Title: Improvisation in Psychophysical Training

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**Introduction**

In art, unfortunately (or luckily), there is nothing that it is absolutely necessary to know, and therefore is worthy to belong to a teaching syllabus. No true ABC exists. (Barba in Zarrilli 2009: xiii)

How does improvisation serve as a coherent, justifiable, complex and rigorous strategy through which to train physical performers? To what do we ask trainees to direct their attention when we ask them to improvise? How do we justify to them, and eventually encourage them to justify to themselves, the time they spend with us, if they are not being taught a specific suite of technical and/or expressive skills? When we use improvisation as training, what are we asking trainees to do?

In deciding what to do we are, in essence, deciding what trainees should direct their attention towards. Through the structuring of attention, the trainee obtains specific outcomes (even if those outcomes are not readily quantifiable). In this article I discuss how an awareness of pedagogical structures offers both trainer and trainee a guide to focusing attention while participating in improvisation. These understandings both ‘justify’ the time spent on an improvisation and provides a specificity of perspective that allows the improvisation to function as a precise developmental mechanism.

I suggest the existence of three ‘domains’ of learning to which a trainee’s attention can be drawn. The first is ‘the mechanics of self’ and involves learning about all aspects of the activated bodymind, the effective use of physicality, voice and thought. The second, ‘models and metaphors’, suggests how an improvisation might serve as a metaphor for
other creative and performative activity, allowing the trainee to model behaviours that are applicable beyond the specifics of the exercise the trainee is engaged in. The third, 'principles', sees the improvisation as an activity through which the trainee encounters and applies fundamental principles governing his or her relationship to self, others and the creative act.

My enquiry is focused on a single exercise, one which forms the core of my training process with physical performers. It is a common activity, which I use extensively when training dancers and other physical performers, comprising the throwing of juggling bags in random or fixed sequences between participants stood in a circle, an exercise so common that its potential is seldom deeply exploited. Though structured, the exercise is fundamentally an improvisation. The pattern of bags continually changes and no participant ever knows from which direction the next bag will come. It is a structure that requires participants to react appropriately to external stimulus while providing clear impulse to others. It operates as a ‘pure’ improvisation, stripped of narrative, content and ‘meaning’.

My analysis is supplemented and contextualised by reflections from postgraduate students who have worked with me and who discuss the types of learning and self-encounter their participation opened up to them.

Through focusing on a the bag exercise as ‘pure’ improvisation, I suggest some ways to answer the most simple of questions; as we guide individuals and groups from where they are to where we need them to be: “what should we do...?”

1 There is not space in this article for a full description of the structure and intentions of the bag exercise as I use it in the training processes I run. However, a fuller explanation, along with film of various aspects of the bag exercise in action, can be found online at http://ensemblephysicaltheatre.wordpress.com/
Forms and Exercises

A trainee working within a psychophysical paradigm\(^2\) will start from either a codified form\(^3\) or improvisation. Though the focus of this article is on training through improvisation, I would like to prepare the discussion by touching on the pedagogy that operates in form-training.

Form-training is given rigour and structure by the detail of the form itself. If the trainee pays sufficient (and appropriate) attention to the details of the form – how to stand, how to shift from one position to another, the appropriate qualities of movement, how to quieten the mind – she or he will encounter her- or himself as the doer of the form. Through that encounter, the trainee learns to make more subtle the self she or he meets.

Zarrilli describes form-training thus:

As one learns to inhabit a form or structure of action, one is gradually attuned to an ever-subtler experience of one’s relationship to that structure.

(Zarrilli 2009: 48)

The necessary foundation of the activity is that the trainee pay attention. It is through attention that self-encounter is made possible, the form serving as a vehicle for that self-encounter.

\(^2\) Zarrilli defines training within a psychophysical paradigm thus: “The self on which one works is not the psychological/behavioural self, but rather the psychophysical self – the experiential/perceiving self, constituted in the moment by sensory awareness, perception and attentiveness to ones bodymind in the act of doing...” (Zarrilli 2009: 29)

\(^3\) Form-training comprises encounter with a fixed, sometimes culturally-specific structure. It might be a form the trainer has encountered and mastered – classical ballet, kalarippayattu, kung-fu, yoga – or one the trainer has him/herself developed and codified, as Meyerhold developed biomechanics or Nunez has developed numerous training dynamics. With the transmission of forms through time, some training becomes a hybrid of these – contemporary teaching of Meyerhold’s biomechanics, Suzuki training or Deleusian mime represent codified forms emerging from the work of individual practitioners.
Many forms, especially those grown and transplanted from cultural contexts other than the contexts in which they are being taught, contain ontological and philosophical challenges to the trainee. In paying attention to the details of the form, the trainee encounters ontological, psychophysical and self-revelatory insights. Even if the trainee is from the same cultural tradition as the form, the form demands a precision of detail beyond that demanded in daily life.

Barba writes:

The various codifications of the performer’s art are, above all, methods to break the automatic responses of daily life... (Barba 1995; 32)

It is in the details to which the trainee's attention is directed that the technologies of the form are embedded. The trainee encounters a gap between the requirements of those details and the assumptions and acculturation that she or he brings to their execution.

What gives an exercise rigour, precision and detail if it is fundamentally improvisatory? What gives improvisation its provenance and seriousness-of-intent?

Barba is clear about the limited intrinsic worth of any exercise:

Taken by itself in isolation, an exercise has no value whatsoever. It is like a word which, if it is not put into a sentence, neither says anything nor serves any purpose (Barba 1986: 98)

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4 Zarrilli writes of this when describing his early experiences in India:

My overt physical ineptitude was matched by my equal naivety about how to learn through my body, and how that body was related to my mind. I physically attacked both kathakali and kalarippayattu exercises. I tried to force the exercises into my body; my body into the forms. (Zarrilli 2009: 23)
He suggests an exercise is given significance, architecture, by the principles\(^5\) that underpin it:

> One exercise is as good as another if it respects the laws, the dialectic of life. When it does so it fulfills its function on all levels.... (ibid)

He further suggests that, though a trainee may acquire skills through mastering an exercise, this is not its primary function:

> The physical training exercises make it possible for the performer to develop a new behavior, a different way of moving, of acting and reacting, a specific skill. But this skill stagnates into a one-dimensional reality if it does not reach down into the depths of the individual.

The physical exercises are always spiritual exercises. (Barba 1995: 88)

Improvisation can offer a technology of training no less sophisticated than a codified form, but this requires the trainee to be offered specific and detailed points of attention. Understanding the complex of pedagogies that underpin the activity offers just such a mechanism for focusing attention. The coexistence of these domains of learning produces the internal dynamic of the exercise.

When a trainee becomes aware that every action has both a concrete reality and a wider significance, she or he also become aware of the gap between the possibilities of the exercise and his or her competencies as its doer. They become ‘gradually attuned to an ever-subtler experience of (their) relationship to that structure.’ (Zarrilli 2009: 48) an attunement that requires they ‘break (his or her) automatic responses.’ (Barba 1995; 32)

\(^5\) Principles he describes as: ‘particularly good ‘bits of advice’...’ (Barba and Savarese 1991; p. 8)
It is in the meeting of pedagogies that a trainee encounters the ontological, philosophical and
metaphoric implications of her or his activity. Awareness of their distinct but interrelated nature
offers both trainer and trainee the possibility of identifying focuses for attention as they negotiate
detailed engagement with an improvisation. By structuring engagement with these pedagogical
domains simultaneously, a trainer can sculpt and develop a trainee’s learning.

The Mechanics Of Self

The first and most easily accessible level of learning a trainee encounters is what I term ‘the
mechanics of self’. This pedagogy principally concerns a trainee encountering and developing their
psychophysical competencies. ‘The mechanics of self’ refers both to the evident mechanics of self-
use and to the idiosyncratic paradigms of thinking each individual encounters. Identifying and
transforming personal paradigms is central to developing efficient use of the integrated self.

In the bag exercise, the trainee is asked to observe the mechanics of self through directing
attention to the details of his or her encounter with the moment-by-moment tasks that constitute
the exercise; to making more subtle the use of the bodymind in facilitating the easeful flow of
impulse into reaction. As each action comprises myriad details, in paying attention to each task he
or she gets better at concentrating, at pursuing multiple objectives simultaneously, at co-ordinating
body/hand/eye interactions, at engaging peripheral vision, at remembering and enacting
sequences of tasks, at identifying and eliminating wasteful and habitual physical movements, at
balancing attention-to-self with attention-to-others, at using different parts of the body separately
but simultaneously. Trainees learn to accept the risk of being hit by a bag and to accept personal
responsibility that, if they are hit, it is because their attention was insufficient. Crucially, the trainee
also improves his or her capacity to think\textsuperscript{6} clearly and with precision, focussing available psychic energy on the easeful execution of task.

From early in the exercise I suggest focuses for concentration, often technical and physical. A key one is that the trainee pays precise attention to the muscular processes involved in catching, absorbing, redirecting and passing the energy a bag carries with it. Trainees are asked to notice the angle of their hand as they catch, how far into the arm/shoulder/torso received energy travels before it can be redirected and passed on. This encourages flow between receipt and transmission of energy, encouraging trainees to notice the blockages to that flow, either in habitual physical activity or habitual thought. In concentrating on the specific physical requirements of a task (i.e. a single catch/throw) the participant can observe (and thereby come to eradicate) both unnecessary and wasteful physical activity and observe (and dismantle) unnecessary thinking.

Other technical focuses are introduced as the exercise develops. We might work towards catching the bag silently, requiring a more detailed engagement with the moment of preparation for effecting a catch and a more subtle absorption of the received energy into the catcher’s muscles. We might work with pairs of bags, requiring equalisation of throwing by both sides of the body, or with choreographies of jumping, spinning, talking, singing before, during or after a throw.

\textsuperscript{6} In using the word ‘think’ I am not describing only the conscious activities of the mind, those activities of which an individual is aware. Part of the process of embodying an action requires that a protocol of thought comes to operate without conscious control. For such non-conscious thinking protocols to be efficient, requires that they be consciously constructed, and therefore that, initially, they be available to conscious manipulation. Only once they have been consciously and appropriately designed and rehearsed, a process that manifests in physical action, can they come to operate non-consciously and the action that the ‘thinking’ underpins can become embodied.
One student, interviewed while I was researching this article, noted that: ‘releasing tension in the body, focusing purely on task, made the exercise easier’. Another noted her habit of: ‘stopping the flow of energy’. The trainees find in the exercise a domain in which to encounter and alter their habitual use of their bodyminds. It is a learning that requires noticing and stopping what one is doing to obstruct easeful engagement with the task.

Trainees are encouraged to separate one task from another. When there are two bags being passed they are asked to think of the exercise not as a ‘two-bag’ exercise, but as two ‘single-bag’ exercises running simultaneously. Thus interaction between an individual and a bag does not absolve him or her from the obligation also to interact with the other bag(s) should they be thrown in her or his direction. This separation of one bag from another trains a participant to concentrate on multiple tasks simultaneously. As one receives, absorbs, redirects and transmits the energy of a bag, one must also pay attention to whatever else might be necessary. Engagement with a task does not mean one can separate oneself from the unfolding flow of the exercise, even momentarily.

As already suggested, a key function of the exercise — especially as a structure that trainees revisit in every training session — is the development of the ability to concentrate appropriately. One student, writing more directly about seeing the patterns of her thinking, wrote of her tendency to force herself to focus rather than concentrate easefully: ‘I would try very hard to pay attention to the task .... This caused me to become too absorbed in paying attention and I’d get hit by a bag.’

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7 In the summer of 2009, Eilon Morris, a PhD student with long experience of working with the bag exercise, interviewed, on a number of occasions, a cohort of MA students who were engaged in a training process with me, a process in which repeated use of the bag exercise played a central role. He asked them to reflect on significant moments of insight that they had experienced either while engaged in the exercise or while reflecting on it. He further asked them to consider whether they considered that those insights related to any of the three pedagogies outlined in this article.

Their answers reveal that they are clear that different ‘sorts’ of learning are taking place through the exercise and that those learnings intersect and reinforce one another. Less clear, understandably, is their ability to be certain the relationship between an insight, often experienced in a flash of realisation while immersed in complex physical tasks, and the precise domain of pedagogy it refers to.
Developing precise and appropriate attention to physical action, and the patterns of effective concentration that underpin it, operates clearly within the domain of ‘the mechanics of the self’. It encourages self-observation – an essential first step in the process of self-education. The trainee comes to know him- or herself though detailed observation of the intersection between the experienced self and the self-with-others, mediated by the passing of the bag.

This is however only one element of learning. Through engagement with the technical tasks of an improvisation, a participant encounters wider implications and resonances, which, if understood, can alter understanding both of a specific activity, and the trainee’s entire relationship to training, rehearsing and performing. It is to this sense of improvisation as model and metaphor that I now turn.

**Models and Metaphors**

The pedagogy of ‘models and metaphors’ elucidates how the specific experiences of one improvisation transfer to other contexts. It suggests how improvisation serves as a metaphor for other performance or rehearsal situations. Improvisation is an activity in which the trainee can model the thinking skills required in other environments, whatever their specific aesthetic. Awareness of, and engagement, with this domain of pedagogy draws attention to improvisation as a foundational rather than aesthetic-specific training strategy.

The bag exercise is improvisation stripped to its fundamentals. It is a sequence of actions during which a stimulus provokes an impulse, requiring an individual to respond by appropriately integrating and redirecting a quantum of received energy. This response manifests through a physical action and involves the transmission of a quantum\(^8\) of energy to another. This is a distillation of the entire performative process – the receipt, manipulation and transmission of energy.

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\(^8\) ‘Quantum’ has a specific meaning in the domain of physics but here I am using it in a more general way to indicate ‘an amount or quantity’ (Collins Dictionary, 2009).
elements of communication. The bag exercise is a metaphor for all performance situations, stripped of aesthetics, narrative and other specificity.

To introduce this metaphor gives the exercise resonance and, more importantly, offers the trainee a concrete mechanism for modelling the development of her or his capacity and experience in the 'conceptual' domain. If the trainee wants to learn how better to see, understand and exploit impulses, attention paid to the detailed use of the bodymind will offer concrete ways of doing this. Within the exercise, the trainee models effective use of the bodymind.

An example will clarify this. Michel St Denis wrote:

> It is of prime importance to establish from the beginning the idea of ensemble acting because what, in fact, creates life on the stage is the actor's awareness of his relationships – spiritual, imaginative, perceptive, physical – with other actors. (Saint-Denis 1982: 81)

If we want trainees to rehearse the 'idea of ensemble acting' or 'awareness of ... relationships', they require precise tasks through which to do it. In an improvisation trainees encounter just such a set of tasks. They can model the physical and thinking behaviours that will facilitate 'awareness' in any context within the specific context of a single exercise.

Often the equivalences between one domain of learning and another are direct. Just as responding to one bag does not absolve a participant from paying attention to other bags, so being engaged in one action within a performance does not mean the performer need not be aware of, and available to respond to, other impulses that arise. The bag exercise offers the trainee a domain in which to model appropriate ways of structuring his or her attention.
However, where the translation of behaviour from the exercise-specific domain to the metaphoric domain is not so evident, the trainee is still developing the capacity for appropriate attention and can model that appropriateness within a real activity with immediate feedback and direct consequences.

Encouraging the two pedagogies to coexist in the trainee’s awareness helps him or her to explore the ‘universal’ through concrete actions and to invest concrete actions with ‘universal’ significance.

A brief further example of the interaction between these two pedagogies might be useful before moving onto a consideration of the pedagogy of principle.

If participants in the bag exercise are asked to catch, spin and touch the floor while dealing with several bags simultaneously, they encounter the idea of ‘the hierarchy of tasks’. This idea recognises that if one is unable to do everything at once, then some things become more important than others. Awareness of a hierarchy of tasks encourages trainees to learn instantaneously to prioritise what must be over done over what might be done.

Sometimes I might impose such a hierarchy of tasks, asking for a specific focus to the exercise on a given occasion. Sometimes it is up to an individual to decide to adopt a particular focus to the activity on a specific occasion.⁹

The notion of a hierarchy of tasks is, on one level, simply a description of how an individual engages with complex activities. However it is also a usefully specific model of performance. All live performance is predicated on the possibility of the unexpected. The unexpected – of major or minor dimension – requires mental discipline if it is to be incorporated into the performance at the moment that it happens. This discipline is intrinsic to the process of ensuring that performance

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⁹ Further discussion of the role of a trainee in personalising and justifying tasks within training can be found in my article ‘The Pursuit of Pleasure’ (Britton, J. (2010))
remains ‘live’. The notion of a ‘hierarchy of tasks’, while on one level a tool for structuring engagement with a particular exercise, is also a model for how one incorporates the unexpected into the rehearsed. It encourages performers to develop the ability, and to rehearse the mental discipline, to know instantly and at all times, what is crucial, what desirable and what optional in each action. This trains the performer, when the unexpected presents itself, to choose an appropriate response, concentrating on the crucial, reducing or discarding the optional.

In placing the two pedagogies alongside one another, trainees encounter an activity through which to model the complex attention performance requires. They experience a practical domain in which to rehearse and develop the disciplines of thinking needed to make instantaneous and appropriate decisions when faced with an excess of options (‘the mechanics of self’). They also model the necessary attitudes and awareness to create across a range of aesthetics (‘models and metaphors’) and hone and develop those capacities through precise psychophysical engagement with the specifics of a single exercise.

The ability of trainees to understand how experiences exist in the domain of ‘mechanics of the self’ and ‘models and metaphors’ simultaneously is illustrated in the following example.

A student had noticed her tendency to become distracted by bags of a certain colour, causing her to lose focus on other bags. She worked to counteract this idiosyncratic perceptual tendency by applying the idea of a hierarchy of tasks to her engagement with the exercise.

While this learning is clearly to do with the student developing the mechanics of her self-use, learning to counteract behaviour which impeded her effective engagement with the exercise, when asked, she nominated the learning as occupying the domain of ‘models and metaphors’. What she considered of primary significance was how an idiosyncrasy of her ‘seeing’ translated into a general tendency to be distracted by the most immediately distracting demand on her attention and therefore to lose sight of other, perhaps more pressing tasks. She worked to counteract this
tendency by paying attention to the details of her seeing and reacting. The ontological insight, her encounter with habitual modes of being-in-the-world, sat at the intersection between the pedagogy of mechanics and the pedagogy of metaphor.

There is a third and crucial component to the complex of pedagogies this article proposes. It provides the continuity between improvisation as task and improvisation as metaphor. This pedagogy is concerned with fundamental principles.

Principles

A principle is a basic attitude or perspective, offering a way of understanding and/or acting which is foundational to the training. It must be practically applicable, allowing the trainee to manipulate the mechanics of the bodymind-in-action, and it must be consistent, elucidating the conceptual, theoretical and metaphoric dimensions of any activity. The principles on which a training is based underpin the pedagogies both of ‘mechanics of self’ and ‘models and metaphors’ and facilitate the transfer of understanding between them. Both during activity and reflection, principles offer trainees a clear focus for attention, allowing them to cut through the noise of doubt or other distraction to find fundamental purpose in an activity.

For a principle to operate across the domains of concrete and conceptual it must be both consistent and flexible.

Consistency requires that a principle be evidently applicable in all of the creative and learning domains a trainee is to encounter. This does not necessarily imply that the same principle should be universally applicable. An example might be found in a principle (one that might seem counterintuitive) which proves useful in my work training ensembles. This principle finds its initial expression as; ‘don’t be helpful’.
The logic of the principle resides in a fundamental concern with reactivity – that a performer learn to read and respond appropriately to impulse. A performer who tries to ‘help’ another is no longer paying attention to the clarity of his or her actions but is, instead, paying attention to guesses about what her or his co-performer needs. Through trying to be helpful, she or he is in fact exercising a control over the improvisation and consequently not offering clear impulses for colleagues to react to. The participant is hindering, not helping.

Within the bag exercise this ‘helpfulness’ might manifest in numerous ways. The most common is that a trainee momentarily pauses before throwing a bag, waiting until she or he thinks their co-performer is ready. This breaks the flow between impulse and response and makes it harder for the catcher to read the impulse they are being asked to respond to. It is, as Zarrilli suggests, an attempt to control the work of others:

> Whenever an individual willfully asserts an intention on an action, the body will be full of tension and the mind full of an aggressive attempt to control and assert the will. (Zarrilli 2009: 23–4)

Trainees are encouraged, in the bag exercise, to rehearse the shifts of mental attitude required to give up being inappropriately helpful. This often involves them discarding socialised behaviours precious to those who value co-operation and empathetic interaction.\(^\text{10}\) The shifts of thinking involved are rehearsed through the mechanics of catch-transform-throw. The new thought paradigms the trainee thus develops manifest initially in the flow of the bags, but become applicable to any context that requires an unmediated reactivity.

In introducing a principle it is important to be clear about the domains where it has currency and those where it does not. The idea of ‘don’t be helpful’ has currency in any interaction that is

\(^{10}\) A trainee starting from a position of competitiveness will find the exercise requiring quite a different shift of personal paradigm. She or he will need to learn that only in ‘appropriate’ helpfulness (ie. by throwing the bag in ways that help others to continue the exercise) will she or he be able to contribute to constructing an ‘ensemble’ to learn within.
predicated on participants reacting to stimulus received from others. However it has less, or no, currency in other domains. To encourage trainees not to be helpful outside the training space is potentially antisocial and even in the training space there may be tasks where it is not a useful injunction.

Nonetheless, a principle needs to be consistent within the domain to which it applies.

A principle also requires flexibility, the ability to stand restatement in increasingly sophisticated ways as trainees deepens their understanding of an exercise or the relationship between a range of exercises.

An example of this idea of flexibility can be found in the principle that develops over several months of working with the bag exercise and which finds its first expression in the phrase: ‘there’s no wrong’.

Clearly, as a principle, this is simplistic. However, initially it is useful, for it encourages participants to stop worrying about every bag they drop and instead to concentrate on maintaining easeful, smooth engagement with each impulse, dropped or caught. It can offer a strong initial challenge to those who habitually undermine their engagement with task by focusing on, and continually apologising for, their ‘failure’.

Once a group has begun to stop worrying about the ‘failure’ of dropping a bag, the principle might develop to: ‘just as there is no wrong, so there is no right’. This restatement encourages trainees to focus on the process of the exercise, rather than trying to achieve the product of rightness (or avoid the ignominy of wrongness).

Still though, the principle is unsatisfying. Trainees sense that a catch is better than a drop.
As trainees become more competent within the exercise, the principle requires more sophisticated expression. While the binary approach of right/wrong is counterproductive, it is helpful to identify a spectrum running from less to more 'appropriate'. A catch, if possible, is usually a more appropriate and useful action than a drop, for it facilitates the continual flow of multiple bags simultaneously. A drop is usually less useful and appropriate. Only an individual trainee can honestly judge whether catching a bag was beyond her or his capacities, in which case she could have done nothing but drop it, or whether he or she failed to catch it by not making the necessary effort, in which case that individual needs to rehearse a more appropriate use of his or her bodymind.

The eschewing of attitudes of right/wrong and their replacement with the idea of a spectrum of appropriateness may seem like sophistry, but it's not. If a trainee is thrown three bags simultaneously and realises that catching all three is impossible, it is inappropriate to waste attention on all of them. The decision to allow one bag to drop might be the most appropriate decision the trainee could make – a instantaneous application of the idea of the hierarchy of tasks.

Application of the principle serves both momentary decisions about how to react to impulse ('the mechanics of self') and works to elucidate the exercise as metaphor. Sometimes the sudden presence of the unexpected – a core feature of any live performance – might mean that it is more appropriate for a performer not to pursue a specific, rehearsed action and, instead, to substitute an action that is more appropriate to the specific context in which she or he finds herself.

However, there is further transformation for this principle to go through.

The idea of appropriateness introduces the notion of context. Thus the principle might develop to: 'There is neither right nor wrong at the moment an action occurs, though, later, some actions may be deemed to have been more or less appropriate than others'. This emphasises the requirement for a performer always to react to what actually exists within a performance, rather than simply reproducing work created in the rehearsal room. This is, once again, a complication of the principle.
of ‘there’s no wrong’, requiring a developed understanding of the training exercise from which it is being extrapolated.

There is a final transformation of this principle which returns it to a lucid and memorable state. Eventually it is possible to restate is as: “have no opinion”. At this level it begins to take on profound philosophical implications which, unless routed in precise physical actions, are likely to confuse rather than empower a trainee. However it remains the same principle, for it suggests that, in a moment of action, any ‘opinion’, be it of rightness and wrongness, beauty or ugliness, self-satisfaction or annoyance, obstructs a trainee from full engagement with the task – the precise reaction to impulse.

Thus the careful development of the crude principle ‘there’s no wrong’, explored through an increasingly complex engagement with the details of the bag exercise, brings the trainee towards an experienced understanding of Grotowski’s formulation of performance in the Skara speech:

Something stimulates you and you react: that is the whole secret.

Stimulations, impulses and reactions. (Grotowski 1968: 185)

The principle has led trainees to experiencing the flow of impulse and reaction and has proved rigorous. It has also been flexible enough to withstand continual development, as those encounters have yielded deeper understandings of the self the trainee experiences as the doer of the exercise.

**Conclusion – More Questions**

The precise directing of attention is central to the efficacy of training. By making the general specific, learning becomes detailed. This article has suggested that awareness of three domains of pedagogy, and their careful manipulation, offers trainers a language and structure for directing attention.
I introduce trainees to these domains of learning and to their interactions, through the pure structured improvisation of the bag exercise with which I start every training session. However, once trainees have learned to read their ‘unstructured’ activity through these interconnected pedagogies, they are increasingly able to perceive and exploit the complexity of learning in all contexts – structured, semi-structured or free.

In structuring a training improvisation, I ask myself: “to what are we going to pay attention?”, a question that inevitably leads to further questions within each of the domains of learning.

*The Mechanics of Self*

- How will the trainee encounter and observe him- or herself during this improvisation?
- How will the structures of the improvisation offer immediate feedback to the trainee?
- How will the improvisation facilitate the trainee in identifying and altering self-sabotaging personal paradigms?

*Models and Metaphors*

- How will the trainee understand the metaphoric relationship between this improvisation and other modes of training, rehearsing or performing?
- Are the metaphors the trainee will encounter rigorous and precise?
- How does the improvisation enable the trainee to rehearse/model modes of thought, behaviour, activity or attitude in relation to him/herself, his/her tasks and others?

*Principles*
• What are the foundational principles the trainee will encounter through engagement with the improvisation?
• How will the core principles intersect and develop as the trainee continues to train over months and years?

**What Are We Going To Do?**

• Will the training yield complex, intrinsic pleasure to trainees, encouraging them to undertake it repeatedly and for extended periods of time?
• Might this exercise and its variants never stop repaying the time and intention invested in it?

If, as trainers, we construct practical and applicable answers to these questions, we can offer trainees structures which, though apparently unstructured or familiar, yield particular and precise technologies of learning. Simple structures of action and response become endless landscapes of exploration and discovery – of the self-with-others – even if those structures are as ubiquitous as standing in a circle and throwing bags to one another.
Bibliography


Interviews quoted were undertaken by Eilon Morris with students studying for on the MA Ensemble Physical Theatre; Training & Performance 2009 – 2010. The cohort of students comprised: Stacey Johnstone, Kerry Ely, Amy Henshaw, Lizzie Doyle, Siobhan Harrison, Diane Barley.