhythms, tensions, directions, space, textures and forces through the body, to experience similar sensations. Director of *Embodied Poetics*,¹ Amy Russell, considers this particular exercise a significant turning point in Lecoq’s pedagogy, for the way it shifts the pedagogical focus to a collective and metaphorical spatial dimension: ‘in transposing a two-dimensional form to three dimensions; the theme compels the performing ensemble to paint the space with their movements’ (Russell 2021). Moreover, through the ‘Painting’ exercise, habitual dependence on ocular observation is distributed through embodied experience-in-practice, which is then transposed in mimodynamic² rather than representational terms: ‘it is not a matter of illustrating the picture, nor of explaining how they see it, but of sharing, in a direct way, the spirit of the work’ (Lecoq, 2000, 48).

For La Mancha Theatre Company, the initial impulse was to explore the exercise’s potential for development into a touring theatre production. Over the course of devising *Arquitectura del Aire*, we were compelled to reconsider the human-centric assumption that the body merely externalises the ideas of the artist or the ideas of the theatre-makers involved. Maaïke Bleeker defines the creative process of performance design and material thinking as ‘the result of engaging with and listening to the materials one works with and involves acknowledging the agency of these

1 *Embodied Poetics* is an immersive course in actor-created theatre. See: <https://www.embodiedpoetics.org/>.

2 A method allowing the actor to discover physical movements which translate the sensations aroused in them by colours, words, music into bodily action (Bradby in Lecoq 2000, 178).

materials and of the others involved' (Bleeker 2017, 133). Whereas Bleeker's focus is on material thinking, this article foregrounds the diverse ways in which judo became an essential means of engaging with embodied material imagining.³ Accordingly, I draw on new materialist perspectives and the writings of French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962), whose philosophy of imagination deeply influenced Lecoq's pedagogical ethos (Sachs 2016; Evans 2020).

3 See 2023 E. Nixon, *Imagining Bodies and Performer Training: The Legacies of Jacques Lecoq and Gaston Bachelard*, London and New York: Routledge.

La Mancha Theatre Company and the International School of Image and Gesture, Chile

Before moving on to a discussion about the creation process of *Arquitectura del Aire*, it is important to introduce the historical and political context informing this project. In 1989, I founded La Mancha Theatre Company with Rodrigo Malbrán. We met at the Lecoq School when I was in my second year and Malbrán was completing the teaching diploma, a distinction shared by very few in the world at the time. Over the years, La Mancha has produced a highly varied body of work centred on devised performance in live and recorded media (Nixon 2016). Our projects have involved collaborating with theatre practitioners, poets, visual artists and writers in Europe, Scandinavia, Central and South America, cultivating rich links and long-lasting cultural correspondences. In 1990, we were awarded a research grant from the Norwegian Arts Council to review contemporary theatre training in Chile, Malbrán's country of origin. There, we discovered that actor training at the time was firmly rooted in Western European traditions of psychological realism. The insights gained from working on a research project of this nature triggered a deep and long-lasting commitment to Chile as a future home for La Mancha.

The political backdrop to this decision is significant. During the socialist government of Salvador Allende (1970–1973), the Chilean experimental theatre movement with its prolific tradition of innovation and renewal became deeply involved in the unfolding political process. In 1973, this culture of creative exploration and political activism was obliterated by the military coup led by Augusto Pinochet. Under his military regime (1973–1990), censorship practices stifled any progressive forms of resistance. 'In the words of the Chilean playwright Benjamin Galemiri, "Culture was seen by Pinochet as an act of terrorism"' (Nixon 2016, 373). In 1992, we set up a permanent base in Santiago and with the generous encouragement of Jacques and Fay Lecoq, established La Mancha Escuela Internacional del Gesto y la Imagen (La Mancha International School of Image and Gesture), the first of its kind in South America.

Spanning the transition between the 20th and 21st century, our School has evolved its own unique curriculum through a '*méthode ouverte*', an open-ended process of inquiry, a life-long pedagogy of renewal. Indeed, the following example of contemporary training practices arguably manifests my belief that Lecoq's pedagogy inspires an ongoing active, transformational space of learning. In Central and South America, La Mancha has contributed to a forceful momentum of collective creation and actor/creator-led work spanning almost three decades. Graduates have pursued careers as

artists, actors, dancers, writers, directors and producers, forming national and international theatre and dance companies. They have also gone on to teach and direct in schools, local communities, hospitals, prisons, and indigenous communities, initiating and consolidating national and international networks as they work with each other across cohorts, cultures and continents. In turn, the theatre company and theatre school have evolved as both distinct but interactive entities.

The relatively remote geographical, cultural and political context in which the theatre company operates has reinforced the value of generating an independent environment for teachers and students to explore research interests and creative practice in the public domain. The company keeps the training alive and progressive. This particular production *Arquitectura del Aire* explored the shift away from the experience of working in a learning environment towards artistic practice and innovation. Engaging entirely with La Mancha School graduates from different cohorts rather than current students, our intention was to generate a climate of co-creation for sharing personal artistic developments and cross-temporal experiences.

Karate and *kollellaullin*: a deliberative educational encounter

One of the early innovations we introduced into our school curriculum was karate, and while this article explores judo, our karate training laid the foundations for our incursion into the world of martial arts as a methodology of training. From its introduction, I was keen to experience karate's pedagogical potentials, so I joined our first cohort as a student *karateka*. Karate classes improved our physical conditioning, focus and balance as well as a progressive understanding of the need for economy of effort and movement. Mindful of Lecoq's warning to 'avoid falling into pure technique, or virtuosity for its own sake' (Lecoq 2000, 84), we opted to study *kata*, which in Japanese means 'form'. These highly detailed individual technical sequences involve imaginary punches, kicks, blocks and footwork underpinned by a deep emphasis on breathing technique. *Kata* are not confined to martial arts. They are also embedded in traditional Japanese art forms such as *kabuki* (classical theatre) and *chadō* (tea ceremony).

While a *kata* is not considered a dance or theatrical performance, its application as a training etude chimes with Lecoq's Twenty Movements, which form the basis of movement analysis classes throughout the first year of training at the Lecoq School. At the end of the year, these movement phrases are presented individually in a sequence of the student's choosing. Mark Evans observes that 'the movements can serve as a reference point around which the student can play imaginatively' (Evans and Kemp 2016, 107) and while the physical vocabulary developed in *kata* is distinct, I suggest that they lend themselves to similar creative potentials emerging from technique. Each *kata* has its own unique floor pattern and in our own Kyokushin karate practice, we were expected to start and finish on the same spot. Intriguingly, the Twenty Movements presentation also requires ending at the starting point of the sequence. The *kata*'s associations with Lecoq's collective movement of chorus in Greek tragedy is also fascinating from a pedagogical perspective. *Kata* can be

practised alone, but in groups these ‘forms’ cultivate a shared spatial awareness. Students develop a sensitivity to clarity of action, active listening, rhythm and gesture, all of which can extend to the imaginal spatial dynamics of chorus work.

While it may seem incongruous to teach a Japanese martial art in a South American performer training context, karate has led to a more interculturally responsive dialogue with students and this is particularly pertinent in Chile, whose national curriculum is still deeply entrenched in the neoliberal ideology imposed by Pinochet nearly 50 years ago. Sitting outside the national education system, La Mancha has the advantageous freedom to co-constitute a responsive programme with its students. This dynamic involves an ongoing discussion about who they are, where their roots lie and what privileges and disadvantages they have experienced in their own lives. Martial arts training in La Mancha has become pivotal to this exchange, as a means of reconnecting and reclaiming practices and methodologies that have been marginalised by Chile’s long history of colonialism. For instance, it has been remarkable to discover that martial arts have existed in Chile since pre-Hispanic times.

Mapuche, the largest existing ethnic group in south-central Chile and southern Argentina, is renowned for having successfully resisted the Spanish invasion for almost 400 years, longer than any indigenous society in American history. *Kollellaullin*, or ‘ant’s power’ (Cruz 2010, 116), is the ancient martial art of Mapuche origin, said to have been developed from the observation of ants as a system of organisation and physical strength, despite the insect’s diminutive size. Integrating two kinds of wrestling, *lonkotun* – taking the hair and dragging the opponent to the ground, as well as *metratun* – taking of the arms, *kollellaullin* involved a life-long rigorous armed and unarmed training to become a *weichafe*, an elite warrior in the ancient Mapuche society (López von Vriessen 2011). Physical and spiritual training combined competitive sports, weapon specialisation and horseback combat alongside sacred practices: bathing in cold waters several times a day to purify the spirit and soul, abstaining from eating and sexual relations before battle; sleeping in the open air and cutting and bleeding their legs with sharpened stones to improve resilience and courage (Cruz 2010). *Kollellaullin*’s training imparted a commitment to loyalty, knowledge, integrity and courage, echoing the spirit of Japanese *budō* in its original sense: ‘the way of brave and enlightened activity’ (Stevens 2001, ix).

Very little information is available about *kollellaullin* and this has generally been attributed to its being kept a closely guarded secret for hundreds of years. From a postcolonial perspective, this assertion is arguably tenuous. Mapuche cultural and material rights have been violated relentlessly by European and North American colonisation, as well as Church and State. For example, during the Pinochet dictatorship, Mapuche land was privatised and sold to wealthy landowners and foreign nationals. Pinochet also introduced laws refusing to acknowledge Chile’s indigenous people, all of which have contributed to the subjugation of Mapuche knowledge and its cultural values. While La Mancha has not yet practised *kollellaullin* directly, a new and resurgent interest in this martial arts system has led to students and staff reconceptualising what martial arts training can include in a performer

training environment and has actively exposed pressing wider national debates around the inclusion of marginalised narratives.

Yves Klein: *judoka* and artist

As mentioned earlier, the impulse for *Arquitectura del Aire* was the work of artist Yves Klein. In our particular context it is important to point out that during the Pinochet dictatorship, much international art had been conveniently ignored or overtly censored. This left a significant knowledge gap during the late 20 and early 21st century in Chile, which the group for this project was keen to rectify. Born in 1928, seven years after Lecoq, Klein died young of a heart attack aged 34 in 1962. A devoted practitioner of judo, Klein left France in 1952 for Japan where he became a fourth *dan judoka*, a level in judo that at the time no French person had reached. At the age of 24 he went on to teach at the Spanish Federation of Judo in Madrid and subsequently opened his own judo school in Paris. Klein also wrote the book *Le fondements du judo* (1954), translated into English as *The Foundations of Judo* (2009). The following images capture Klein in action (Figures 1, 2 and 3).



Figure 1 Klein using judo flips, 1960.

© Succession Yves Klein c/o ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2022.



Figure 2 Klein doing a judo takedown, 1955.
© Succession Yves Klein c/o ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2022.



Figure 3 Master Sampei Asami performing the *Koshiki-no kata* (*kata* of ancient forms), *dōjō* (workplace) of Master Asami, Tokyo, 1953. © Succession Yves Klein c/o ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2022.

Klein's deep immersion and education in judo ostensibly motivated his fascination for the immaterial, the infinite, the absolute and the void. His invention of a patented unique blue pigment, International Klein Blue (IKB), constituting almost 200 blue monochrome paintings, suggests an attempt to free the viewer from the limitations of the picture plane and instead, open up the spectator to the dimensions of experiential space. Klein conceived of his paintings as living presences and not as material objects. For instance, in his *Cosmogonies* series, he focused on capturing momentary states of wind and rain on a canvas tied to the roof of his car. He cast aerial reliefs of planetary surfaces before photography from space had been invented, filling the universe with sensibility beyond the confines and expectations of what had until then been considered the art object. His *Anthropometry* performances for live audiences, in which nude women covered themselves in blue pigment and imprinted their bodies onto white canvases, can be read as Klein's male orchestration of female bodies, or conversely, as a co-creation between performers, Klein and the spectators. Extending his experimentation to sound, Klein's *Symphonie Monoton-Silence* (Monotone-Silence Symphony, 1961) consists of one sound, a D major chord produced abruptly by an orchestra. The sustained and loud sound fills the air for precisely 20 minutes. Then the musical note ends as suddenly as it began, with the orchestra sitting without playing or moving in performed silence for the same amount of time. All of these elements were explored in our devising process.

In 1958, Klein's exhibition *The Void* presented an empty gallery, prompting a divided response between those who appreciated the philosophical and artistic significance of *The Void* as an artistic provocation and those who immediately dismissed him as a narcissistic charlatan. Klein's *Le saut dans le vide* (Leap into the Void) in 1960, in which he appears to fly (Figure 4), sought to embody his deep fascination with the body's ability to truly levitate, for in his words, 'to paint space, I must be in position, I must be in space' (Klein 1960).

Writing the foreword to Klein's book on judo, Jean-Luc Rougé, president of the French Judo Federation at the time of its publication, states that Klein's work as an artist 'drew on the unadorned simplicity of judo: the first *Monochromes* recalled the different coloured belts, and of the justly celebrated *Leap into the Void*, [Klein] said that as a *judoka* he was always involved in "dynamic levitation"' (Rougé 2009, 213). *Leap into the Void* in particular manifests Klein's interest in the spiritual dimensions of judo, primarily the Zen Buddhist teaching of *sunyata* or 'emptiness'. Various interpretations and contested, *sunyata* does not indicate 'nothingness' but rather 'without form', 'without fixity' and taps into the Buddhist concept of *paticca-samuppada* or the chain of causation, in which 'existence is seen as an interrelated flux of phenomenal events, material and psychical, without any real, permanent, independent existence of their own' (Britannica n.d.).

Relatedly, while the writings of French philosopher Gaston Bachelard were not part of our initial investigation, his ideas began to emerge as a theoretical grounding for devising this project. Klein's artistic work was



Figure 4 *Leap into the Void* by Yves Klein.
Photo: Shunk-Kender © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2014.R.20).
© Succession Yves Klein c/o ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2022.

⁴ Klein's mother, the artist Marie Raymond (1908–1988), gave him Bachelard's *Air and Dreams* (1943). See Bachelard 2011.

deeply influenced by Bachelard's philosophy of material imagination⁴ and in his 1959 lecture, he acknowledged his debt to Bachelard:

The world is on the far side of an unsilvered mirror, there is an imaginary beyond, a beyond pure and insubstantial, and that is the dwelling place of Bachelard's beautiful phrase: First there is nothing, next there is depth of nothingness, then a profundity of blue. (Klein 1959)

Bachelard, who regarded words as the primary means of exploring the imagining consciousness, also profoundly inspired Lecoq's pedagogy of theatre-making and the body. This seemingly oppositional connection is countered by Bachelard's bold reclaiming of the imagination from the shadows of the mind to the core of human existence, and speaks to the full complexity and wider reaches of Lecoq's pedagogical approach. Bachelard asserts that imagination is not something that simply happens to us, rather it is something that requires active participation with the pre-Socratic material elements of earth, air, fire and water. Similarly, the mimetic potentials of the elements feature prominently in the first year of the Lecoq School. 'Reverie' is the central method by which Bachelard

considers imagination to transform reality, defining it in *The Poetics of Reverie* as ‘that simple state where the work takes on its convictions by itself without being tormented by censorship’ (Bachelard 1992, 160). In this delicate and transient ‘intermediary world where *reverie* and reality mingle’ (Bachelard 1992, 162). our habitual impressions, interpretations and assumptions are instead destabilised and deflected towards the material world.

Bachelard and Lecoq might well concur that concrete experience rooted in the imagination and based on a process of embodied discovery rather than abstract determination and fixity, is the source of their creative, philosophical and educational ethos. For instance, Lecoq’s training with the neutral mask (Lecoq 2000; Evans and Kemp 2016) sensitises students to this relational encounter with the world: ‘the neutral mask puts one in touch with what belongs to everyone’ (Lecoq 2000, 41). As devisors, we sensed that Klein’s leap towards space and immaterial sensibility could offer pivotal possibilities for exploring new embodied strategies for devising. Yet how could La Mancha transmit this world theatrically? How could we make a piece of theatre about someone who wanted to paint space and not the objects that filled it?

Judo (the gentle or yielding way): embodied technique for an imagining disposition

In my roles as director and co-devisor of the production, the shift to personal voice in this section is intended to capture a direct grasp of the emergent dynamic between judo training and creative practice encountered in *Arquitectura del Aire*. Devising is a convergence of interrelations and connections, networks, clusters, collisions and discoveries. Our La Mancha training established a collective materiality of learning and we each brought different abilities, qualities and motivations, galvanised by the materiality of experience to the studio. One of the significant directives of Lecoq’s ‘Painting’ exercise is not the interpretation of the psychological life of the artist, but the *mimodynamic* process mentioned earlier. However, in the case of Klein there were some motivating forces that were central to our preliminary research for this project, as they are clearly deeply invested in his work. Our karate training opened us up to exploring the new physical vocabulary of judo. The absolute discipline that both martial arts impose and the similar rigour and energy invested in the movements and gestures drew us to explore judo’s training potential for the project. At the start of the rehearsal process, we divided the day into two separate sessions that increasingly cross-fertilised: judo training in the mornings and in the afternoons, improvisation, exploration and play.

Based on scientific principles of leverage and balance, the aim of judo is to use strength with maximum efficiency through the techniques of attack and defence. Training with the Chilean *sensei*, Claudio Toledo, we explored a well-defined system of preparation before engagement: throws, counter-throws, grappling techniques, falls and recovery. Learning in judo begins with the art of the fall (*ukemi*). Working principally with

these falling techniques on a large *tatami* (a judo mat) and barefoot at all times, we developed a sense of lightness and freedom through the grounding principles of judo. In judo training, simple exercises for controlling the transition from being upright to horizontal gradually increase in difficulty. Falling from a low position and gradually moving upwards, falling in different positions, falling on the spot and then adding movement, falling alone and then being thrown by a partner, encouraged coordination and control. By rounding the body and yielding to the fall, we learned to roll freely in all directions. Discovering how to fall safely leads to overcoming the fear of being thrown. The pedagogic benefit lies in not resisting. By accepting the fall, we move on rather than dwell on failure.

Developing a sound understanding of *kuzushi* (breaking the opponent's balance), we were introduced to the principles of giving way, maximum efficiency and mutual respect. From a training perspective, following the force applied by the opponent and making use of that force with flexibility and ease, progressively increased our physical confidence for jumping, tumbling and balancing (Figure 5).



Figure 5 Rehearsal for *Arquitectura del Aire*. Photo: Ellie Nixon.

The principles of judo training, described above, became the essential cornerstones of our approach to devising. In retrospect, *aiki* (the spirit of gentleness), served not only to expand our expressive range, but also instilled a practice of active listening. We would accept each offer and fully explore its potential with softness, pliability and lightness of touch, like a shadow following an object. Moreover, the judo principles of learning to act without hesitation, minimising the use of extraneous effort between stillness and motion, adjusting the rhythm of action to the opponent's motion, flowing with it in full concentration, encouraged an inclusive, collaborative devising environment, directly connected to the world and events around us.

When problematising the notion of technique in training and its historic negative associations with 'merely mechanical or formulaic aspects of artistic production' (Spatz 2014, 272–273), Ben Spatz introduces an alternative term 'exercise-action', borrowed from Massimiliano Balduzzi, Italian performer, director and teacher. Balduzzi's expression illuminates what Spatz describes as 'a productive tension between the precision, repeatability and athleticism of "exercise" and the imaginative freedom' (Spatz 2014, 277) that the actor should seek in this embodied technique. Lecoq resolves this dynamic tension in his training by applying movement analysis to dramatised sequences. How then, might judo as a physical technique lead us into embodied imagining in which dramatisation was not necessarily the goal?

From a training perspective, our focus on judo in this project was not centred on resistance training, stretching or competitive principles, yet as a system of unarmed combat, judo led us to work in new and unexpected ways. We did not invent the movements, but in accordance with Spatz, 'as the order and duration of each element becomes more variable and dynamic, the practice shifts from a series of exercises towards a flow of actions' (Spatz 2014, 288). It is interesting to note that the use of the term 'action' here is deeply connected to post-Stanislavskian and post-Grotowskian approaches to training. In terms of Lecoq's pedagogy, I would argue that the productive tension between technique and creativity through judo resonated most closely with the legacy of our dramatic acrobatics training, which involves incremental exercises in leaps, somersaults and progressing to 'diving rolls forward and back flips' (Lecoq 2000, 70). Curiously, one of the essential ambitions of both judo and dramatic acrobatics is identical: 'to free the actor as much as possible from the force of gravity' (Lecoq 2000, 70).

Judo aligns with many awareness practices. Traces of judo principles are embedded in the Feldenkrais method (Feldenkrais 2010; Worsley 2018), an essential dimension of my own training at the Lecoq School and subsequently with the renowned movement teacher Monika Pagneux. Tangentially, Moshe Feldenkrais and Klein were living in Paris at the same time, where they both taught judo and published instructional manuals. Indeed, Ben Ivry is convinced that they must have known of each other (Ivry 2010). In his book *Higher Judo*, Feldenkrais discusses the creative entanglements of studying judo. In his view, great perseverance not only achieves professional efficiency, but is also conducive to 'a state, where

one works not only from necessity but enjoys the pleasure of creative work' (Feldenkrais 2010, 21). This ease and pleasure, he argues, 'is never achieved before adult independence from gravitation' (Feldenkrais 2010, 21). With the reassurance of the *tatami*, the tactile vibrancy of working bare-foot and increasing mutual trust, our judo training encouraged us to make more challenging, adventurous and complex creative choices.

For instance, *Arquitectura del Aire* involved the imaginal flight of one human body in space. We did not install a trapeze to lift the performer. Neither did we use virtual reality to generate an illusion of flight. Instead, we created an imaginary gravity-free journey in which the performer soared, swooped, turned, rolled forward and in reverse, floated, fluttered, climbed, glided and hovered without once touching the ground. Three base-lifters, in conjunction with the flyer, mediated between structurally exploring shifting the weight between hands, feet, knees and hips and sensing the three dimensionality and integration of all bodies involved (Figure 6). While we were not trained acrobats, judo had imbued our working strategies with the dynamic interplay or physical conversation between the flyer and the lifters. We did not attempt to hide the mechanical workings of levitation. The 'trick' was declared throughout.



Figure 6 Aerial dynamism in *Arquitectura del Aire*. Photo: La Mancha Theatre Company.

***Randori* (free practice) – training for the unexpected**

In line with Spatz's argument outlined earlier, the 'exercise-action' embedded in the technique of judo offered a structure in which free movement of the body can flourish. *Randori*, or free practice, involves improvising sparring drills with opponents to develop tactical and technical principles as well as training to be ready for the unexpected. Alternatively, *randori* can also be explored using imaginary partners in the form of shadow training. Adopting this more adaptable application of judo we improvised with imaginary opponents, awakening a stronger curiosity to explore beyond what we could merely see before us; a kind of speculative freedom. Applying *randori* as a devising exercise, we played with the imaginary dimensions of weight, speed, and scale, as we imagined

being thrown or throwing imaginary partners who were smaller or larger than us. Later, we extended these improvisations to the non-human, metaphorically ‘sparring’ and physically ‘identifying’ with huge glycerine bubbles, candle flames, shadows, amaretti wrappers that float upwards as if by magic when lit. Everyday objects painted blue – card, paper, spinning tops and balls – were crucial to the freedom of our imagining process.

These objects were not arbitrarily chosen but emerged through our experiences of engaging with Klein’s world and might best be described as examples of James Gibson’s three components of the inhabited environment: ‘*medium, substances and surfaces*’ (Gibson in Ingold 2007, 4; emphasis original). Our *medium* was the element of air, through which we moved. I interrogate this dimension further in the next section. *Substances* include more solid materials and, as Tim Ingold points out, ‘it is not generally possible to see or move through them’ (Ingold 2007, 6). From *substances* we moved to *surfaces*, defined by Gibson as the interface between the *medium* and *substance*. Explicating Gibson’s argument, Ingold suggests that *surfaces* are ‘where radiant energy is reflected or absorbed, where vibrations are passed to the medium, where vaporization or diffusion into the medium occur, and what our bodies come up against in touch’ (Ingold 2007, 6). Through our experimentation with *randori*, Gibson’s three dimensions of matter were embodied both as real presences and then as embodied possibilities of the imaginary.

For the French anthropologist Marcel Jousse (1886–1961), whose writings also deeply influenced Lecoq’s pedagogical ethos, the universe is a dynamic whole in which all parts are in constant interaction and human beings continuously absorb the reality that the environing universe impresses upon them. In other words, we are fashioned and sculpted by ‘the ambient world that impresses itself upon [us], plays itself out, in and through [us]’ (Sienaert 1990, 95; author’s insertions). This nuanced dimension paralleled the connective learning experience we discovered through judo in that it provided a training framework for experimenting and negotiating with reality, for probing a situation different to or beyond the actual and, through play, to modify that association or difference in such a way that it took us into new imaginal territories. Bachelard mentions that motion as a study of mechanics becomes merely ‘the transportation of an object through space’ (Bachelard 2002, 255), yet in our case, the poietic sense of bringing forth and making present revealed the ways in which the intertwining bodies of the performers made the flight exist above and beyond the body’s functional role. In the case of the flight example, it was precisely the interaction between the lifters and the flyers that explicates Bachelard’s aerial dynamism in which ‘the imaginary is imminent in the real’ (Bachelard 2002, 4). The material imagination Bachelard explores in poetry and literature lends itself to the body, for it is in and through our experiencing bodies that resonances and reverberations touch us.

Capturing speculative possibilities of judo training

As in many similar performer training approaches, we kept notebooks to record exercises, discoveries and significant instances of *randori*, coupled

with developing an awareness of the materiality of the body, of substance, density, weight and volume. A continuing feedback-loop of improvising, imagining, reflecting, revising, confirming and improvising again expanded our imagining faculties, allowing us to leave behind set patterns, predetermined movements and safe thoughts. In effect, our creative vocabulary increasingly became material-based. This approach is by no means unique to creation processes, but what we did discover was another dimension of improvisation, which we had not considered before in material terms. This is perhaps best encapsulated by Ingold's definition of improvisation as following 'the ways of the world as they open up' (Ingold 2010, 97). This subtle variant redirects the emphasis away from the exclusivity of improvisation as a human-centric activity through which we impose pre-conceived forms on inert matter. Instead, the notion of 'following' provoked by judo's principle of yielding to the fall sensitised us more specifically to engaging with 'the fields of force and currents of material wherein forms are generated' (Ingold 2010, 97).

Returning to material imagination and the element of air, I find the definition of 'lightness' proposed by Campbell Edinborough et al. particularly pertinent for the kind of embodied 'following' I am proposing:

Lightness is a disciplined sensitivity to impulses both from without and within. An ability to be consciously blown on the winds of imagination without resistance, without fear, without forcing. Letting each moment be neither pushed nor inhibited but *what it is*. (Edinborough et al., 2011; emphasis original)

Exploring the related theme of 'lightness' in the pedagogies of Lecoq, Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier, as well as in examples of performance practice, Simon Murray proposes lightness as 'a generative disposition towards making, composition and dramaturgy' (Murray 2013, 207). Similarly, Bachelard claims that 'To move with a motion that involves the whole being in the developing stages of lightness, is already the transformation of any moving being' (Bachelard 2011, 259). Taking this notion further, he adds that 'without aerial discipline, without apprenticeship in lightness, the human psyche cannot evolve' (Bachelard 2011, 261), suggesting that material lightness is necessarily a learned quality; one which I am convinced was initiated and cultivated through our judo training.

The performance outcome of *Architectura del Aire* did not follow a linear narrative. Instead, the work unfolded as an interweaving constellation of our unique and collective phenomenological and material experiences; as well as the cultural, political and historical responses and discoveries of making new work in Chile at the start of the 21st century. The judo *tatami* acted as a field of possibilities, a training space and a performance environment where the body, Bachelard's texts and Klein's art became the matter of meaning. All the time our judo training moved the work in unplanned directions, bringing to the fore the ways in which the imagining human body coalesced not only *with* other human bodies but also *with* more-than-human matter. Beneath the performance, judo continued to

flow, flux, absorb, settle and flurry in ways that shaped the creation process.

I would not describe *Architectura del Aire* as a 're-imagining' of Klein's work. In its etymological sense the prefix 're' implies 'a turning back; opposition; restoration of a former state' (Etymology online). Bachelard's perspective is useful here. Imagining for him is not representational or reflective, 'the faculty of forming images of reality', but rather a speculative act: 'the faculty of forming images which go beyond reality, which sing reality' (Bachelard 1983, 16). In these terms, the imaginary does not reject reality, but as Richard Kearney states, 'only the ossified and habitualized crust of reality. It does not annihilate the real world; it mobilizes its potencies of transformation' (Kearney 1998, 101). Fundamentally, *Architectura del Aire* transformed into a new material imagining in its own right, with its own emergent style, defined by French critic Nicholas Bourriaud as 'the movement of a work, its trajectory' (Bourriaud 2002, 114).

In her book *Performer Training and Technology*, Maria Kapsali discusses the shifting ontology of training between 'training as an "in-order-to" ... and training as a form of creative praxis, in and of itself' (Kapsali 2021, 84). The example I have shared in this article demonstrates that the entanglements of judo practised in *Architectura del Aire* potentiated a generative interplay between both ontologies, in which a creative devising approach and martial arts training were mutually constituted. Beneath the delicate veneer of form, our judo training had offered us access to new embodied possibilities of sensing, feeling, experiencing and acting, inviting us to exploit the creative opportunities of the present world and to explore the dynamic from the real to the imaginary. We often think of the actor-creators shaping the practice. In this production, judo also shaped us. It provided the conditions for making thought tangible and imagination possible, giving life to a new reality. Quietly and almost surreptitiously, judo was at work in this material practice as an imagining trajectory, as co-devisor, as performer and also as educator.

Moving forward, I suggest that the implications of reconfiguring judo as a material performer training practice, in which a rigorous technique of physical preparation is interwoven with its value systems of giving way, maximising efficiency, and interrelated flux, can offer a timely training framework for transcending the discipline-oriented functions predominantly associated with martial arts. Moreover, generating deliberative discussions between students and staff around the wider cultural implications of martial arts can stir curiosity and prompt new sensibilities towards marginalised practices.

To conclude, the new challenges and opportunities of 21st century performer training offer an invitation to step back and critically reflect on training lineages such as my own with Lecoq, as a means of finding new ways to move forward. Through the course of bringing the diverse disciplines of judo and performer training together with the philosophy of Gaston Bachelard, the art of Yves Klein and new materialist thinking, this article has offered one example of how Lecoq's pedagogy is being continuously recalibrated and adapted to new environments and contexts.

Correspondingly, I propose a more expansive way of imagining legacy as an ongoing active, transformational space of learning.

Within this speculative space, it is clear that the historical, cultural and material dimensions of Chile have profoundly permeated the ongoing development of La Mancha's own creative and training trajectory. This year, Chile is making preparations for another historic event: the co-creation of a new constitution, one that aims to cast aside the economic and social model imposed by Pinochet and to establish greater representation for marginalised groups. La Mancha's staff, students and graduates have actively participated in this ongoing process of transformation. I suggest that the spiritual ethos and techniques of judo explored in this article as a performer training approach cultivate similar sensitivities, correspondences and flows between peoples, places and materials. I align these educational potentials with performer training practices that call into existence our capacity to be open and alert to the vibrancies and intensities of co-emergence; a material becoming.

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