

**An Explanation and Analysis of One Principle of Meyerhold's
Biomechanics – *Tormos*
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The historical importance of Meyerhold's work has been acknowledged by a number of academic authors including Braun (1969, 1998), Law & Gordon (1996), Leach (1989, 2003) and Pitches (2003). These works have tended to focus on Meyerhold's overall approach to theatre rather than the specific system of Biomechanics. Since 1995 when the first Biomechanics workshop was delivered in the UK there has been a growing practical understanding of Meyerhold's actor training system, primarily through Higher Education Institutions. Middlesex University, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (CSSD), the University of Huddersfield and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) all teach Biomechanics as part of their BA syllabus. Despite this fact, the actors graduating from these courses tend to use Biomechanics as one part of their acting arsenal along side a number of other techniques, resulting in an absence of Biomechanics as a singular approach to professional acting. Pitches, although largely working within an academic context, perhaps best exemplifies this shift in thinking and bridges the gap between the practical and academic with his written examples of biomechanical exercises suitable for students and actors (2003, p.111-154). These give us new dimension to the analysis of Meyerhold's productions adding a more traditionally academic approach to the directors' influence. Pitches adds further clarity to his Biomechanics training via his MOOC (Massive Open Online Course platforms) 'Introduction to Physical Actor Training' (2014). This forum can give a basic understanding of the fundamental principles of Biomechanics. In this article I will examine in greater detail one of these key principles: *tormos*.

My own understanding of Biomechanics has come through actor training workshops with Gennadi Bogdanov which led to the establishment of my first theatre company, Talia Theatre, co-founded with James Beale in 1997. Talia

Theatre toured seven productions directed by Bogdanov in which I performed. Bogdanov learnt Biomechanics as a young actor training at The Russian University of Theatre Arts (GITIS) from 1972 to 1977. He was taught by Nicolai Kustov, himself an actor/ teacher in Meyerhold's theatre, (Baldwin, 1995, p.182).

My relationship with Bogdanov and Biomechanics began in 1995 at the Centre for Performance Research (CPR) in Cardiff. Gennadi Bogdanov and his fellow actor Alexey Levinsky who had also trained under Kustov, had been invited to the UK for the first time as part of the Meyerhold symposium and workshops (October, 1995). This was to be the first in the distinguished *Past Masters* series of symposia, which ran until 2003¹. It was here that Bogdanov and Levinsky first taught Biomechanics in the UK.

My understanding of Biomechanics has been a practical one: through doing. Each time I have returned to an intensive period of training with Bogdanov I have found that understood the principles of Biomechanics at a deeper level. I have come to appreciate the profundity of the system created by Meyerhold. My learning has also followed a very structured and traditional path; first I have participated in workshops with Bogdanov, then I have applied this training in rehearsal and finally I have taken these productions on tour as an actor. More recently I have transferred this learning to other students and acting companies. Each new level of understanding has complemented and extended my learning. In this article I will translate some of that practical knowledge on to paper. Using the structure of my own practical and personal journey of understanding I will describe and analyze the Biomechanical exercises exposing the principles, primarily *tormos*, contained within them. ²

¹ Artaud 1996, Decroux 1997, Brecht and Eisenstein 1998, Chekhov 1999, Kantor 2000, Tanz Theater 2001, Craig and Appia 2003.

² Some exercises used in Biomechanics are not unique to Biomechanics and can be found in other theatre training. It is the way these exercises are used to teach Biomechanics which is specific to Meyerhold's system.

Before looking in detail at *tormos* let us first understand an overview of the main principles of Biomechanics. The three principles most commonly used as the basic building blocks of all action are *otkaz*, *posil* and *stoika*. The term *stoika* is interchangeable with *tochka*, the first meaning ‘stance’ and the second ‘point’. Within Biomechanics they are interchangeable. Pitches offers a comprehensive description of the three terms:

- *Otkaz* is the Russian for ‘refusal’ and describes the preparation an actor makes before any actual action – crouching down before jumping or reaching back before throwing. It’s a kind of gestural prologue, if you like.
- *Posil* (the verb ‘to send’ in Russian) is the action itself. Sometimes known as the ‘realisation’, the *posil* is the actual expression of what was suggested in the prologue, the jump or throw itself.
- *Tochka* marks the end point of a cycle of action. It is the rest at the end of any movement. You might think of it as a kind of frozen epilogue, but an epilogue which always suggests a new start. (2003, p.55)

However Pitches does not offer a description of *tormos* and to find this I refer to Katie Normington’s article, ‘Meyerhold and the New Millenium’ (2005).

Similar to my own understanding, Normington is coming from the perspective of practical application. In 2004, following training with Bogdanov, she was invited to be the movement director for Red Shift Theatre Company’s production of *Bartleby*. She took this opportunity to explore the principles of Biomechanics and offers this on *tormos*: ‘*Tormos*, or delay, has the effect of putting a brake on the movement of the *posil*. The actors found this helpful in defining stages of the overall movement.’ (Normington, 2005, p.120).

Baldwin, also coming from a practical perspective of training with Bogdanov at Tuft’s University, Massachusetts, USA in 1994 gives us a similar explanation: ‘*Tormos*: (the brake) the restraint which must be applied simultaneously with the forward momentum of the *posil* to maintain control.’ (Baldwin, 1995, p. 187). She then goes on to record in an interview with one of the other actors,

Kathryn Medernos, the effect of *tormos*; 'The combination of forward momentum and restraint gives the work an elasticity, creating as kind of theatrical tension which is beautiful to watch,' (1995, p.188).

Building on these descriptions of *tormos* which currently exist, let us begin with the commonality of 'the brakes'.

Using the brakes

My initial understanding of *tormos* began at the Centre for Performance Research (CPR)³ in 1995 with a training exercise. Bogdanov told the group to run as fast as possible towards the wall of the studio then abruptly stop as close to the wall as possible. The task was to keep the speed of the action all the way up to the wall and to stop without touching it. The 'stop' or *stoika* needed to be with the whole body, that is to say the entire body needs to abruptly change from extreme speed to complete stillness within one moment. Initially I was able to stop my feet with the rest of my body catching up in canon, creating a ripple effect with my head finally coming to a stop a fraction of a second after my feet had started the process. Sometimes my hands would be the last to find the stillness. We were asked to repeat the exercise many times, each time stopping closer to the wall whilst avoiding contact with it, all the time developing our understanding of completing the task with our 'entire body'. Here the exercise is used to impart the first and perhaps the most basic level of understanding of the complex idea of *tormos*. This first definition of *tormos* was translated in the 1995 workshop as 'using our brakes', developing the skill of total physical control using *stoika* as a tool for training.

Through this initial exercise we were training our own personal *tormos*. The first few times we carried out the task there were accidents and failures: the

³ The Centre for Performance Research (CPR) was established in Cardiff in 1988. It is the successor to Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, formed in 1974. CPR is a multi-faceted arts organization, working nationally and internationally. The symposium I attended was the first in a series called 'Past Masters'.

workshop participants slowed down as they approached the wall, stopped at a distance from the wall or sometimes hit the wall, demonstrating that the exercise was hard to achieve and there was risk involved. Through repetition the actor gains physical control, becoming less likely to hit the wall and less likely to stumble; the actors are developing their *stoika* and *tormos*.

Bogdanov used every opportunity within the workshop to emphasize the actor's awareness of the spectator's position, this first exercise in *tormos* being one such opportunity. Within the workshop situation there is no audience unless we count the other participants, however, the actor is thinking and practicing through physical exercises how to engage the possible audience. She is developing her control of moving at speed towards a wall; an audience is likely to engage with this element of risk. The audience attention is engaged by their perception of the risk in a manner similar to that of a circus audience observing the feats of an aerialist. Through *tormos* we were able to control our movements to keep the appearance of this risk whilst simultaneously reducing it.

When teaching my students this first idea of *tormos* I try and remain faithful to the way I was taught by Bogdanov. The first instinct is to slow down as they approach the wall, the sudden and immediate stop being difficult to achieve. It is the repetition which embeds the practical understanding. The exercise, which develops the students' embodiment of *tormos*, helps them become aware of their physical control. For the students to place themselves in the position of the spectator whilst doing this first exercise adds a new perspective for them to consider, and another level of complexity to the exercise.

Variation of Speed

My initial understanding of *tormos* arose from working with fast movement. The difference between moving quickly and abrupt stillness is easily defined. Once I had an embedded understanding of this first idea of *tormos*; using our

brakes to stop us from hitting the wall, Bogdanov moved the learning forward. From here he introduced subtlety to my comprehension as I began to apply *tormos* to other actions.

Tormos can be applied as equally to a slow movement to allow the actor to maintain a consistent tempo as it can to fast actions in order to create a sudden and complete stop. The same control used to stop a fast action can be applied to a slow phrase of movement. Bogdanov trained this idea by telling us to walk consistently and steadily from one end of the room to a chair in the centre. Our task was to arrive at the chair after precisely one minute whilst walking continuously and keeping a steady rhythm. With my initial attempt I tried walking in a straight line which resulted in what Bogdanov remarked was a tedious 37 seconds. Bogdanov pointed out that if the actor is always keeping the perspective of the spectator at the forefront of her mind then she should try and create something of more interest. Also 37 seconds or even 59 seconds was not 60 seconds, as Bogdanov often said, an actor must be precise. Once I began to move more creatively across the space I lost the consistency of rhythm, speeding up, slowing down and still arriving at the chair after 47 seconds. It was through the application of *tormos*, which I had begun to understand when moving at speed, that I began to maintain a consistency of rhythm, consciously arriving at the chosen point within a precise timeframe.

This consistency and control is not to be confused with the separate skill of rhythm. *Tormos* is applied to rhythm in order to achieve the control. For example, when working with theatre students I often teach them the rhythmical exercise of placing their toe followed by their heel, moving from the left foot to the right. This is a common exercise in Biomechanics and is the starting point for the development of rhythm. An easy physical action to learn, the students quickly pick it up and immediately start to increase the rhythm, repeating the action faster with each step. The group find a collective rhythm but they don't have control of the rhythm, the rhythm is running away with the group. This is when the students must apply *tormos* to control the rhythm,

keep the consistency and not allow the rhythm to dictate the speed. It is the understanding and application of *tormos* which allows the group to hold the rhythm and remain steady.

Relating to Objects

I now have an understanding of how I can use *tormos* as brakes, bringing myself to a stop using my whole body. I also have an understanding of how to use *tormos* in relation to the consistency, rhythm and control of my actions. I now move to apply this learning to my actions in relation to other objects, such as props or set.

In the same way we trained to stop ourselves as close to the wall as possible we can now transfer this training to choose a precise position in relation to other objects. This does not necessarily need to happen from a fast action, it is the choice of how we place our bodies and the control we use in order to do this which is important. *Tormos* helps an actor to move with control through the space, towards, around and away from objects. The mastering of an actor's physical control results in clear and conscious actions which exclude superfluous movements with the intention of clearly communicating with the audience.

Pitches notes that post-revolutionary Meyerholdian productions, such as *Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922), were influenced by the Constructivist movement⁴ (2007 p.98). This can be seen more directly in the sets he used at this time, most strikingly in those of Lyubov Popova. Nick Worrall's description of *The Government Inspector* (1926) talks of the director's use of stage objects 'rebellious against their environment and their own fixed meaning' (Worrall, 2002, p.62). He also speaks of the actors 'conjuring' the objects (Worrall, 2002, p.62). Pitches goes on to ask how the actors achieved this and offers examples of the biomechanical training with sticks referring

⁴ 'Constructivism brought industrial materials and sensibilities into the cultural sphere, and as such it was absolutely in tune with Meyerhold's post-revolutionary philosophy of theatre' (2007, p.98)

back to the fundamental formula of *otkaz*, the 'refusal' or preparation for the action, *posil*, the action itself carried out with intention and purpose and *tochka* or *stoika*, the full stop or end of the action.

Image One – Work with Sticks

Photographer – Martyn Wilson

Caption - Actors training with Proper Job Theatre Company (2014).

When I was working with Bogdanov on the stick exercises detailed by Pitches (2007, pp. 99-101) Bogdanov said that an actor should be able to use a prop as if it was an extension of her own body, to have the same control as one would have over one's own hand (personal communication, Berlin, 1997). While it is *otkaz*, *posil* and *stoika* that gives the basis of achieving this objective, it is *tormos* which gives an over-arching control of these three fundamentals and therefore with the object or prop. Pitches notes that Meyerhold enlarged objects in order to 'defamiliarize them from their immediate context.' (2007, p.98). And in agreement with Bogdanov, goes on to say:

Whilst this enlargement of the stage properties added to a sense of grotesque exaggeration and enhanced the childlike aesthetic, it did not, of itself, constitute a liberating of the objects' potential meanings. Instead, it was the manner in which these objects were manipulated that constituted the real magic – and that, it shall be argued, related to the way the performers had been trained. (Pitches, 2007, p.98)

Bogdanov adopted the enlargement of props in our production *7 Assilon Place* (2003). This piece, written by Nathan Osgood, explored the difficulties of the process that asylum seekers are put through when entering this country. The choice here was to enlarge the character's pen to fifty centimetres long and to have the paper attached together to create a continuous sheet of over thirty metres. This choice was taken to emphasize the amount of paper work and the difficulty with writing, following Worrall's assertion of the theatre props being 'half way between function and symbol' (2002 [1973] p.62).

As actors when working with these oversized objects we still needed to use them as 'extensions of our own bodies'. The studio training with sticks, as outlined by Pitches, gave us this basis. We needed the extra control we learnt through *tormos* to be able to control these objects and prevent them from appearing unwieldy and clown like. *Tormos* gives the extra control, an ease in the relationship between the actor and the object, something above the rhythmical precision found through *otkaz*, *posil* and *stoika*. The accentuation of the props in *7 Assilon Place* made a point, they did not distract or appear comic.

Through *tormos* the actor is choosing how and what to communicate to the audience, for example to give the impression that a fifty centimetre pen is usual rather than amusing. Developing the principle of *tormos* gives the actor choice, choice in *how* to perform the action.

Working with Partners

Tormos is of specific use when an actor works with partners. The wider value of Biomechanic's contribution to partner work has been noted. Amy Skinner refers to Biomechanics and working with partners, or perhaps more appropriately put, theatrical ensemble, in *Encountering Ensemble* (Britton, 2013). Skinner concurs with Britton that ensemble is difficult to define referring to it as 'it-ness'.

[C]learly there is such a thing as "ensemble" performance which those who participate in it and those who observe it recognise as qualitatively different from non-ensemble performance. The problem is knowing what "it" is. (2013, p.57)

Through *tormos* the actor is given a definable tool with which to bring her closer to understanding this "it-ness".

Skinner uses Meyerhold as an example of a director/auteur who took total control of his productions 'from the composition of the stage set, through the delivery of lines, to the intricate detail of actor's work' (Skinner 2013, p 58).

She then goes on to discuss how Meyerhold, whilst taking this control was able to place importance on both the individual actor and the ensemble:

Meyerhold reconciles the potential paradox of a central individual within an ensemble framework by using his position to develop a unified approach to performance, creating a theatrical model where the auteur /director and the practice of ensemble function side by side. (Skinner 2013, p.58)

Braun (1998), Pitches (2003) and Worrall (2002) also refer to the ensemble playing of Meyerhold's actors in the analysis of *The Government Inspector* (1926), one of the most influential productions in terms of ensemble working according to Braun (1998, p.236). Meyerhold had the ability to keep the discipline of the overall artistic composition above the individual status of the actor. The company would prioritize the ensemble for the greater good of the production.

How is this ensemble created by Meyerhold? Of course, there is not a one-word answer to this question. Skinner makes the connection between Meyerhold's musicality and his work with ensemble:

Like the instruments of the orchestra, Meyerhold's performers function not as isolated individuals, but as part of the larger artistic enterprise, the production.....an appreciation of the role of the individual within the performance process...the unique sounds of the individual instruments which work together to create the orchestral voice.....the integration of many individual parts into a complex theatrical whole. (Skinner, 2013 p. 57)

This gives us a clear and, in my opinion, very true metaphor of how Biomechanics brings together the individual actors to create a piece (to quote Skinner's title) 'more than the sum of its parts', however, for an actor in a rehearsal space there is still a gap between the concept and how it is to be achieved. Both Pitches and Skinner refer to the etudes and the tripartite rhythmic structure of *otkaz*, *posil* and *tochka (stoika)* as training for an actor to bring them closer to achieving ensemble, I would argue that *tormos* should be added to this list of basic biomechanical skills.

To return to the CPR workshop in Cardiff with Bogdanov, as it was here that I began to develop my understanding of *tormos* within a group, again, through

an exercise. The task was to move from one point to another point within the space, continuously increasing our speed. We did not need to stop at the same time but we did have to find a shared rhythm and increase this simultaneously so the speed of each individual was always the same. Each individual could stop at any point in the space and the distance between points was chosen by the individual and did not need to be the same as her partners. Maintaining the rhythm with all the partners even during the *stoika* or moment of stillness, was the primary learning of the task. Whilst moving in this shared rhythm, continually increasing the pace, Bogdanov reduced the amount of space the group had to move within⁵. All the actors had to maintain the speed of movement within a confined space without touching each other. I applied the learning of the first exercise, running towards a wall, although now rather than a fixed visible wall the control was towards the other partners in the group and we were all continually moving, changing direction, stopping and starting, creating a staccato rhythm. Now the concept had developed from a start/ stop exercise to something that occurred whilst in movement. Through repetition of this exercise I developed a more complex embodied understanding of *tormos* within an ensemble setting. Through learning to read the movements of my partners I became to be able to use my *tormos* to control my physicality in relation to my partners. I could speed up, slow down and move any part of my body to allow for a partner to move past me. The eventual result was a group moving at speed within a confined space without any collisions. Again, the movement is precise and conscious. I learnt how to control every part of my body in relation to my partners; I consciously moved my body in space.

Similarly, as with individual *tormos*, this group control at speed can be translated to other group actions. For example, to enable an ensemble to move together as one, allowing the group to arrive at a certain point at the same time and to avoid untidiness. An example of this occurred in the

⁵ Bogdanov did this by holding out his arms to create a horizontal line and slowly moving towards the group. His arms created a line which the actors did not cross, it was as if he had created a moving wall.

rehearsals for a production of Martin Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies*. There was a group of four actors standing on a table at the back of the stage. One actor stood down stage, close to the audience and spoke the text. The space between the table and the front of the stage was approximately three metres and the lines delivered by the actor at the front took twenty five seconds. The task was for the group of actors to maintain a connection between each other. They must move together continually towards the down stage actor to arrive behind him precisely as the lines end: twenty five seconds. This must include a soft and continuous descent from the table. To hold this connection between the partners within a specific timeframe whilst moving across the set requires *tormos*. An actor's ability to read her partners physicality and control her own actions in relation to the group demonstrates her understanding of *tormos* within an ensemble.

Image two – Five actors

Photographer – Martyn Wilson

Caption – 'Fewer Emergencies' by Martin Crimp, directed by Chloe Whitehead (2016).

Summarizing the Training

After this sequence of exercises the members of the Cardiff workshop shared a common definition of *tormos*. Bogdanov was able to use the term in a number of different training situations. Most Biomechanic workshops with Bogdanov began with the same exercise; walking from one point to another. During this exercise he would often say '*tormos*' and we would become more conscious of the control we had over our bodies and of any superfluous movements. We would think about our pace, were we rushing in comparison to our partners? Where were our partners and how do we move in relation to them? In another exercise of jumping onto and from a table the word *tormos* would apply to how we used the control of our bodies to land softly, through our feet. Moving across the floor the word *tormos* could apply to the way in which we connect our feet with the floor, controlling the roll of the foot from the

heel to the toe, creating a softness and soundlessness whilst choosing the tempo. More than just our feet we could now use *tormos* consciously to position each part of our bodies in relation to other objects; chairs, tables, etc. training to take the actor towards working with a set within a rehearsal context. Following Meyerhold's intention that the training of actors should be for performance this would be the next necessary step.

Moving Towards Performance

Meyerhold consciously held the audience, or spectator as was his preferred term, in the forefront of his mind when developing his theatre:

For Meyerhold, the audience was the vital fourth dimension without which there was no theatre. The other three 'dimensions'- the playwright, the director and the actor – worked to no avail if they had no audience, for it was somewhere between them and their audience that theatre 'happened'. (Leach, 1989, p.30)

The evidence presented by Leach and others, notably Sadovsky (quoted in Schmidt, 1967, p.46-7), of the importance placed by Meyerhold on the role of the spectator within theatre, leads us to believe that Meyerhold was training his actors for performance. Sharing this belief that theatre needs an audience and actor training is for this end, I established Talia Theatre in 1997 with my colleague, James Beale, (who also participated in the 1995 symposium) with the intention of using Biomechanics to create performances and engage audiences. Talia Theatre annually invited Bogdanov to direct a new production for a four to six week period between 1998 and 2005. Each day, following rehearsals, Bogdanov would lead actor-training sessions for five hours in the evening. Owing to the annual repetition of this process Talia Theatre were able to build a company of actors trained to a high standard in Biomechanics. It also offered the rare opportunity to transfer this training into rehearsals and then performance. These processes, each directed by Bogdanov with the assistance of James Beale, resulted in *Jesticulate* (1997), *Alice in Wonderland* (1998), *The Duel* (1999), *Is There Anybody out There?* (1999), *Home* (2001), *7 Assilon Place* (2003), *The Vaudevilles* (2004) and *Moliere* (2005). Conceived in a commercial theatre context these

productions were not documented by film or photographs or analyzed for the purposes of academic research.

With Character

During Bogdanov's annual visits to the UK our ensemble of actors was small and this required us to play multiple roles. Our production of Chekhov's *Vaudevilles* (produced by Talia Theatre, 2004) saw me cast as the male, comic character of Lucca. Bogdanov was not happy with this casting but with only three actors in the company there were few alternatives. In an attempt to prove to Bogdanov that I could play this role I learnt the lines, worked out a dynamic physical score using the principles of *otkas*, *posil* and *stoika* and awaited the opportunity to demonstrate my skill. Bogdanov would often complain of actors not 'proposing' ideas during the rehearsal process so surely he would be impressed with my preparation. My cue came and I sprang through a window in the set whilst saying my first lines and began darting around the stage in a display of physical comedy. From Bogdanov just one word: *tormos*. In this situation the character of Lucca had been thrown into the faces of the audience, everything about the character was given in the first few moments. There was no opportunity to develop subtly, the intrigue for the audience was lost.

By the time of this rehearsal I had been working with Bogdanov for nine years. My understanding of *tormos* had developed from the initial 'using the brakes'. In this situation that same principle needed to be applied to the whole character of Lucca and the manner in which he was presented to the audience. By applying *tormos* to the way in which the character is revealed the actor has the opportunity to create intrigue for the spectator. Here *tormos* applied both to the physical action of the character as I had learnt in the aforementioned exercises and also the script. This is not to say that lines cannot be delivered quickly, but *tormos*, again, allows the actor a conscious choice of which speed to use and when to contrast this with pauses in order to create interest and variety in the rhythm. The similarity can be seen with the previously described exercise where the actors moved from one point to

another within a confined space, learning to speed up, slow down and ultimately control their movements. The same control applies to the delivery of the lines. With Lucca, although not playing at this point within an ensemble, Bogdanov wanted me to find the variety in the delivery, to allow the spectator time to understand the character, for the character to be revealed through a series of conscious decisions on the part of the actor rather than thrusting the character at the audience.

Image three – Lucca

Photographer – Martyn Wilson

Caption – Chloe Whitehead playing Lucca from 'The Bear', Chekhov's Vaudevilles, Talia Theatre (2004).

We re-worked the entrance of Lucca. First the audience heard him from a long way off, an orchestra of nonsensical sounds that built the imagination of the audience; what was coming? As this cacophony of sound grew so did the expectation until finally – counterpoint - a head popped into the window diagonally from the top. Then began a play of climbing through the window, engaging the spectator through physical comedy. The audience could understand Lucca's intention to climb through the window, and humour came from the roundabout way of achieving this end. Once Lucca finally arrived on the stage the audience had become curious to learn more, first through sound then through the physical comedy, now they wanted to hear what he would say. In this example Bogdanov used *tormos* to reveal a character and build engagement with the audience, to allow the character the possibility of development. The actor needs to create a desire in the audience to know in order to hold their interest. In allowing this pause or by slowly revealing a character the audience is given space to develop their own interpretation. Their part in the unfolding of the production becomes more active, they themselves have more of a role, a role in making decisions about this character. The actor does not feed them the information they need. They are actively encouraged to engage and to think. Such engagement lays the foundation for a more sophisticated, two-way relationship with the audience, a

philosophy in which Meyerhold believed 'We intend the audience not merely to observe' he wrote in 1907, 'but to participate in a *corporate* creative act' (Leach, 1989, p45).

By applying *tormos* the actors, and indeed the director, can choose how the characters, the plot or any other aspect of the play are revealed. Holding back certain aspects as others are revealed, hooking the audience in, feeding their desire to want to learn more, what will happen next? Information is given to the audience in conscious parts allowing the spectator space to think for themselves, inviting intrigue, encouraging participation in the creative process. Meyerhold argues for this intellectual engagement of the audience (Leach, 1989, p.46).

Whilst Bogdanov's instructions to the actors were made in a Biomechanical context it can be argued that there is a blurred line here between a principle of Biomechanics and a wider theatrical concept found in other approaches to theatre; my entrance was out of control and rushed. However, the word *tormos* gives the Biomechanically trained actor a very precise understanding of what the director wants, a definition which has come from a layering of knowledge, an embodied knowledge, building from a basic to an intricate understanding. Now within this rehearsal situation the one word of direction refers holistically and yet precisely to how the director wants the actor to change. What we are given in the one word, *tormos*, is clarity of definition developed through training, applied and tested to ensure a specific understanding within a company. James Beale, who followed the same training with Bogdanov since 1995 and is now artistic director of Proper Job Theatre Company, explains:

Biomechanics gives us a language through which we can talk about the principles of acting. It allows us to refer to ideas which can otherwise be impenetrable or misunderstood. (pers. comm. April 2014)

The layering process through which an actor develops an understanding of the term *tormos* gives its definition precision and accuracy minimizing the

possibility for misinterpretation. One word to communicate a complex and intricate idea.

Conclusion

What we find in Biomechanics is Meyerhold bringing together, in one system, what he perceived to be the essence of good theatre practice. He brought together what he thought 'worked' in theatre through both studying the work of others and creating his own vast body of work. He divided this approach to theatre into small and precise teachable principles. If we take this as the premise for Biomechanics it is therefore unsurprising that we can find Biomechanical principles in other art forms. For example it is possible to identify *tormos* within a musical frame.

To compare J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, one interpretation by Andras Schiff and another by Glenn Gould. Both are accomplished pianists, both admired and respected in their field, both play Bach's composition yet interpret the music differently. It is not hard to hear the difference is their choices. Gould's playing of the piece is intentionally controlled. He is holding the music, which engages the listener, building anticipation as to what is to come next. This is not to be confused with simply playing the piece more slowly. In the Gould version we do not have the impression that he could not play the piece at a quicker tempo, he is not playing slowly because he is unsure of what comes next, he has chosen to control the rhythm, and with this the music. It is not only the rhythm of the piece but also the emotion, as when a child is holding back tears, we can see the emotion even though the fullness of the emotion is not being shown, in some ways we can feel the emotion more strongly because it is being held back. Gould plays the piece with greater *tormos*.

Tormos is the actor's control over her physical actions allowing for the precise placing of all or any part of the body in space giving the individual precision of

movement and a choice of how actions can be played. *Tormos* also gives the possibility for lightness and softness to an actor's movement. This precise and conscious control of the body is then extended to build the shared control of an ensemble. Within a group, *tormos* develops awareness of partners helping ensemble playing. Through training, actors can come to share a multi-layered understanding of control both from an individual perspective and as an ensemble. This shared understanding can be captured in one word: *tormos*. The company can then move forward into rehearsal with this shared definition of a complex principle. Once working on a production the layering of understanding continues. It is now possible to speak about playing a scene, a character, an entire play through *tormos*. The word gives clarity of definition. In a production *tormos* can refer to the overall pace or the way the actors' carry the play. It is possible to see *tormos* being played by actors today, actors who have never come across the term, it is an existing acting concept, indeed the idea can be found in many art forms. What Meyerhold did was to recognise the concept, understand the effect on the audience, develop a physical understanding through actor training, define it, name it and make it possible to teach to actors.

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