

Developing ‘Gymnastics-Based Practices’ for Performer Training

**Submitted by Kelly Marie Miller
to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of
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Abstract:

The aim of this thesis is to explore through historical and practical research, the use of *gymnastics-based practices* for contemporary performer training.

This thesis addresses the following key questions:

- What are *gymnastics-based practices*?
- How have *gymnastics-based practices* already influenced performer training, particularly in the work of François Delsarte, Rudolph Laban, and Jacques Lecoq?
- How can *gymnastics-based practices* be understood, applied, and developed in order to contribute to performance/performer training?

The practical investigation employs the use of *gymnastics-based practices* in a series of three studio-based projects which focus on the development of the training. Project 1 explores *gymnastics-based practices* in relation to my own process as a performer. In Project 2, I apply *gymnastics-based practices* to the facilitation of a group-devised performance. Project 3 uses *gymnastics-based practices* to facilitate the actor in character development, vocal work, and performance of a naturalistic text. In this manner, this thesis has developed a set of exercises, workshops, and frameworks which draw on *gymnastics-based practices* to activate the performer in several different contexts.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction | 8 |
| PART 1 | |
| Chapter 1: What are ‘Gymnastics-Based Practices’: Histories, Lineages, and Connections | |
| Introduction | 38 |
| Pre-Modern Non-Elite Gymnastics | 43 |
| 18th —20th Century Non-Elite Gymnastics | 45 |
| Elite Gymnastics | 75 |
| Conclusion | 82 |
| Chapter 2: ‘Gymnastics-Based Practices’ in Theatre Trainings and Performance | |
| Introduction | 85 |
| François Delsarte | 95 |
| Rudolph Laban | 105 |
| Jacques Lecoq | 113 |
| Contemporary Practices and Performance | 119 |
| Conclusion | 126 |
| PART 2 | |
| A Concise’ Introduction | 128 |
| A Note on Terminology | 129 |
| Chapter 3: Practical Project 1: Developing ‘Gymnastics-Based Practices’ Through Self-Practice and Evaluation | |
| Introduction | 131 |
| What is <i>my</i> Training? | 137 |
| The Body | 147 |
| The Mind | 158 |
| Movement | 166 |
| Imagination | 175 |
| Conclusion | 183 |
| Chapter 4: Practical Project 2: Developing ‘Gymnastics-Based Practices’ Towards Facilitating the Contemporary Performer | |
| Introduction | 187 |
| Project Development | 189 |
| Individual Development | 192 |
| Bodymind Development | 206 |
| Ensemble Development | 209 |
| Conclusion | 224 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Chapter 5: Practical Project 3: Developing ‘Gymnastics-Based Practices’ in a Rehearsal and Performance Process | |
| Introduction | 226 |
| <i>Miss Julie</i> | 229 |
| Character Development | 234 |
| The Voice | 230 |
| Performance | 248 |
| Conclusion | 256 |
| Conclusion | 257 |
| Appendices | 275 |
| Bibliography | 305 |
| DVD Accompaniment | |

List of Figures

1. Triangulation of discovery
2. Practical projects
3. Example of barbell exercise from *Gymnastics for Ladies* (1870)
4. Chart of Western histories of gymnastics
5. Practical Project 1 phases
6. Breakdown of personal gymnastics history
7. Example of stretches explored
8. Depiction of a basic cartwheel
9. Depiction of kinaesthetic energy in vaulting exercise
10. Practical Project 2 phases
11. Triangulation of discovery
12. Example of *extra-daily warm-up*
13. Example of *rehearsal extra-daily warm-up*
14. Practical Project 3 phases
15. Actors' starting positions in *Miss Julie*
16. Example of a paused position in *Miss Julie*

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‘There must be simultaneous movement of all parts of the body, from head to toe; the motion must be magnetic. Slow, rhythmic, and as unaffected as the subtle evolution of a serpent. [...] The movements must flow from within to without as naturally as the growth and expansion of a flower. [...] Every gradation of motion from normal position to perfect image must be one beautiful flow of physical transformation.’

- Genevieve Stebbins

‘Gymnastics must be destroyed.’

- Cintra Wilson

Introduction

Current cultural perceptions of gymnastics suggest it is a didactic and mimetic discipline in which ‘acrobatic, contorted, cute children’ perform seemingly impossible physical feats where no internal engagement is required (Chisholm, 2002: 416). Cintra Wilson describes contemporary female elite gymnasts as ‘airborne tiny buttocks and barrette-covered kewpie heads’ who can ‘jump and twist and handspring like superballs’ but sacrifice their personality, self-image, height, and bodily comfort in doing so (Wilson, 2000: 99). She and others suggest gymnastics does not have any benefit for participants as it hinders the body, it diminishes the doer and therefore, according to Wilson, it ‘must be destroyed’ (ibid).

However, as this thesis will argue, gymnastics is, in fact, an inherently psychophysical discipline and it ‘promotes fluidity, flexibility, grace, ease of action and rhythm’ (Beecher in Chisholm, 1999: 132). I will argue that, as Friedrich Jahn stated in 1828, it is ‘an art, theory, and practice that should never be separated’ (Jahn, 1828: vi) and that it can be of great benefit to the contemporary performer.

Gymnastics is a pervasive practice that is embedded in Western culture. Gymnastics’ historical implications are deeply rooted in our contemporary lives having bled into everyday practices, creating unacknowledged culturally constructed activities. Most individuals in Western culture will have come into contact with gymnastics, knowingly or not, in their lifetime. For instance, as Mark Evans argues, the ‘warm-up’ is a process, regularly engaged in yet

rarely questioned (2014). Often, performers will be invited into a warm-up, half-heartedly employing stretches and exercises learnt in previous classes. However, most will be unaware of the histories of these exercises and why they draw on them. Indeed, these exercises exist from deeply complex lineages. As Evans states, 'The cultural history of these exercises, their roots in European physical training, gymnastics, the revival of interest in Ancient Greek physical culture and the development of modern physical education' is not made evident in most contemporary practices (Evans, 2014: 145). By unpicking and acknowledging selected lineages, this thesis will demonstrate that gymnastics has long since been a practice of training the body and mind, both in education and in theatre practices. Through this acknowledgement, I will address how we might begin to re-imagine these histories alongside contemporary practices of gymnastics to develop an additional pathway to training the contemporary performer.

I acknowledge there are certain practices of gymnastics that are mostly physically driven; practices which focus solely on the perfection of outward forms, competition, and winning. However, this thesis will explore some of the lesser-acknowledged elements of gymnastics training. To the reader, it may feel as though I have taken an imprudent optimistic view of gymnastics training in this thesis. Indeed, I have taken this stance consciously and not naively due to my deep-rooted history within the practice of gymnastics and my understanding of its long-term benefits. From this I have purposely selected certain practices and principles of gymnastics that I deem to be safe and beneficial for the performers' practice and individual development. These

practices do not encourage virtuosity, competitive drive, or a utopian body. Rather, they transcend preconceived ideas of gymnastics and promote mindfulness, cohesion of the body and mind, and holistic training of the individual.

This thesis presents the findings of a practical investigation into certain practices of gymnastics and their application to performer training. It examines the histories of gymnastics, with particular focus on the Germanic, United Kingdom and United States contexts. It also notes the use of gymnastics within selected theatrical practices and pedagogies, with particular focus on the work of François Delsarte, Rudolph Laban, and Jacques Lecoq. The thesis then demonstrates how these histories, combined with my own practice as an elite gymnast and performer, might be reframed to develop gymnastics-based practices for the contemporary performer.

Reasons for Enquiry

This project began through a process of personal research based on my investment in performer training and gymnastics. Therefore, this thesis is beneficial for my future work and practice. Alongside this, the thesis aims to be beneficial to other actors, facilitators, and directors who are interested in performer training.

Indeed, the field of performer training is wide and continually expanding. Beginning in the early twentieth century, the West saw a surge in practitioners investigating the training of the performer. This thesis understands that there

are several different approaches the performer may take to training and performance. This thesis only hopes to extend the field through a personal investigation.

I first encountered elite gymnastics in 1989 at a local YMCA in Auburn, Washington, USA. I began elite competition as a team member of Gymnastics Unlimited in 1990 and continued elite training until 2002. In 2003, I began teaching gymnastics at Washington State University and continue to do so. In 2008, I enrolled in the MFA Theatre Practice programme at Exeter University. Under the guidance of Professor Phillip Zarrilli, I engaged in performer training using 'a combination of psychophysical exercises drawn from traditional Asian disciplines of bodymind training,' (Zarrilli, 2014) particularly yoga, *Taiquiquan*, and *Kalaripayattu*. The impetus for this research began two years prior to my acceptance to the psychophysical MFA. As an elite gymnast I learned to understand my body as a conduit for communication and a driving force of energy and power. As a performer I was able to take this pre-trained body and use it for multiple acting tasks enhancing my corporeal awareness. It was not until I suffered a major injury that left me unable to communicate that I began to understand the importance of the relationship between body and mind. In 2006, I incurred a head injury that rendered me mute and partially paralysed. During this period, I lost the proprioceptive memory in parts of my body and undertook therapy to re-learn everyday movements of the body. Upon regaining mobility, I retrained my body to do everything I had once known without question. This prompted internal questions: where had my body-memory gone, and why could I no longer understand something that had

previously made sense? I also began questioning the notions of the internal body and the external body — why could I feel sensations but not activate a physical response? These questions lay beneath the surface as I began my training at Exeter. As I became more engaged with the psychophysical training, I found my work as a performer was heavily influenced by and interconnected to my history as a gymnast. I found connections between these two seemingly unrelated trainings. My existing understanding of my body, its capabilities and limitations increased my ability to engage in performance work. Lecoq reflected similarly on the connections between his sport training and work as a performer. I also noticed the structure of the training was similar to the structure in which a gymnast is trained and similar techniques for preparation were used in both processes including development of breath, body awareness, mind and body cohesion, and extra-daily repetition. Similarly, I noticed common narratives of “self” exist between the gymnast and the actor. I began to develop an interest in the training of the performer and the performer’s creative process and thus questioned, how might the use of gymnastics be used towards the training of the contemporary performer? This question became both more expansive and detailed, leading towards subsequent questions that this thesis attempts to address.

I believe it is also important to now note ‘Why gymnastics?’ Of course, it can be argued that other sport-based work or exercises can be used to activate the performer or have an effect on performer engagement and understanding. However, this thesis will argue that there are specific and unique benefits that gymnastics-based practices can provide for the contemporary performer. I

argue that alongside the history and influence gymnastics has had on Western culture and sport, it is also distinctive from other sport regimes. Gymnastics, unlike most other elite sports, is an equal mix of anaerobic and aerobic practice. It is the only elite sport to put equal emphasis on strength, flexibility, endurance and mental training, as will be discussed in detail throughout this thesis. Similarly, gymnastics extends the athlete's physical vocabulary in a way that can be used directly in several modes of performance. Finally, the performative nature of gymnastics provides key similarities to the performance of the actor. For these reasons, I argue gymnastics separates itself from other sport trainings and practices and, in consideration of the actors needs, is distinctively suitable for preparing the performer.

Furthermore, in considering the connections between elite gymnastics training and actor training, I would argue that the gymnast and actor hold common narratives in training, identity, and performance. I believe the gymnast and the actor carry specific parallel narratives of the self. Both the gymnast and the actor are individual performers who 'actualise moments of connection between the bodymind-environment towards fully inhabiting their task and control over their self' (Lennox, 2012). In other words, both seek embodied intention. In both trainings, the participant engages in corporeal repetition and realises embodiment through the constant reengaging of the external body. Leslie Howe states that our first question when understanding sport and the self is 'How do we find ourselves in our bodies?' (2003: 94). Howe questions the idea of discovery of the self through ownership of our body and asserts

that sport can aid in this understanding of the body. I argue then, that training is a process of self-definition and is integral in both gymnastics and actor training. According to Zarrilli, the actor 'must commit himself/herself fully to training as an ongoing process of self-definition' and 'this process of self-definition and personal justification can never end — the practitioner must constantly (re)discover the self in and through the training with each repetition' (2009: 31). Likewise, the gymnast must commit to a deep and continuous engagement with his/her training in order to become a master of their body and mind. Gymnastics training and actor training are life-long processes in which the learning and advancement is never complete. The gymnast, even at Olympic level, is still in a constant state of learning and self-definition. The elite gymnast will continually draw on principles relayed early in his or her training as well as develop new skills and understanding. This is also true for the trained actor. Through an on-going process of work on the 'self' both the actor and the gymnast work towards elimination of self-consciousness, fear, nervousness and distraction of external stimuli within performance. Overall, the gymnast and the actor are constantly reassessing their own limitations, possibilities, and engagement whilst in continuous communication with their own body and mind towards understanding of the self. These connections lead me to believe there is potential in applying gymnastics-based practices towards addressing the performer's key needs. For these reasons and others, I believe this project to be an important and valuable study to expand the field of contemporary performer training.

Research Topic and Research Questions

This research is founded on the following primary and secondary research questions:

1. What are *gymnastics-based practices*? (Chapter 1)
2. How have *gymnastics-based practices* already influenced performer training, particularly in the work of François Delsarte, Rudolph Laban, and Jacques Lecoq? (Chapter 2)
3. How can *gymnastics-based practices* be understood, applied, and developed in order to contribute to performance/performer training? (Chapters 3-5)
 - a. What are the specific languages, processes, and practices of elite gymnastics training and how can I understand my own gymnastics training through these languages, practices, and processes? (Chapter 3)
 - b. How can I explore and adapt this training in order to find ways to 'activate' me as a performer? (Chapter 3)
 - c. What specific languages, processes, and practices of *gymnastics-based practices* could be useful for the performer? (Chapter 3, 4,5)
 - d. How can I communicate and 'transmit' these languages, processes, and practices in order to facilitate the contemporary actor in a gymnastics-based process towards a devised performance? (Chapter 4)
 - e. How can *gymnastics-based practices* be utilised to activate the actor in a rehearsal process? (Chapter 5)
 - f. Can *gymnastics-based practices* be used to work on a naturalistic text? (Chapter 5)
 - g. What elements from Practical Projects 1 and 2 can be implemented towards this process? (Chapter 5)
 - h. What elements of *gymnastics-based practices* can be used towards 'creating a character'? (Chapter 5)

- i. What are the potential limitations/challenges of using *gymnastics-based practices* in this context and how can these challenges be addressed? (Chapter 5)

As these questions make clear, this thesis aims to develop frameworks of a training using *gymnastics-based practices* for performers. *Gymnastics-based practices* form the central component of this thesis and the term has emerged as the research project progressed. It is derived from the combination of 'elite' and 'non-elite' gymnastics'. I use the term 'elite gymnastics' to mean contemporary competitive gymnastics training. When I refer to 'non-elite gymnastics' throughout the thesis I mean gymnastics practiced by ordinary people in a non-competitive setting. This thesis examines how both elite gymnastics and non-elite gymnastics are historically and currently situated, contextualised, and interpreted. It addresses the existing histories of non-elite and elite gymnastics within theatrical practices and trainings. Finally, it evaluates the potential for developing these histories, practices, and languages for contemporary performer training using what I am defining as *gymnastics-based practices*. These key terms will be further elaborated as the thesis progresses.

The bibliographical research of this thesis is based on primary and secondary resources. This has been combined with interviews, conversations, and correspondence with practitioners and researchers within the fields of research. I also consider my current and previous trainings with coaches and practitioners to be valuable resources within this research. Chapters 1-3 in this thesis will begin with a short literature review noting specific texts

important to the areas addressed in this overall project. The areas explored include historical and contemporary practices of gymnastics, contemporary performer training, gymnastics within performer training, and elite gymnastics training. In addition to the sources outlined these literature reviews, this PhD research has also been informed by studies that do not focus on gymnastics as a key discipline. Although these studies focus on other disciplines, they allowed me to engage in and understand different formats of application. In particular, the PhD thesis of Dr. Solomon Lennox (2012) explores, through ethnographical research, the narratives of the boxer. His research crosses the boundaries of sport-science and theatre research, which gave me insight into cross-disciplinary study and analysis. Similarly, Dr. Maria Kapsali's work with yoga has been useful for understanding pedagogical processes in university research settings.

As will be discussed, while gymnastics has continued to develop over the last two centuries, very few contemporary texts give detailed insight into the training and education of the elite gymnast. Therefore, I have used interviews and the witnessing of practical frameworks to guide areas of this research that felt incomplete. For example, I attended training days at Lilleshall National Sport Centre, taking detailed notes on training formats and structures, interpersonal relationships, language and vocabulary used in the practice, and individual development of the gymnasts. After witnessing these practices, I interviewed Great Britain national team members, Imogen Cairns and Danusia Francis. Their testimony gave me a wider understanding of contemporary training programmes and the narratives of elite gymnasts. Similarly, I spent

time interviewing and witnessing practices at my former gym, Gymnastics Unlimited, in Washington State. Finally, I attended elite gymnastics competitions to deeply engage with current competition frameworks, the *coach-gymnast relationship*, and the internal processes of the gymnast. Each of these experiences I consider to have been valuable resources for the practical part of this PhD project.

Finally, this thesis has continued to draw on resources that were not available at the beginning of the project. It has attempted to keep current on publications and studies within the field and has taken these into consideration. For example, Robin Nelson's book *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances* (2013) has given me deeper insight into Practice-as-Research (PaR) methodologies and allowed me to reflect on certain areas of my practice. Similarly, *Acting: psychophysical phenomenon and process* by Phillip Zarrilli et al. (2013) allowed me a deeper engagement with ideas of performer training, psychophysicality, and pre-expressivity. I consider these sources and others to influence my understanding of the wider field and this thesis position within the field.

It is my understanding, through my extended research, that no other study has been done on the direct use of *gymnastics-based practices* in performer training. Therefore, this thesis offers a unique contribution to the areas of sport science and performer training.

Methodology

This PhD research focusses on women's elite gymnastics and does not consider men's elite gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, aerobic gymnastics, and acrobatic gymnastics nor trampoline competition. While these may share similar histories and training as women's elite gymnastics, I have chosen to focus on the former due to my extensive experience and understanding of this form of the sport. Furthermore, women's elite gymnastics draws on elements I believe particularly useful for the actor, such as fluidity and grace in movement. As noted earlier, I will refer to this form of gymnastics as 'elite gymnastics' throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Also, this project does not take on a simplistic nor didactic approach to using sport as training for performers. It hopes to identify key connections in languages, processes, and practices of gymnastics training and actor training. This thesis utilises interdisciplinary research as a key framework. It works across the boundaries of sport and performance, blurring the lines between the two fields.

To begin work, I drew heavily on the existing bibliography of Practice-as-Research texts to situate my own research clearly within the field. This included looking at several Practice-as-Research PhD theses (Lennox 2012; Kapsali 2011; Gates 2011) and MA/MFA dissertations (Arrighi 2003). This also included examination of case studies within the field and the analysis of previous practitioners' work. Understanding the guidelines and methodologies of Practice-as-Research was essential to this research.

Recent publications of PaR in Western theatre were central to my investigation as I plotted the territory of my own inquiry (Kershaw, 2010) (Freeman, 2009) (Nelson, 2006) (Edmond and Candy, 2010). What was distinctly absent from most of the recent publications was the discourse of systems used in performance research and specifically the methodological processes by which they originated. In their book *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen*, Baz Kershaw et al. fail to 'give the reader a basic toolkit for studying, conducting and implementing PaR projects' and instead lay out final representations of examples of performance (Spatz, 2010: 490). Similarly this is true in the work of John Freeman's *Blood Sweat Theory* (2009), where he outlines six sections of text, each following a case study in relation to the subsequent chapter. In neither of these publications do the authors discuss the methodologies of practical research.

To address this, I began by looking at Robin Nelson's article 'Practice-as-Research and the Problem of Knowledge' (2006), which explores the difference between 'know-how' knowledge and factual knowledge and exposes the theory that *how* we know means as much as *what* we know. This means the methods by which we accrue knowledge have equal merit to the knowledge itself (Nelson, 2006). Nelson's paper questions what it means to know something and the different ways in which a person *can* know something. For example, we can know by acquaintance or through experience and by historical research or through embodied-practical research. Nelson discusses PaR in theatre and how:

[I]f knowledge in dance, physical theatre and other performance practices is like the 'know-how' of riding a bicycle and incommunicable in words but disseminable through a process of workshop education, then Practice-as-Research practices begin to meet acceptable criteria for research which approximate to scientific and scholarly investigation (2006: 108).

If it is impossible to communicate through text how we know something, then our research of that knowledge should lay within experiential investigation — knowledge through doing. Nelson argues that PaR's venture into 'know-how' knowledge broadens the paradigms of knowledge and situates the arts more clearly in the academic field. This research project adopts his concept of 'know-how' knowledge to investigate the dissemination of *gymnastics-based practices*, processes, and languages to the performer. Similarly, it takes into account his argument that what is required for Practice-as-Research is documentation. Documentation is an important sector of the work of PaR, where audiences/participants act as witnesses and practitioners recall a performance that in its original nature had once disappeared, allowing the articulation of evidence of process. This project adopts this structure for qualitative research. Within the practical projects, I employed video documentation, pre and post-project questionnaires, interviews with participants, daily journals, and daily feedback sessions to gain deeper understanding. This also tied directly into the evaluation process of the projects.

To develop a working methodology that aligned with PaR theory and allowed for critical reflection and evaluation, I considered Edmond and Candy's article,

'Relating Theory, Practice and Evaluation in Practitioner Research' (2010).

Edmonds and Candy state that within the model of systems and:

[I]n a trajectory of practice and research, there are three elements: Practice, Theory and Evaluation' each being an integral part of an overall route in which each element involves activities undertaken by the practitioner in the process of making physical works, developing conceptual frameworks and performing evaluation studies (2010: 1).

Distinctively, Edmonds and Candy discuss the notion of 'evaluation' and its fundamental part of the practice-theory relationship. As the mode of practice actually becomes research, the facilitator's reflections of practice gain broader understanding. The trajectory comes as a composite model that can be molded by each researcher's individual needs, but always maintains 'the three elements that make up a practitioner trajectory [...] outcomes and [...] various kinds of activities. From Practice, the main outcomes are Works [...] from Theory, the main outcomes are Criteria and Frameworks; from Evaluation come Results' (2010: 470). Within this project, I drew on this composite model and utilised documentation as a form of evaluation to gain qualitative results.

Furthermore, this project drew on ideas of practices used by previous practitioners to develop frameworks of a pedagogy. Particularly, I drew on my individual practice with Phillip Zarrilli and his writings detailing his training. Professor Phillip Zarrilli's work, specifically his book, *Psychophysical Acting: an intercultural approach after Stanislavski* (2009), interrogates his intercultural psychophysical actor training. The book focusses on 'the three arches of a bridge [that] connect: 1. the traditions of Western and Asian theatre; 2. artistic and scientific knowledge; 3. performative work and the work

of the performer on his or her inner life' (Barba in Zarrilli 2009: x). The core of Zarrilli's work is rooted in practical research and although Zarrilli developed the training, the pedagogy derives from a series of influences and histories. Where Zarrilli's work directly aligns with the original themes of PaR and of experiential knowledge is in his original question or conception of exploration. In her article 'Materialising Pedagogies' (2006), Dr. Barbara Bolt argues 'theorising out of practice [...] involves a very different way of thinking than applying theory to practice. It offers a very specific way of understanding the world, one that is grounded in "material thinking" rather than merely conceptual thinking' (2006: 30). This is where Zarrilli makes his distinction from other PaR resources. In this project, I drew specifically on Zarrilli's pathways to the development of practices to activate the performer.

Similarly, as mentioned previously, existing PhD and MA/MFA writings for pedagogical models were useful for this research. Specifically, in this process, I drew on Dr. Gillian Arrighi's MFA dissertation, *The Neutral Mask: its position in western actor training, and its application to the creative processes of the actor* (2003). Dr. Arrighi qualifies her practice-based inquiry as 'the research method of participatory action research, a methodology suited to collaborative research where the conditions of the project suggest that new questions may emerge and require attention in the course of the project' (2003: 75). Dr. Arrighi used three practical projects, each a semester long with the same twelve students to investigate the neutral mask's pedagogical worth to contemporary actors in training, discussing in length the rediscovery and rehabilitation of masks in the twentieth century. I drew on both Zarrilli and

Arrighi's methodologies towards development of structures for the practical projects of this research.

Throughout the practice, I also drew on my past experiences with practitioners and processes, including Fran Barbe (Butoh), Marjolein Baas (Michael Chekhov), Alison Hodge (Core Training), Terry Converse (Directing), Rebecca Loukes (psychophysical training), and Maria Kapsali (yoga practices). I cannot deny that my understanding of acting/actor training is partly due to my previous work with these practitioners and therefore my research, opinions, and methodologies have been also influenced by my work with them. Their influence on my practice and how it informed certain elements of this project will be noted throughout this thesis.

From the combination of these materials and practices, I developed a triangulation, which I utilised to discern qualitative results within the practical portion of this project. This triangulation used an equal balance of pre-project theories weighted against post-project reflections and evaluations, from both the participants (where applicable) and myself. The method weighted what I predicted would be the outcomes against what the participants predicted would be the outcomes and what I analysed as the actual outcomes (Figure 1).

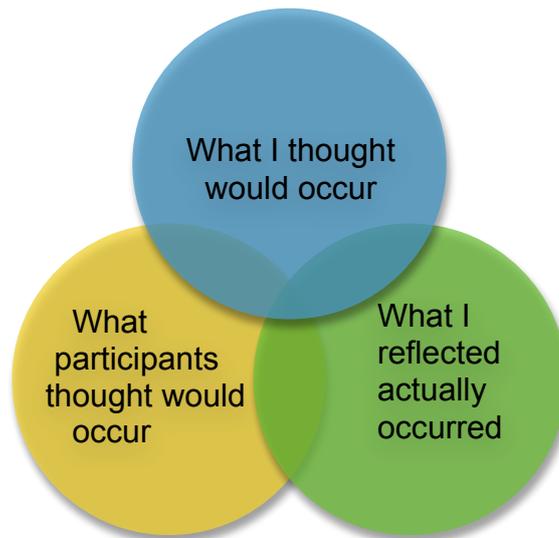


Figure 1: Triangulation of discovery

This allowed me to gauge ranges of development, learning, practice, and knowledge within the project and the methodology was used in each of the three practical projects in this research. Using this triangulation allowed me to make certain qualitative evaluations about the process and the effectiveness of the work. I developed the triangulation out of consideration of Practice-as-Research methodologies. According to Nelson (2009, 2013) and Edmonds and Candy (2010), the practice-based researcher can draw on participants' reflections to gain qualitative data. I also considered gymnast development strategies. Lloyd Readhead (2013) argues for the importance of the independent gymnast who can understand his or her own development. Therefore, I created a practical model that could incorporate the performers' reflections alongside my own evaluations. I discuss this methodology further in the Project Development section of Chapter 4.

To address the research questions of this project, this PhD utilised these three practice-based research projects as entry points of discovery (Figure 2). There was also the opportunity to work with undergraduate students in Research and Performance, a compulsory first year module at Exeter. The work with these students also informed the overall research.¹

Figure 2: Practical projects

| Project Title | Role | Duration | Gymnastics application |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Practical Project 1: Finding the Actor/Athlete Within | Performer Facilitator | Five months | Exploring and interrogating my own gymnastics and actor training in relation to activating me as a performer |
| Research and Performance module: <i>Athlete</i> | Teacher Trainer Facilitator | Twelve weeks | Using <i>gymnastics-based practices</i> towards devising physical performance |
| Practical Project 2: <i>Paused Activity</i> | Teacher Trainer Facilitator | Nine weeks | Using <i>gymnastics-based practices</i> towards facilitating the performer |
| Practical Project 2: <i>Via</i> | Trainer Facilitator | Three weeks | Using <i>gymnastics-based exercises</i> towards facilitating the performer |
| Practical Project 3: <i>Miss Julie</i> | Trainer Facilitator Director | Six weeks | Using <i>gymnastics-based practices</i> towards direction of a naturalistic dramaturgy |

¹ All the practical research took place at Exeter University using current students of the Drama Department. All participation was voluntary and participants signed waiver forms acknowledging their willingness to participate and the use of their testimonials and video documentation within this thesis. See Appendix 2.1 for an example of the waiver form.

In the first year of research I explored historical practices of elite and non-elite gymnastics and their dispersion into theatre practices. This was through a thorough investigation into the work of François Delsarte, Rudolph Laban, and Jacques Lecoq. Each of their influences, methodologies, and performance practices directly correlate to my own research, as this thesis will later demonstrate. I also interviewed members of the British Olympic Gymnastics team, elite coaches, elite male and female gymnasts in the UK and US, attended elite gymnastics competitions to gain field knowledge and attended contemporary theatre performances that drew on or used elite and non-elite gymnastics. I also continued my own training in gymnastics.

The second two years of this project focussed on the practical aspect of the exploration in three cumulative investigations. The first practical project commenced in October 2011 and was completed in March 2012. In this practical research I explored my own practices as a gymnast and actor. This was an ongoing exploration ending in a short working demonstration and presentation for my peers and supervisors. The second project began in January 2013 and ran the length of Term 2. This further explored the training with a group of actors ending in a performance devised by the performers. The final project took place between May and June 2013 and applied *gymnastics-based practices* towards work on a naturalistic text-based performance.

It should be noted that my role shifted in each project. In Practical Project 1, it began as a self-reflexive process and investigation. Here, I worked from the perspective of the performer and gymnast. In the second and third practical projects, the focus shifted towards disseminating the practice to others. In these two instances I worked from the perspective of the facilitator, director, and gymnastics coach.

These practical explorations will be analysed in this thesis in order to reflect on the potential of using *gymnastics-based practices* to activate the performer. Throughout the practical work, an elite gymnastics-training framework was followed, which focusses equally on the preparation of the body and the mind. I consider this type of training 'holistic'. The *holistic approach*, as I understand it, is the consideration that all parts (body and mind) of the gymnast are interconnected and shown equal emphasis in training in order to wholly develop the individual. I also drew on existing sport psychology models for mental preparation and maintenance. I discuss these models and how they informed my practice in Chapters 3-5 of this thesis. Large portions of the practical methodologies draw on my past training as an elite gymnast and my understanding of how gymnasts are trained. Equally, I draw on original principles, ideologies, and practices of historical models of non-elite gymnastics, as well as on certain practitioners influenced by both non-elite and elite gymnastics. Furthermore, I draw on existing models of Practice-as-Research for the overall framework, research, and evaluation process of this project. All of these influences were key to the overall development of this project.

What is 'training'?

According to John Matthews, 'training has become integral to performance practice in the early twenty-first century' (2011: 1). In other words, training has become a marker for quality of practice and performance. But what *is* training? Within this thesis, I understand the term 'training' in two different contexts. The first: within the frame of sport where training is the preparation of athletes towards competition and game play: 'preparation for physical activity' (Feral, 2009: 16). And the second: within a contemporary Western theatre context to denote 'all aspects of the actor's preparation' (ibid). Most specifically, this thesis aligns with Josette Feral's discussion of 'training' in her article 'Did you say 'training'?' (2009). Here, she suggests the term 'training', in the Western context, first arrived in the late nineteenth century and 'links the word to a sport (gymnastics) which was moving across the Atlantic' at that time (ibid). This suggests that gymnastics was a key component in the original principles of 'training' in the West. She then goes on to argue that the word and 'common use' definition of training increased and developed over the twentieth century through key figures and practitioners such as Copeau, Grotowski, Delacroze and Barba, who used the term to denote their own practices of preparing the actor. At the conclusion of her article, Feral suggests that the term training contemporarily refers to 'a structured preparation done within the formative framework of a specific method' (2009: 25). Similarly, Zarrilli describes his actor training as 'guiding the actors through a repeatable set of intensive psychophysiological techniques which cultivates the bodymind towards a state of readiness' (2000: 186). Each hopes to bring the 'performer' to the state of preparedness in unlimited performance settings.

This thesis adopts this understanding that ‘training’ is a preparation of the performer through specific formative frameworks. Therefore, when I use the term ‘training’ throughout this thesis, I am referring to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experience through a set of extra-daily structures towards preparation of the performer.² For example, elite-sport training is a process of bringing the athlete to their peak of performance through reiterated practice, instruction, physical and psychological education. This definition was applied to practical and theoretical frameworks used in this project.

It is important to note the potential ethical implications of using a sport as a basis for actor/acting training. While past practitioners have used sport as an impetus or influence, it is not common practice to use elite sport as the core structure. This thesis does not attempt to encourage actors to reach virtuosity in gymnastics, nor does it attempt to train performers to become gymnasts. Rather it invites performers to draw on processes and practices available to them, therefore addressing their individual development.

Considering gymnastics as an overtly physical task, this project questioned the limitations of this practice and how we might begin to transcend perceived boundaries of engagement. According to exercise psychologist, Joanne Thatcher, in adults there are personal and environmental factors that either encourage high levels of exercise or create barriers. This comes under her ‘Exercise Behavioural Model’, which labels adults under four main categories

² The term ‘extra-daily’ was coined by Eugenio Barba referring to ‘techniques, or particular ways of using the body, used by the performer, ‘which do not respect the habitual conditionings of the use of the body’ (Turner, 2004: 152).

of exercise behaviour. Some of the barriers may include lack of time, lack of energy and lack of motivation. There are also personal factors (obesity, injury), emotional factors (too embarrassed to exercise, not seeing yourself as an 'exerciser'), motivational factors (no energy, do not enjoy exercise), time factors (too many work commitments, childcare), and external factors (no exercise facilities nearby, cannot afford exercise facilities). Adversely, support from friends and family, good weather, enjoyment of exercise and, most often, younger age can lead to higher levels of adherence to exercise (2009: 122,123). Along with other variables and unknowns, this research took these into consideration. At the conclusion of my first practical presentation (Chapter 3) I invited audience questions. One audience member queried, 'What about people who are afraid to go upside down? Or people who have previous injury? Or people who just do not like to exercise?' (2012). This line of questioning became a large factor in the work, specifically when working with the first year students. In answer to these questions, I remained firm that the training and each exercise were optional for each participant. I would encourage them to move beyond their conceptions of their own abilities but allowed a freedom to participants to engage in the process in whatever form they felt available to. This openness and adaptability as a facilitator became paramount to this project. Alongside this, I often received questions about how to heal injuries or what foods to be eating. These questions fall outside my expertise and the parameters of this research. I advised any participant who inquired about injury to seek a medical professional. In the case of eating, I advised participants to maintain a well-balanced diet and if they wanted further advice to seek a food nutritionist. It should be noted that inside the

studio space I only allowed the participants to drink water and no carbonated or caffeinated drinks. I chose to do this due to the intensive nature of the work and the importance of keeping well hydrated.

The subject of age and ability came up frequently in this research. In one instance, I was invited to give a three-hour workshop to the cast of *Romeo and Juliet*, as part of Exeter University's Staging Shakespeare MFA. Within the cast there were varying ages and athletic or physical backgrounds. One of the cast members, Raphael Massie, asked to sit out of the workshop. I dealt with the situation in the following manner:

KM: 'Hi Raphael.'

RM: 'Hi Kelly.'

KM: 'Would it be okay if I asked you why you do not want to participate?'

RM: 'Uh, I do not know. I'm too old. My body will not be able handle it.'

KM: 'Can I ask how old you are?'

RM: '36'

KM: 'And why do you believe that at 36, you're 'too old'?'

RM: 'I just...I have never been much of an athlete, or an athlete at all. I think I will hurt myself, at this age, if I try. And what can I possibly change now? It just will not work for me.'

KM: 'Okay, thank you for sharing that. I'd still like to invite you to participate, and if at any time, you want to step out, you're more than welcome. But I just want to say, that age is not a factor in this. Everyone goes at their own pace and follows their own body.'

RM: 'Thank you, I really appreciate that.'

I selected this particular conversation because Raphael chose to join in the workshop afterwards. Although he did move at a slower pace and opted out of

a few exercises, he was able to move beyond his preconception of his abilities in order to join the group.

The behaviours range from pre contemplation to maintenance. At the beginning of the day, Raphael displayed, what Thatcher et al. would describe as, a 'precontemplation' attitude towards the training. Under this model, 'precontemplation' is described through an individual who does not think or intend to do exercise within the next six months. In this short time frame, I attempted to invite Raphael, without coercion or force, to move towards 'preparation'. This is described through an individual in the planning process of regular exercise or finding out about exercise; they may have completed one or two exercise sessions. Indeed, Thatcher et al. argue that in adults:

[A]ttitudes towards a behaviour are determined by what we feel we will gain from the behaviour in relation to what we might lose from doing it (perceived consequences). So, we weigh up the costs of the behaviour against the benefits we'll gain from it (Thatcher et al., 2009: 124).

In understanding this, and the potential that the majority of participants might feel this, I followed a 'process of change' model, which encourages adjustment in cognitive and behavioural processes including self-evaluation and reinforcement management. I also consistently allowed the participants to form their own boundaries and to only push these boundaries when they felt prepared. I acted as a facilitator, coach, and support system during these processes and practices. In case of physical injury, of which I encountered one incident, I immediately sought medical aid and did not attempt to remedy the situation on my own, as it is outside my expertise. I would advise anyone in future who might utilise the processes, exercises, and workshops revealed

in this thesis to take similar action. I discuss 'Exercise Behavioural Models' and how they were adapted for this process in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis argues that performers can be activated through selected languages, practices, and processes of elite and non-elite gymnastics or, *gymnastics-based practices*. This thesis makes a unique contribution, as it is the first of its kind to fully consider the extensive relationship between gymnastics and theatre practices. Research into acrobatics, yoga practices, dance and martial arts for actor training has been explored extensively. There has also been investigation of the shared narratives of athletes and performers, and elite sports as forms of performance. In addition, previous projects have explored gymnastics as an elite sport, through sport science and sport psychology (Cogan and Vidmar, 2000) (Jemni, 2011). Finally, previous publications have also touched on gymnastics lineages in theatre practice, but too often glide over its concrete influence (Dennis, 2002) (Callery, 2001).

The thesis is split into two parts: historical and practical. Chapter 1 articulates a concise history of elite and non-elite gymnastics from Greek antiquity until the present. It begins by noting selected histories of non-elite gymnastics before investigating the re-development of gymnastics in Germany in the late eighteenth century. This is followed by the development of German gymnastics models in the United Kingdom and the United States. The chapter

then addresses the Western history of elite gymnastics since the late nineteenth century. It traces the key connections between these histories, showing the relationship between the development of elite gymnastics as an Olympic sport and the use of non-elite gymnastics practiced by ordinary people. It should be noted that when I use the terms 'West' and 'Western' I am referring to Western Europe (including the United Kingdom) and the United States.³ The chapter also situates gymnastics as a predominant sport in Western culture. Through the historical investigation, the chapter will focus on answering the question 'What are 'gymnastics-based practices'?'

Chapter 2 explores three key histories of *gymnastics-based practices* within theatre practices and trainings. It will look at three practitioners in chronological order. First, it will investigate the history, work, and legacy of François Delsarte. It will specifically address 'harmonic gymnastics', which was a large influence on American physical education and modern dance. It will then explore the work of Rudolph Laban, German choreographer and director, who was directly influenced by physical culture and German gymnastics. It will interrogate Laban's emphasis on the body and mind in harmony through 'new gymnastics'. It will then look at the practices and work of French director and teacher, Jacques Lecoq, who began his work based on his previous gymnastics and sport training. Finally, the chapter will address selected examples of contemporary companies who use gymnastics in either training or performance: Bodies in Flight, Rhum and Clay, and Raymond and the Strength Crew Project.

³ I first use this term in Chapter 1 when discussing the histories of gymnastics.

In a short introduction to Part 2, I will address how the histories I have explored in the first two chapters will be applied to the development of the practical work investigated in Chapters 3 - 5.

Part 2 is divided into three chapters, each exploring one of the practical projects. Chapter 3 will explore the work of Practical Project 1. In the chapter, I attempt to identify key practices, processes and languages of gymnastics that can be used towards activating the performer. I discuss and analyse the developing *extra-daily warm-up* formed in this process. I also investigate the basic elements of gymnastics discovered through the practical work and address how these might be translated to the actor. I make key discoveries concerning the use of *gymnastics-based visualisation* as a tool for activating the performer.

Chapter 4 looks at Practical Project 2. In this process I attempt to address how *gymnastics-based practices* can be translated, adapted, and disseminated to actors. In the chapter, I will look at the individual development of the performer, the key relationship of the coach and gymnast, bodymind development, and ensemble work. I interrogate workshops and exercises developed during this process. I also reflect critically on the final performance, unearthing new discoveries and further research inquiries.

Chapter 5 will look at Practical Project 3. In this project, I investigated how the *gymnastics-based practices* could be used in a rehearsal process and

performance of a naturalistic text. I address the work through the lens of the facilitator and director. In the chapter, I will investigate how *gymnastics-based practices* were used towards character development, voice work, and preparing the performers for performance. I will also discuss exercises and workshops central to this investigation and analyse the final performance. Furthermore, I will address issues that arose out of Practical Project 3.

In the conclusion, I will identify key findings of this research project, address existing limitations and remaining questions, and discuss potential future directions of this research. I will also look into the process and impact of dissemination of this work. Along with the written text of this thesis, I have attached accompanying DVDs to the back of the thesis. These DVDs will be integral for demonstrating the work of Practical Projects 1-3.

Chapter 1

What are ‘Gymnastics-based Practices’: Histories, Lineages, and Connections

‘Gymnastics is an art, theory and practice that should never be separated.’

Freidrich Jahn (1828: 1).

Introduction

As noted in the introduction of this thesis, the writing of Cintra Wilson and others on gymnastics practice and competition is currently shaping the Western cultural view of elite gymnastics. Current texts belittle the sport and athletes, labelling gymnasts as ‘future travel agents’ who cannot play well with others and have no future prospects (Wilson, 2000: 99). In her book *Pretty Girls in Little Boxes* (2000), Joan Ryan calls gymnastics ‘legal, celebrated child abuse’ (2000: 4). *The Chicago Times* revered her book, stating ‘It should be a manifesto for change in the rules’ of the sport (in Ryan, 2000). Ryan’s book includes chapters entitled: ‘If it’s not bleeding, don’t worry about it’ and ‘They stole her soul and still have it’. The book is an exposé of the harsh ‘realities’ of gymnastics: eating disorders, mental and physical abuse, and the politics of the sport. Furthermore, alongside the news, media, and academic representation of female gymnasts, there are also fictional resources that perpetuate these stereotypes, for instance, the ABC Family’s TV series *Make it or Break It*, inspired by the teen comedy movie *Stick It* (2006). These unrealistic portrayals of gymnastics training, competition and ‘behind the scenes scandal’ reinforce contemporary notions of the sport. This is

particularly made clear in *Make it or Break it*, through the under-researched story line of Emily, an untrained phenomenon who magically possesses the skills of an Olympic trained gymnast. Here, the show gives viewers the notion that training might not be an absolute necessity and talent alone can suffice. These examples, along with others, give delusory views of the elite sport of gymnastics.

Within the field of gymnastics training, several publications reinforce the cultural perception of gymnastics, as outlined above, including Ann Chisholm's (2002) article 'Acrobats, Contortionists and Cute Children: the promise and perversity of US women's gymnastics' explores current cultural views on women's gymnastics. In this article, Chisholm gives an account of US women's gymnastics as a sport and its current place within sport culture. Similarly, two of Chisholm's other publications 'Defending the Nation: national bodies, US borders, and the 1996 US Olympic women's gymnastics team' (2002) and 'Incarnations and practices of feminine rectitude: nineteenth-century gymnastics for US women' (2005) look at cultural histories and perceptions of women's elite gymnastics. Chisholm often adopts the Western cultural perspective of gymnastics, believing it to be an exploitation of femininity and harmful to the body. However, she does argue that 'many modern permutations of gymnastics have inherited and adapted the philosophical rationales for gymnastics exercise that were advanced in Western antiquity' (1999: 128). Most of Chisholm's publications on women's gymnastics focus solely on US gymnastics rather than having a global perspective. Similarly, Wilson and other journalists objectify female gymnasts

and reduce the sport to existing solely in order to appease the male gaze, to aid in a voyeuristic society, and to destroy the bodies of growing women. Indeed, Olympic coach Bela Karolyi acknowledges the media's influence and perception of the sport in his autobiography *Feel No Fear* (1994). He states that the talent of the gymnasts did not matter, rather 'the size and cuteness of the kids caught the public and the media's attention' (1994: 59). Jo Ann Buysee in her article 'Construction of Gender in Sports' (2004) describes the media's portrayal of gymnastics and gymnasts as an overpowering structure. She argues that 'where much attention [is] paid to women's participation, the emphasis [is] frequently on how well the women could [...] still be feminine off the field' (2004: 66). These sources reinforce the Western cultural perception of gymnastics and have shaped contemporary understandings of the sport.

This thesis acknowledges that, as in arguably every sport, there are exceptions to the rule. This thesis does not presume that every gymnast is trained in a safe environment. Nor does it presume that eating disorders or forms of abuse do not exist in some cases. It also acknowledges that there are negative sides to gymnastics, as in all sport, such as obsession with winning and competition. However, it does argue that there is an imbalance of bibliographical and media resources on the training and competition of gymnastics, and on the cultural preconception of gymnastics as a spectacle which shapes societal definitions of gymnastics. While these conceptions are important to recognise, Western gymnastics has developed from a far more complex history, originally rooted in bodymind principles and aimed to provide a holistic education. The authors and perpetrators of these cultural

conceptions fail to acknowledge these histories and trainings, and the impact of the sport on contemporary Western culture.

As mentioned in the introduction, the central spine of this thesis is the exploration of gymnastics-based practices, which I consider to be a combination of non-elite and elite gymnastics. This project is re-imagining certain lineages of gymnastics-based practices towards the development of a training for contemporary performers. Therefore, an accurate historical account is necessary to provide an underpinning for this research. This chapter will specifically explore the foundations of non-elite gymnastics in Western culture particularly in Germany, the United Kingdom and United States. It will then explore Western contemporary practice, training, and competition of elite gymnastics. It will argue that gymnastics has become a pervasive practice in Western culture and will highlight certain historical pathways that led to this.

For this research, I referred to historical texts of original gymnastics practices to attempt to unpick certain lineages of gymnastics. Pre-1800 there are few texts that discuss gymnastics in detail. Philostratus' *Gymnasticus* (200-300 AD) provides the most detailed insight into the origins of gymnastics. In *Gymnasticus*, Philostratus discusses the education of man through gymnastics in ancient Greek society and the importance of physical activity for the betterment of man. For contemporary forms of gymnastics, texts only began to emerge in the early nineteenth century. Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths' *Gymnastics for Youth, Or, A Practical Guide to Healthful and*

Amusing Exercises (1800), is the first printed text on the formalised practice of the sport. GutsMuths' text has proved invaluable for this project, as he outlines original principles and foundation practices of gymnastics and physical education in modern Western culture. I discuss his text in greater detail later in this chapter and also draw on his exercises in the practical portion of this thesis. GutsMuths' book and practice was then followed by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn's *A Treatise on Gymnastics* (1828), which details gymnastics education for German men. This text has given me great insight towards unpicking the original principles and practices of gymnastics. I draw on Jahnian theories and practices in Part 2 of this thesis. Between 1800 and 1970 several texts emerged on the practice and education of gymnastics throughout Europe and the US (Strutt, 1841) (Brenner, 1870) (Lang, 1891) (Murnow, 1963) (Harris, 1964) (Loken and Willoughby, 1967) (Graves, 1918). These texts have given insight into the practice of gymnastics and the impact it had on Western socio-cultural structures, specifically physical education.

This chapter will draw on the resources mentioned above, as well as others, to unpick selected histories of gymnastics in order to highlight the foundations of gymnastics practices in Western culture. It should be stated that the histories of gymnastics are extremely complex and this chapter will attempt to knit together certain strands of this network of practices. This chapter does not attempt to address all the histories of gymnastics cross-culturally but has rather curated key histories central to this investigation. Furthermore, I should state that I am fully aware of the problematic nature of sport and the negative sides to modern sport history, yet I have chosen to mostly focus on what I

believe to be positive foundations of the sport. I have specifically chosen to do this because they will feed directly into the practical work of this project. I will argue that gymnastics is a foundation of the development of Western physical culture, physical education, and the implementation of the modern Olympic Games.

Pre-Modern Non-Elite Gymnastics

Gymnastics derives from the Greek term 'gymnastikos', meaning 'fond of athletic sport'. The sport originated in the time of classical antiquity in ancient Greece. The ancient Greeks perceived the human body as a 'temple' whose development was as important as the mind. Through this ideology, gymnastics was formed to educate men in the mastery of their bodies, alongside their intellectual learning. Leslie Kurke argues that gymnastics gave 'the Greeks a way of thinking concretely about self and other, embodiment and disembodiment, and the relation of the body to symbolic order' (1999: 254). They believed full integration of the body and mind existed through physical activity in combination with intellectual learning. For the Greeks, the harmony of body, mind, and soul was the ultimate goal and the gymnasia 'were the centres of physical and literary training' (Kennel, 1995: 47).

The first practice of gymnastics was in the form of outdoor running, jumping, and wrestling for young men. Men were encouraged to train their sons in the art of gymnastics alongside their other scholarly learning. According to the Olympic committee, 'the ancient Greeks believed gymnastics to be the perfect symmetry between mind and body' (Olympic.org, 2009). True attunement of

the body could only be achieved when physical and mental activities were practiced in conjunction. However, due to the corruption of the Olympic Games, gymnastics was banned in the fourth century and gymnastics became a labeled as a pagan practice, unsuitable for moral men. According to P.C. McIntosh:

Most histories of gymnastics mark a break between the between the systems of Western antiquity and eighteenth century Swedish and German systems. This is not to say, however, that physical education as a form of military training disappeared or that gymnastics, particularly medical gymnastics, vanished either (in Chisholm, 2002: 416).

Indeed, while we can trace certain forms of gymnastics during this period, including medieval gymnastics in the ninth and tenth centuries, and gymnastics used for militaristic training between the tenth and seventeenth centuries, the practice mostly disintegrated. Physical education was considered hostile, according to the church, and physical health went into decline. Indeed, as Wosh argues, 'since neither the urban poor nor the urban rich obeyed the laws of health, the species was becoming spiritually sick and deteriorating physically' (1982: 40). Across Europe, gymnastics exercises became considered to be an 'unprofitable waste of time' (Walsh, 1828: 135). This was due primarily to the decline in interest in physical well-being and a rise in a bourgeois lifestyle. Not until the rise of Romanticism did gymnastics resurface across Europe. While most often we associate the Romantic era as a reaction to the industrial revolution that is embodied in art and music, it also had a large influence on education reform and sciences. According to Earle Ziegler, at this point in Europe's history there was a reconstruction of existing

social and political structures due to Romantic thinkers such as Rousseau and Voltaire. Their reconsideration of European ideals directly influenced physical education throughout modern Europe (2003: 60). This in turn created the resurgence of gymnastics and the development of physical culture in the West.

18th — 20th Century Non-Elite Gymnastics – European Physical Culture

According to Michael Budd, 'at the end of the [nineteenth] century, fitness and exercise were just beginning to be popularly known by the catchphrase 'physical culture' (1997: 43). Physical culture is often defined as the physical health training movement that originated during the nineteenth century in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This movement was formed through the development of gymnastics in the late eighteenth century. The aim of this section is to identify and analyse the emergence of non-elite gymnastics and its place within Western culture and society. I hope to accurately identify what non-elite gymnastics is through tracing its history within larger socio-cultural contexts.

Germany

As mentioned above, physical education resurfaced in Europe through a deep interest in Romanticism. This was particularly through the writings and teachings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His most influential text *Emile* described what he deemed to be the ideal education of young men. Rousseau considered 'the person to be an indivisible entity and was firmly convinced of the need to devote attention to the developmental growth of the entire

organism' (Ziegler, 2003: 60). Rousseau believed that 'the grand secret of education is to contrive, that the exercise of the body and that of the mind, may always serve as relaxations of each other' (in GutsMuths, 1800). Rousseau argued that we all have a natural affection for our own being and therefore the most effective education would be to develop a healthy sense of self-worth through equal training of the body and mind. In response and reverence to these ideologies, physical exercise (gymnastics) for the development of mind and corporeal awareness began its formal development in Germany spawning a deep interest in the human body and physical culture in Western society. Beginning in the eighteenth century, in homage to classical education systems, the Germans revitalised Greek notions of gymnastics as a holistic extra-daily training towards the harmony of body and mind.

Models of German gymnastics began to form as a reaction to the Church's control over the education of children in the late eighteenth century when there began to be challenges to theological ideologies. According to Tal Korgman, 'in the last third of the eighteenth century, a new educational system was established in northern Germany by the Philanthropist movement' (2009: 280). In 1774, German reformist Johann Bernhard Basedow opened the Philanthropinum, a school for children in Dessau, Germany, which embodied this new educational system. Basedow's dismissal of his studies in theology at the University of Leipzig led him in search of naturalistic education reform. In this quest, Basedow became greatly influenced by Rousseau's *Emile* and his discourses on education and the

rejection of arts and sciences as proper forms of education. He argued that education should nurture and promote our natural tendencies. Through consideration of Rousseau's ideas, Basedow developed methodologies of teaching fifteen pupils in the ways of science, art, philosophy, and physical games. Basedow's exploration was based on the needs of the human as a moral being and more importantly the needs of children. Therefore the Philanthropinum was based on the theory that, 'everything was according to nature. The natural instincts and interests of the children were only to be directed and not altogether suppressed' (Graves, 1918: 117). Children were encouraged to follow their adolescent impulses and 'were to be trained as children and not as adults, and the methods of learning were to be adapted to their stage of mentality' (ibid). Among the other advancements the institution made to eighteenth century German education was the nature of practical work. Basedow believed physical education was a key part of the learning process of boys and it was the educator's 'duty to look to the preservation of health, and to strengthen and exercise the physical powers of the child' (Lang, 1891: 18). Furthermore, he argued, 'wrestling and other parts of gymnastics or exercises of the body should be restored' (ibid). He surmised, through a process of education that served both the body and the mind, that boys could be guided towards becoming strong, well-rounded men. Basedow's school was the first in Europe 'to admit children from all social classes and to give physical education a place in the daily curriculum' (Zeigler, 2003: 60). Basedow's work was the basis for the development of physical culture and gymnastics and paved the way for a new form of education in Europe and

came at a time when Europeans were craving a revolution of culture and education.

Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths

German pedagogue Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths (1759-1839) is primarily seen as the pathfinder of modern sport pedagogy and was one of the leading philanthropists in eighteenth and nineteenth century Germany. He is most often accredited for being the founder of pedagogical gymnastics and instilling the need for physical education for children in Germany. Although, the work of Basedow was highly influential, up until GutsMuths, physical exercise was still rarely practiced.

GutsMuths took over control of the Schnepfenthal Institution, founded by Christian Gotthilf Salzmann in 1784. With a borrowed curriculum from Basedow, the institution's original purpose was to teach children new educational theories. In his book, *Gymnastics for youth, or, A practical guide to healthful and amusing exercises for the use of schools: an essay toward the necessary improvement of education, chiefly as it relates to the body* (1800), GutsMuths opens his argument with the importance of gymnastics practices in education:

If you neglect the health and strength of his body, you could leave him the treasures of a Croesus, the debilitated, suffering, wretched, helpless creature would curse the education he had received, amid all the splendour of reputation, the glare of honours, and even the incense of a throne. Learning and refinement are to health and bodily perfection what luxuries are to necessities (GutsMuths, 1800).

Here he explains that if men deprive their sons of proper physical education, their sons' bodies will no doubt be useless objects by the end of their lifetimes. His first few chapters focussed on the necessity of physical activity in German and European societies for the health and maintenance of strong cultures. GutsMuths asserted that boys, at that time, should spend a minimum of ten hours a day in physical activity to cultivate a strong bodily construct. He believed, 'a sound mind in a sound body' was 'the grand object of education' (GutsMuths, 1800: 4). Therefore, he encouraged the implementation of exercises for the improvement of the body. The remaining chapters of GutsMuths textbook focussed on exercises he developed to reach this body attunement. GutsMuths' text and pedagogy encouraged the practice of gymnastics across Europe: 'The results of this system of exercises are deserving of consideration. In thirty-two years, three hundred and thirty-four scholars, from various nations, were educated at this [GutsMuths] institution' (Walsh, 1828: 136).

GutsMuths gymnastics sought the 'health of the body and unclouded serenity of the mind' (1800: 146). He believed that gymnastics was the intersection between morality and the condition of the body. Therefore, the gymnastics he developed encouraged strength and firmness of the body and mind, which he believed to be necessary for men. GutsMuths gymnastics included leaping, which:

[R]anks amongst the most excellent of gymnastics exercises. It strengthens and gives elasticity to the feet, legs, knees, thighs, and indeed the whole frame. It braces every muscle, invigorates courage

and [...] imparts such a command over the balance of the body (Gutsmuths, 1800: 196).

It also included the 'standing jump' and variations on leaping, jumping, and running, which he believed to 'strengthen the lower limbs, and more importantly the lungs' (1800: 228). GutsMuths took his running exercise directly from the Greeks and their stadium races, which he believed to be useful for holistic development. GutsMuths gymnastics also included wrestling, climbing, preservation of the equilibrium or balancing, lifting and carrying, dancing, walking and military exercises. While most of GutsMuths' writing references 'men' and 'young boys', and makes no specific reference to the specific education of girls and women, he notes that he was influenced greatly by the teachings of the Greeks. He states:

The gymnastics of the ancients deserve to be sedulously studied, and introduced with suitable alterations. I am persuaded they would prove excellent means of rendering our men and women, youths and maidens, boys and girls, whom sentimentality has enervated, once more healthy, strong, and hardy (1800: 165-166).

Here, we see GutsMuths' consideration of women and girls within his teachings and practices. However, there is no evidence that women or girls were actually included. In fact, women were not allowed to partake in gymnastics or physical education until the early twentieth century. I discuss the role of women in the modern gymnastics history later in this chapter.

Through his continued research, GutsMuths made several discoveries that led to what we consider to be contemporary gymnastics. GutsMuths' harnessing of pure gymnastics continued until the end of his life and gave way to the

formalisation of gymnastics and physical education, which grew exponentially in the nineteenth century. GutsMuths' teachings are also a key part of the development of elite gymnastics. GutsMuths gymnastics has been directly incorporated in contemporary elite practices and competition, particularly his work with balancing, which led to the development of the balance beam, as well as his work with leaps, jumps, and running as preparatory training.

It is important to acknowledge GutsMuths in this thesis for two reasons: his influence on contemporary elite gymnastics and his influence on Friedrich Jahn and physical education. At this point in European history, there was a rise in nationalism formed out of Romantic ideologies, which brought a new wave of physical education and gymnastics to Europe. European countries began forming national identities born out of Romantic views of cultural self-expression and nationhood. Nationalism promoted loyalty to those with whom one shared a culture and history, instead of an allegiance to empires. According to Hannu Salmi, nationalism is a multi-faceted term, often seen as a political movement, but which was in many ways a 'cultural historical phenomenon' that left its imprint on many socio-cultural sectors including physical education and sport (2013).

Friedrich Ludwig Jahn

After the 1815 Congress of Vienna and Napoleon's defeat, a large barrier emerged in the Germanic states between the conservatives who aimed to restore Europe to a pre-enlightenment era and liberalists interested in nationalism. During this time, gymnastics became a practice which exposed

German citizens to nationalistic and democratic ideas enmeshed with liberal thinking. Gymnastics and physical education became part of a larger structure interested in a higher culture influenced by the French Revolution and Romanticism. This was mostly at the hands of Friedrich Jahn, who introduced gymnastics institutions to German culture and became the 'leader and trainer of flaming patriotic German youth' (Wild, 1925: 124).

Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (or Father Jahn) is recognised for developing modern-day gymnastics events and as the 'founder of a great national system of physical training' (Wild, 1925: 124). Jahn's interest in nationalism led him to 'encourage bodily exercise and foster patriotic ideals in his pupils, so that with sound minds in sound bodies, inspired with love of country and passion for freedom, they might help in the liberation of their country from foreign oppression' (1925: 125). Indeed, he was one of several German nationalists in this period that was heavily influenced by Prussian history and patriotism. In 1810, 'Jahn and Friedrich Friesen formed the link between the free corps and the German gymnastics organisation', which they formed 'when both taught at an educational institution founded by Dr. Plamann in Pestalozzi's spirit' (Kohn, 1949: 423)⁴. This relationship between gymnastics and Prussian army training evolved into Jahn's opening of the first gymnasium (*turnplatzen*) in June 1811, where he 'gathered the pupils around him, led them to the open spaces of the Hasenheide in the southern part of the city, and started to instruct them in games, gymnastics drill and athletics' (Kohn 1949: 424). This rapidly spurred

⁴ (1746 – 1827) Pestalozzi was a Swiss educational reformer and pedagogue interested in the use of Romanticism in teaching. He is best known for his implementation of literacy in nineteenth century Switzerland and his interests in the personal development of each student.

the concept of physical education in German culture. Jahn's fight against the 'neo-authoritarian regimes of Restoration Germany' with his university students made him 'simultaneously a hero, a martyr, and a legend to his followers' (Kohn, 1949: 423). Jahn created open sports fields where 200-400 gymnasts would come together to practice and cultivate a German community grounded in nationalistic identity and pride. By 1818, there were over 150 sports fields with 12,000 organisations. This rapid development can be accredited to two factors: the realisation of the need for physical exercise, and the overwhelming sense of a coming together and national identity. Jahnian gymnastics shaped the German identity through the amendment of original educational practices, specifically through rigid training and the development of the body alongside attunement of the mind (Jahn, 1828).

Jahnian gymnastics included preparatory exercises, secondary exercises, and group exercises. An example of the work Jahn developed is his preparatory exercises. These included standing and walking on tiptoe, hopping, kicking, stretching, and variations on walking and running. Jahn considered these exercises as preparatory with their object 'to strengthen and to render limber the lower extremities and to accustom the body.' He argued that every gymnastics practice should begin with these exercises as preparatory work (1828: 1). Jahn's secondary gymnastics exercises included leaping, vaulting, balancing, exercises on the single and parallel bars, climbing, throwing, and wrestling, among others. Jahn believed vaulting to be one of the most important exercises for the German man as it 'has a salutary effect upon almost all parts of the body' (1828: 19). In performance of the vault, the men

would first engage in preparatory vaulting exercises including hopping, leaping, crouching, and raising. The men would then attempt 'simple vaults' where the pupil takes hold of the two saddle-holds, springs so as to rest on his hands, raises his right leg till it forms a right angle with the left; leaves the grasp of his right hand, turns at the same time his right leg and body, till the face is looking towards the horse's head; the right hand is put into the saddle, and the right leg closes gently (1828: 25). Eleven other beginning vaults then follow this beginning vault before moving forward. Each exercise is meant as a building block to further strengthen and prepare the participant's body. There is a similar structure for the other secondary exercises, for instance, in work with the bars, which Jahn believed to strengthen the upper body, develop a dexterity of the body in motion, and harness balance. The participants first worked with swings on the single bar and eventually moved towards work with the parallel bars. Jahn was very clear that the training was an ongoing process of succession and no move or exercise should be explored before the mastery of its predecessor. However, each of the separate areas should be practiced simultaneously to continue development of the whole body. The vault and the parallel bars in particular were developed by Jahn and were later incorporated into elite gymnastics competition, which I discuss later in the chapter.

Jahn believed that the instructor of gymnastics should also be a trained gymnast and set laws which were to be strictly observed by the instructor including: not giving a bad example; refraining from all enjoyments which are improper for youth (including drinking and smoking tobacco); not to appear

late; to be the severest judge against himself; never to outdo his pupils; to direct conversation to pupils so that it may be instructive and entertaining; to avoid stiffness and pedantry; to be friendly and kind; to prove clearly he is impressed with the importance of the subject; and to act as an elder friend, adviser and warner among his pupils (Jahn, 1828: 153). Jahn believed the relationship between the instructor and the pupil should be strong and full of trust; that the gymnast must be willing to risk his life in movement, trusting the instructor would catch him if he fell.

For Jahn, the ultimate goal of gymnastics was to be an inclusive, community-based activity that promoted a sense of camaraderie. However, this camaraderie was distinctly reserved for men. According to Heikki Lempa, 'instilling a sense of community was Jahn's goal in gymnastics, and his exercises created a community that was freewheeling and immersed in team spirit. It was unique and an exclusively male experience. [...] One from which women were excluded' (Lempa, 2007: 83). For Jahn, women were 'soft-hearted mothers and [...] only do harm on the sports field' (Jahn, 1816: 232)⁵.

Beginning in 1819, there was a decline in Jahnian gymnastics and the principles on which he and his predecessors based their work. Their initial gymnastics trainings included 'throwing, jumping and 'formal' physical exercises and was 'aimed at improving physical health, shaping and strengthening the body, improving dexterity, as well as courage, and

⁵ Jahnian ideas regarding preparatory exercises, the relationship between the instructor and the gymnast, and gymnastics to promote camaraderie proved extremely useful for the practical portion of this project and are discussed in greater detail in Chapters 3-5.

stimulating intellectual and moral growth' (Hartmann-Tews in Hardman, 2002: 153). Along with physical health and a promotion of physical culture, gymnastics became a way to educate and 'celebrate community and convey social responsibility, solidarity and patriotism' (ibid). At the decline of Jahn's teachings, he left Germany for France, where he continued to disseminate his practices, further extending the original principles and practices of modern gymnastics into European and American culture. I will discuss the influence of GutsMuths and Jahn on American physical education later in this chapter as well as their influence on the formation of elite gymnastics.

Beginning after the Carlsbad Decrees in 1819, other forms of the German gymnastics began to emerge and increase in popularity. These forms no longer emphasised the bodymind relationship but instead were laden with a military spirit and negative reinforcement.

According to Berit Elizabeth Dencker, even 'in the period following the revolution of 1848, most gymnasts continued to view the movement's founding aim of military fitness as a central goal' (2001: 504). Although abandoning most of the original principles of modern gymnastics, these militaristic forms became largely popular. By 1847, there is said to have been 40,000 to 50,000 German men practicing gymnastics in Germany. Starting in 1848, the gymnastics organisation began to move away from sociopolitical opposition and into a supportive role of the Bismarck era, particularly after the

unification in 1871.⁶ Despite the opposition from 1848 onward, a large portion of gymnasts strongly supported and even aimed at involvement in military action (Dencker, 2001: 504). This militaristic view grew considerably over the latter half of the century and bled into the training style in the gymnasium, where negative aggression was used to motivate the gymnasts. This negative aggression included adverse verbal reinforcement and dominance of the teacher/coach. This gave rise to the 'Free and Order' style gymnastics, which used group exercises to dispel individuality of the gymnasts and teach them to obey commands as a collective unit.⁷ This practice was:

[B]ased on the idea that a particular people, unique, and distinct from other peoples, should be sovereign. In this form of nationalism, therefore, the idea of the sovereignty of the people rests on a notion of the people as a collectivity, rose to power for the remainder of the century (Dencker, 2001: 505).

The rapid increase in the practice of gymnastics and its principles had a large effect on socio-cultural change throughout Europe. Primarily, the introduction of gymnastics into German culture in the late eighteenth century shaped the European fascination with the body and physical culture, which continued into the twentieth century.⁸

⁶ Otto Von Bismarck was a Prussian-statesman and was named the North German Confederations' first chancellor in 1871 after the unification of which he was a central player.

⁷ According to Dencker, 'Free and Order' gymnastics was a sub sect of the Jahnian movement and was free of apparatuses. These exercises also differed from the standardised Jahnian gymnastics in that they 'were explicitly designed for pre-military training' (Dencker, 2001: 506).

⁸ While this thesis does not explicitly discuss this, it is important to note Jahnian gymnastics had an indirect role on the rise of communism in Germany. According to Lisa Burnett, 'by the 1930s, mass gymnastics had become a fixture in totalitarian regimes [...] Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany staged enormous parades, rallies, and mass athletic demonstrations in the Jahnian Tradition' (2013: 8).

Part of gymnastics' tangled history, and a large part of cultural conceptions of gymnastics are enmeshed with unfavourable practices of gymnastics. In the early twentieth century, the Nazis gained control over physical education in Germany and gymnastics practices were interlaced with the quest for the 'utopian body' fostered by eugenics. The Nazis 'saw gymnastics as the expression of a Northern European or Aryan racial body and racial culture' (Spracklen, 2014: 23). They believed gymnastics was evidence of their racial superiority. This spot on the history of gymnastics has greatly affected contemporary notions of what gymnastics *is* and whom it is for. While acknowledging this history, this thesis chooses to focus on the original principles and practices of modern gymnastics, which are embedded in contemporary Western culture. Although not concentrating on it, it is important to acknowledge this strand of the history, because as Karl Spacklen argues, sport 'can only be understood by realising that sports had a number of contradictory purposes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when sports as we know them became part of a shared physical culture of modernity' (2014: 11).

The German system of gymnastics became the dominant system throughout the nineteenth century and up until the 1950s. After the formation of German gymnastics, other forms of gymnastics emerged. Major strands included 'Ling gymnastics' and 'harmonic gymnastics', which will be discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 2. Not only did major strands of non-elite gymnastics emerge, but also gymnastics practices became the primary physical education practice in the West.

United Kingdom

Like Germany, the UK was interested in forging a national identity and thus employed German gymnastics to 'harness the passions of virile, sometimes violent, but value-laden masculinities through sports and games, seeking to build a nation of strong men and boys committed to the nations imperial and colonial foreign policies' (Wamsley, 2002: 396). While British gymnastics and physical education systems were based on German gymnastics, the English developed their own interest in competitive sport and had begun implementing systems of games and competition into upper class culture in the seventeenth century. Joseph Strutt notes that sporting events during this period were likely to include 'ringing, fowling, shooting, [...], wrestling, leaping, running, [...] tilts and tournaments,' noting the Londoners 't[ook] pleasure to see some pageant' or event (1841: xxxiv). However, M. Johnes argues that modern British sport made its formal appearance in the nineteenth century on the brink of the industrial revolution and was 'forged within this heady mix of breakneck change; new ways of working and living brought new ways of playing' (2005: 1). Sport competition and gymnastics practices in the UK had a wide influence on the development of the modern Olympics, which I discuss in further detail below.

German gymnastics began its informal integration into British systems in the early nineteenth century. Published in 1816 in *The Morning Post* in England, 'Substitutes for classical education' reports on new fundamentals that should be integrated into schools. Among the list with, Natural History, Civic History, Modern Languages and English Style, was the final point, 'a greater attention

to gymnastics' (Unknown, 1816: np). As in Germany, gymnastics during this period included exercises like fencing, swimming, boxing, jumping and running, before a formal rubric and use of apparatuses were set in place. According to Michael Anton Budd, 'systematic approaches to physical training and education did not catch on [...] quickly in Britain. [...] For the most part, boys were left to their own devices in arranging their recreational pursuits' (1997: 16). It was not until the 1830s and 1840s that Britain adopted the athletic and gymnastics movements as part of military training and reforming bodies, although 'it was thought as early as the 1820s that something apart from formal drill and team was needed' (ibid). For the better part of a decade (from 1825), gymnastics was used purely for the development of the corporeal body and development of a physical culture in boys and men, drawing on original German practices. Britain's Lord Brabazon was a widely popular writer and speaker who emphasised the importance of the body and its physical condition in the late nineteenth century, stating 'the national physique is by no means all that it should be,' and stressing the importance of Germany's gymnastics training in order to 'maintain a modern nation' (1881). Brabazon's commitment to implementing a physical culture in Britain in order to maintain a modern nation paved the way for more formalised practices of German gymnastics in Britain.

Many argue that Swedish gymnastics, an extended form of German gymnastics, was the dominant form of the times. As Mark Evans states, 'without doubt the most influential gymnastics regime of the nineteenth century [...] was the Swedish System founded by Per Henrik Ling' (2009: 17).

Evans argues the Swedish System was largely popular throughout Europe and later England and emphasised 'harmonious development of the physical, mental, and moral qualities of the individual' through exercises of body training (ibid). However, while the Swedish system was popular and influential in theatre practice, German gymnastics served as the root of this practice and was the largest influence on the implementation of elite gymnastics. Chapter 2 of this thesis discusses Ling gymnastics' influence on theatre practices, particularly in the work of Genevieve Stebbins, in greater detail.

From the 1880s, gymnastics had been the main source of physical education in schools in the UK. Beginning in 1954, a battle of systems erupted because three separate versions of gymnastics, Swedish gymnastics, educational gymnastics, and German gymnastics, were being taught in government schools. Swedish gymnastics prevailed because, as Dawn Penny states, 'even though educational gymnastics was the rising star of physical education in the early 1950s, its strong association with the education of girls and woman probably ruled it out of contention for the men' (ibid).

This debate spurred the separation of gymnastics from physical education in the United Kingdom. 'The men have made overt acknowledgement that other skills are as important and have 'diluted' the gymnastics skill content of gymnasium work so that now the boys may be seen practicing basket-ball shots and manoeuvres' (Munrow, 1955:276). Penny suggests that at this time when Munrow and other male educators were weary of educational gymnastics, female educators, such as Marjorie Randall understood 'the

notion of body awareness, which lay at the centre of the women's scheme, a theory of learning that ran directly counter' to the male counterparts (Penny 2002: 31). For Randall, the major aim was 'the achievement of what she termed 'body awareness', which included neural control combined with a higher level kinaesthetic awareness.' She argued this could be achieved through 'experience into an intuitive control of movement' (ibid).⁹

The use of Swedish gymnastics education continued in the UK until the late 1960s. However, by 1969, Swedish and educational gymnastics had been almost entirely replaced throughout schools by contemporary forms of physical education, no longer military-focussed nor strictly male-oriented. However, Swedish (Ling) gymnastics influence and practice is widespread, particularly in dance and theatre practices. While formalised gymnastics may have been removed as the primary source of physical education in the UK, remnants of the practice still remain. For instance, schools continue to implement original practices such as preparatory exercises: running, jumping, leaping, and stretching as forms of 'warming up'.

United States of America

Similar to European sentiment, 'American interest in physical fitness was largely the culmination of the educational movement and the urban-industrial development of the latter half of the nineteenth century' (Betts, 1968: 787). Comparable to Germany, Rousseau had a strong influence on American

⁹ Body and kinaesthetic awareness became key components of the practical work and will be explored in Part 2 of this thesis.

teachers: 'The origins of American relationship of the mind and body can be traced back to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century [...] and the recurring appeals of educators, physicians, health advocates, journalists and sports enthusiasts' (Betts, 1968: 787). Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Americans were interested in the concepts of education of the mind and body through gymnastics, sports, and games. Prior to this, Americans viewed exercise, games, and play as frivolous acts with little advantage to the betterment of man. However, in 1785 Thomas Jefferson recommended two hours of daily exercise for men. This began a national endorsement of exercise and the importance of health in young men. The US began encouraging gymnastics as 'exercises which would cultivate a national spirit and exercise, which was 'necessary both for vigour of body and mind' (Betts, 1968: 789).

Formal education of gymnastics transitioned to America through German immigration and influence beginning in the early nineteenth century. This began with the 1822 publication and release of GutsMuths book, which spurred interest in education gymnastics in the German spirit. Due to mass immigration from Germany in the early nineteenth century, gymnastics practices became widespread in America. Between the 1830s and 1840s Germans poured into Milwaukee, Wisconsin and represented more than a third of the total population. The Germans gained power as their influence spread throughout the city in hopes of making it the 'New Germany'. In the 1850s and 1860s as the population spread wider and the first generation of German-Americans were born, the first-generation German immigrants began

inserting themselves into the education system to link a more German-based method. By 1863, there were over seventy German gymnastics associations, over 7,000 athletes interested in Jahnian teachings and by the end of the century there were 312 known associations. America became immersed in a sport-based ethos and physical education.

At the turn of the twentieth century, physical culture became heightened in America when, 'theories about how bodies should look, feel, work and move, and physical practices for training and presenting oneself accordingly' came to the forefront (Veder, 2010: 819). Frey and Eitzen argue that the socialisation of sport in American history reinforced the hegemony of societal arrangements, perpetuating class, and power differentials. The implementation and practice of gymnastics in the US encouraged the continued development of physical education programmes and collegiate sport competition (1991). German gymnastics continued to flourish in practice across America until the mid twentieth century until gymnastics became the embedded practice of physical education in most US schools.

Although German gymnastics was the major strand of gymnastics practiced in the US, other practices of gymnastics played significant roles in the development of physical education and gymnastics in the States. This is particularly shown in the dissemination of the work of Francoise Delsarte. American Delsartism or 'harmonic gymnastics' initial boom and then immense growth can be partially attributed to its rejection of previous ideals or ignorance of the body at a time when 'social modernity's rationalised

mechanics of the body' promoted Descartes mind-body dualism (Veder, 2010: 825). American Delsartism sought to move away from the traditional body form towards a new kinaesthetic ideal focussed on energy, movement, and health. Two strands of Delsartism emerged in the US: actor and dance training and physical education. As one strand of Delsartism moved towards expression of internal emotion in performance and dance (Harmonic Gymnastics), fourth and fifth generation students of the system developed an alternative function of the work based in physical education in schools. American Delsartism is the widest known influence on contemporary American models of physical education, particularly in the physical education of women.¹⁰

After World War II ended, the physical education systems began to shift in America. Holbrook states, 'while the world of dance education flourished, the same could not be said in the development of gymnastics work' (1973: 5). With the end of the war came the dissipation of gymnastics as a social construct. When the war concluded the television age was shortly to follow and people became less and less interested in the advancement of physical culture outside the education system. June Kenner argues that the term 'sport replaced gymnastics [...] as the major ingredient of physical education in both men's and women's programs' (1977: 836). Here she acknowledges the term gymnastics as 'physical education' and states 'physical educators adopted either the Swedish system of gymnastics, the German system, various

¹⁰ I explore the work of Delsarte and his students in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Their work was also influential in the practical portion of this project and will be discussed in Part 2.

American innovations, or some combination of them' (Kenner in Holbrook, 1973: 5). By the 1950s, the term 'physical education' had completely replaced gymnastics in Western culture. Methodologies of teaching and training young men and women shifted away from original ideologies. Physical education programmes began expanding and using other forms of activity for physical education. Simultaneously:

Gymnastics continued to develop along more formal lines and the emphasis remained on set patterns designed to develop strength, agility, endurance and balance. [...] In addition, interest in success at Olympic level was a determining factor in the growth of this in school and college programs (Holbrook, 1973: 5).

At this point, there was a formal split in gymnastics and physical education, and subsequently, the decline of German models of gymnastics in the US.

The development of German gymnastics spawned several other strands of nineteenth and twentieth century gymnastics training, which should be noted. In Switzerland, Adolf Speiss developed 'Speiss gymnastique', which originated out of Jahnian practices but utilised free exercises with no use of apparatus or equipment. Speiss gymnastique often associated with or referred to as 'Free and Order' exercise became popular with the decline of Jahnian gymnastics by those interested in gymnastics practices as military training. As discussed, in Sweden 'Ling gymnastics' became the popular form. Ling gymnastics was also widely popular with women and had a large influence on theatre practices. 'Natural gymnastics', developed in France by Georges Hébert became a popular method in France in the early twentieth century. The 'natural method' was 'designed primarily to develop strength and flexibility for

sporting' (Rudlin in Hodge, 2000: 68). Hébert's natural gymnastics heavily influenced the work of theatre practitioner Jacques Copeau and will be detailed in relation to the work of Jacque Lecoq in Chapter 2. Finally, in Denmark, Franz Nachteggall developed a form of gymnastics based on his own training of GutsMuths. 'Natchteggall gymnastics' main focus was military preparation and used ropes, ladders, climbing, and wooden vaulting horses. Nachteggall gymnastics is also accredited with the first use of mats in gymnastics practices. While these programmes were secondary and did not have the widespread influence that German gymnastics had, it is important to acknowledge them within this particular history. Furthermore, each of these practices stemmed from German gymnastics systems, maintaining the core principles and practices, yet adapting them for their individual interests. Finally, acknowledging these other histories demonstrates the widespread practice of gymnastics throughout the West and its impact on Western culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The practical work explored in this project explicitly draws on the understandings of this particular history of non-elite gymnastics because of its strong influence on Western culture and elite gymnastics. These practices and their influences on the practical work will be discussed in greater detail in Part 2 of this thesis.

Women in Gymnastics

As the practical portion of this thesis draws on women's elite gymnastics, it is important to note the role of women in gymnastics' history. The legitimization of female exercise did not arise until much later in Western culture. Indeed, in most countries, women were not permitted to take part in physical activity or

education until the 1920s. Separatism is not distinct to sport but is an example of pre-twentieth century 'dominant ideas about the biological and psychological predispositions of men and women,' which supposedly rendered men 'naturally suited to sports, and women, by comparison, essentially less suited' (Hargreaves, 1994: 30). Forms of female physical activity did not appear until the late nineteenth century and were only permitted because they were qualitatively different than men's sport, emphasising beauty and poise, which were considered conventional ideas of femininity.

As stated previously, in Germany for much of the nineteenth century women were considered inferior in both mind and body, and gymnastics was seen to be unsuitable for them. According to Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens, in nineteenth century Germany, 'the exclusion of women seemed self-evident and nobody bothered to explain or justify it. It was embedded in a general resistance against the physical education of females based on moral, medical, and aesthetic arguments' (2002: 53). Moreover, as Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens argue, 'exercises for girls were restricted to free, but limited range of movements and dances in order to make them healthier and more attractive' (ibid).

Beginning with the conception of the Olympic Games in 1896, which this chapter later discusses, women began being included in gymnastics practices under the supervision of men. However, they were still regarded as the weaker sex and the exercises, such as light dances and calisthenics, were

modified to maintain their femininity. Women's role within German gymnastics changed drastically after World War I. A new female body type and athleticism were embraced and there became a greater participation in sporting events although according to Pfister, there was still large controversy over the participation of women in competitive sport. Medical experts 'especially argued against it as they feared a masculinisation of the female body' (Pfister, 2002: 168).

In the UK, women's practice of gymnastics began much earlier than in Germany. Beginning in 1832 with the 1832 Reform Act, women's roles and rights within British society were being challenged. Although, women's suffrage did not become a national movement until the formation of the National Society of Women's Suffrage in 1872, a push for women's rights was emerging throughout the nineteenth century. A key and yet perhaps unrecognised figure in this movement was Lucie Brenner.

From my research, there is little existing bibliography on Brenner's specific practices. However we know she is considered one of the first female physical educators in the UK. Kathleen McCrone cites Brenner as being part of a movement of educators interested in Ling gymnastics as a practice for women in the UK. Indeed, she argues that the system first transferred to the UK in the 1840s and was promoted by Mathias Ross, a Hungarian doctor who took refuge in London. Steady growth of the Ling system continued alongside the more dominant German system, as private gymnasiums were opened in the cities. Indeed, Brenner opened her own gymnasium in London drawing on

Ling principles for the practice of women's gymnastics and published a book entitled *Gymnastics for Ladies* (1870), in which she reports on extra-daily exercises to do with women in England. She starts by stating, 'it is only of late years that the importance of Gymnastics Exercises has been recognised. It is equally true that, even when recognised, the subject has been too often most imperfectly understood, the details most ignorantly applied' (Brenner, 1870: 1). Brenner continued to interrogate the methods through which gymnastics was being translated to students at this time, with criticism of the lack of science used in methods and the 'idle pretension and radical error' used in teaching, making it practically useless (ibid). She emphasised the need for preliminary exercises and development over time, unlike her fellow colleagues who thrust their students into advanced moves. Brenner argued that to attain optimal achievement of gymnastics 'two grand rules must constantly be observed. First: the avoidance of fatigue as to the exercises themselves; secondly: the recognition of amusement in connection with those exercises.' She argues that the only way to achieve gymnastics usefulness is to constantly find pleasure in the practice (Brenner, 1870: 3). In the remainder of her book she carefully outlines her exercises for women, which she believed should differ from men's exercises because of difference in bodily frames. Sections included: Exercises with the bar-bell (see Figure 3 below), Exercises with foils, Swing exercise and jumping, Leaping and trapeze exercise.



Figure 3: Example of barbell exercise from *Gymnastics for Ladies* (1870)

She finishes her book by stating that the gymnastics she has outlined in her writing should be 'peculiarly adapted to the requirements of my own sex. I have striven to impress upon those who have carefully followed me, the vast importance of discrimination in the choice of Gymnastics Exercises where Ladies are concerned' (Brenner, 1870: 81).

Brenner's understanding of the specific needs of the woman's body in differentiation to the male body was key in the separation of men and women's contemporary gymnastics. Brenner's gymnastics, unlike Jahn or GutsMuths, also emphasised grace and fluidity of the body. For instance, her exercises with bar-bells were meant to improve grace and plasticity in the arms while promoting muscular strength and balance of the body. Brenner notes that the bar-bell exercises give 'steadiness of body in difficult positions and under muscular exertion of both sets of limbs' (1870: 36). She further emphasises that grace and graceful movement is a natural effect of these

exercises and the balance gained from them. Here we see a direct split in the teaching of gymnastics between women and men. Brenner's move towards gracefulness and flexibility in conjunction with physical training is the first sign of distinction between men and women's gymnastics. Brenner was the first physical education instructor to offer gymnastics to women and to identify specific requirements necessary to develop a healthy and agile frame in females.

It is important to give particular attention to Brenner's work for multiple reasons. Firstly, she is the first female to make the clear distinction between men and women's gymnastics. She is also the first known female educator to write down such theories and practices. Her emphasis of grace and fluidity in practice spread throughout women's practices of gymnastics during the nineteenth century. Her work was largely useful in the practical work of this project and in gaining deeper understanding of more key principles of contemporary elite gymnastics.

For women in the US, gymnastics developed in the nineteenth century in order to aid them in their housework. It was believed that gestural exercises promoted healthy, agile bodies that were capable of doing domestic-based work. Ann Chisholm states that 'often referred to as calisthenics in order to denote their feminisation, gymnastics systems deemed appropriate for US women between 1830-1870 were enmeshed within a matrix of nineteenth century discourse and institutional investment' (1967: 737). She argues:

Although we lack conclusive proof that gymnastics and calisthenics were practiced in the majority of female academies

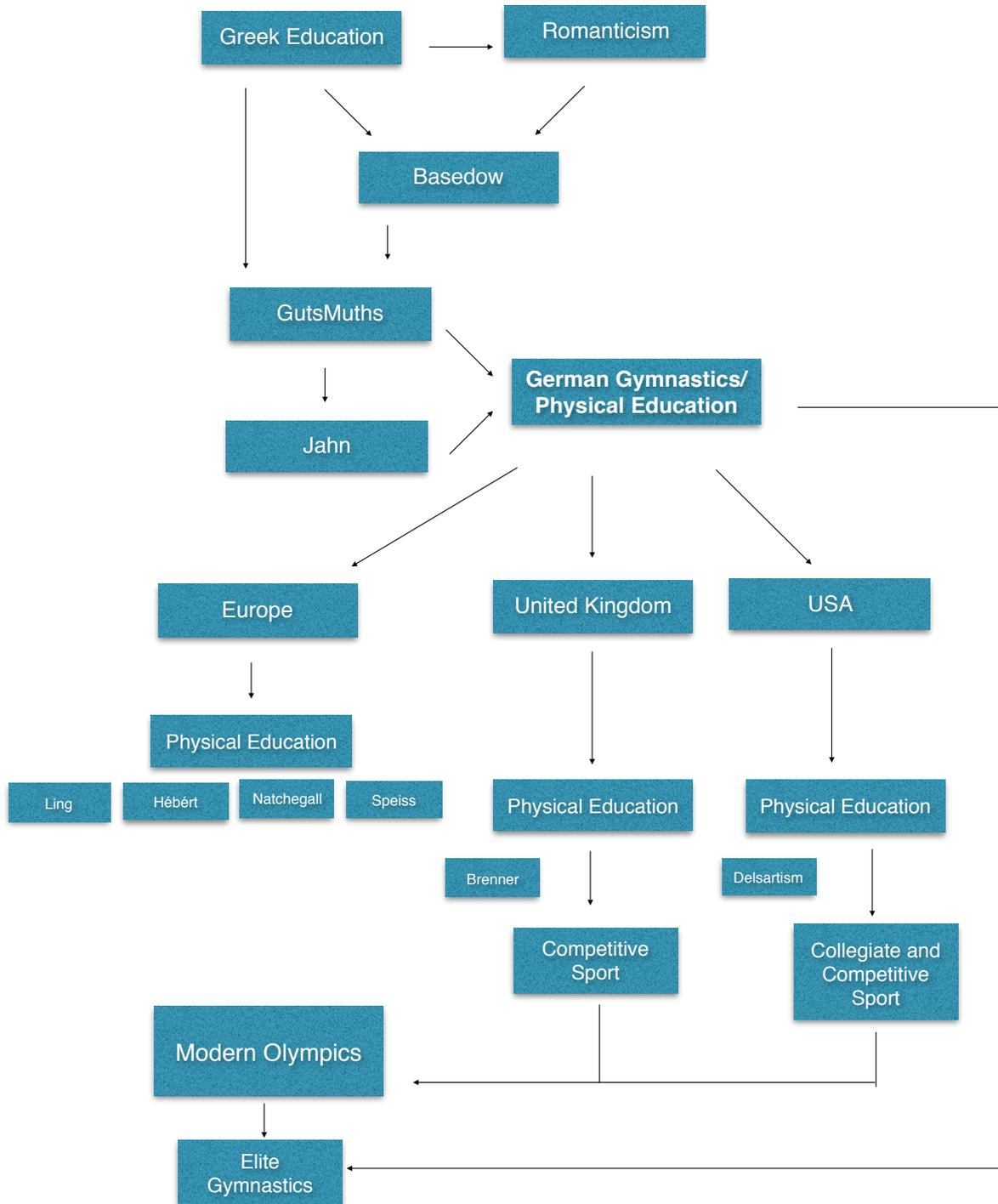
[...] irrefutable evidence exists that they were included in the curricula of leading northeastern female seminaries and women's colleges. [...] Gymnastics, thus, were fundamental to the eventual institutionalisation of US women's physical education (ibid).

According to Jennifer Hargreaves, both North American and European female education specialists 'opposed men's sports because they believed they concentrated too much on competition and were overspecialised and corrupted by commercialisation' (1994: 30). Beginning in 1861 with the Normal Physical School, specialised schools for women's gymnastics emerged in the US. Like Brenner's work in the UK, these schools particularly emphasized 'agility, grace of movement, flexibility, and posture' (Jenkins, 2005: 184). These schools continued to flourish until the formalisation of competitive sport in America in the late nineteenth century.

Although enmeshed in traditionalist views of femininity, these original practices of female non-elite gymnastics paved the way for women's elite gymnastics. The final portion of this chapter will look at the rise of women's elite gymnastics and contemporary practices of the sport.

However, before moving forward, it is necessary to clarify and summarise what has been discussed above. Therefore, I have created a chart which outlines the tangled lineages. The figure below outlines the progression of gymnastics throughout Western society from its reintroduction in the late seventeenth century.

Figure 4: Chart of histories of western gymnastics



Elite Gymnastics

This section of the chapter will explore the rise of elite gymnastics in the nineteenth and twentieth century. It will particularly investigate women's elite gymnastics: its development, current training, and competition frameworks. The aim of this portion of the chapter is to expose and discuss the second strand of gymnastics that emerged in the late eighteenth century and its importance to contemporary Western sport. This next section is essential to the overall project because it lays down the foundations of the principles and practices I explored in the practical work and Part 2 of this thesis. Furthermore, it aims to give an understanding of the current shape of the sport.

As non-elite gymnastics grew exponentially in the nineteenth century, so did competitive sport in Europe and America. This rise can be attributed mostly to the influence of British sport on the Prussian government during the industrial revolution and to the re-introduction of the Olympic Games.

Nineteenth century French educator and propagandist Pierre de Coubertin aimed to reform education in France, believing the French should teach their children to be as 'hardy as their perennial foes', the Germans (Guttman, 2002: 8). However, he sought to shift away from the German physical education system, which he believed to be rigid and looked to England and the US for inspiration. He was motivated by the moral influence of physical culture and vigour for sport in England, and the national craze of intercollegiate sport and gymnastics education in the US. Upon returning to France, Coubertin

attempted to interlace English and American physical culture, gymnastics education, and sport into French society. In 1892, Coubertin began plans to revive the Olympic Games to encourage humanism and peace through sport. Over the next four years, Coubertin developed and implemented the modern Olympic Games. According to Kevin Wamsley, 'in spite of nostalgic connections to the ancient world, the modern Olympics emerged from nineteenth century thought and practice' (2002: 396). Wamsley argues that countries like Germany initiated uniquely styled gymnastics movements and 'in a variety of forms, sport itself was a project of the nineteenth century [...] and the beginnings of international exchange and competition'. He further argues that the emergence of competitive sport and the Olympics during this period became a monitor of cultural progress (Wamsley, 2002: 396).

Prior to the integration of the Olympics into modern society, in 1881 the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) was formed. FIG is the governing body of gymnastics competition worldwide. It is the oldest sports federation in existence and governs all forms of elite gymnastics. When FIG was originally developed by Nicholas J. Cuperus, only three countries were represented: France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Currently, FIG represents 133 affiliated federations of gymnastics. FIG oversees the rules, regulations, ethics, code of points and competitions for gymnastics.

When the Olympics were reintroduced in 1896, a second strand of gymnastics emerged: elite gymnastics. In the competition, men (only) competed on Jahnian-developed equipment, which included the horizontal bar, parallel

bars, pommel horse, rings, and vault. While the French team wished to include the Swedish (Ling) form of gymnastics, which required no equipment, Coubertin allowed the use of Jahnian gymnastics equipment in the competition in response to the German agreement to participate. This concession to the Germans shaped the form of elite gymnastics today.

Women were officially allowed to compete in Olympic competition at the 1900 Paris games. However, gymnastics was not added as an official women's sport until 1928. This addition of women's gymnastics coincided with the shift of the female body towards a more athletic form, as previously discussed (Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens, 2002; Pfister, 2002). Similarly, it coincided with the expansion of female specific non-elite gymnastics programmes across the West, where grace, fluidity, and balance were emphasised. These physical education practices of gymnastics and the reconstruction of the female form after World War I were direct influences on women's Olympic gymnastics at this time. Furthermore, they formed the beginning of distinct differences in men and women's elite gymnastics.

Due to the mass popularity of gymnastics across the West, the number of female competitors more than doubled from the addition of gymnastics at the Amsterdam Olympics (1928). This competition involved group calisthenics and did not include any of the male apparatus-based events. From this point onward, women's involvement and participation in competitive gymnastics continued to increase.

After World War II, another reconsideration of the female form emerged, encouraging more athletic and muscular bodies from the hands-on work done during the war. Alongside this reconsideration, gymnastics 'enjoyed a resurgent growth of popularity,' beginning in the 1960s (Gault, 1976: 7). This growth in women's elite gymnastics stimulated a widespread acceptance of the sport, the emergence of elite gymnastics clubs and programmes, and media coverage. Many accredit this surge to television coverage of the 1972 Olympics and the dominance of the Russian gymnastics team. Then in 1976, women's gymnastics became the 'star' sport at the Olympic Games after Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci and Soviet gymnast Nellie Kim received perfect scores of 10.0. From this point onward, elite gymnastics grew in popularity and practice. Currently, it is the most watched female sport in the Olympics and one of the top two practiced female sports in the world.

Contemporary Elite Gymnastics

According to Caine et al., 'the word 'gymnastics' is today an umbrella term, much the same as 'aquatics', in that it encompasses not only a group of competitive sports, but also many less formalised gymnastics activities in the fields of education, recreation and fitness' (2013, 3). Under this larger umbrella fall the competitive forms of gymnastics. Gymnastics, in the elite sport context, is defined as the performance of exercises, demonstrating physical strength, flexibility, power, agility, coordination, grace, balance, and control. Currently there are three different categories of gymnastics in Olympic competition: artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, and trampoline. Within these larger structures are sub-sections: team and individual men's artistic,

team and individual women's artistic, group and individual women's rhythmic, and men and women's individual trampoline¹¹. Aerobic and acrobatic gymnastics also exist but these, however, do not occur in Olympic competition.

Contemporary women's elite gymnastics is laid out in four competitive events: vault, uneven parallel bars, balance beam, and floor exercise. FIG describes the contemporary events as follows:

Vault: 1.25 meters high; it is placed perpendicularly to the approach, a springboard placed in front of it. The gymnasts perform two vaults, the best of which is scored.

Uneven Parallel Bars: consist of two wooden or fibreglass bars, each resting on vertical supports of different heights. The lower bar is 1.70 meters from the floor, while the upper bar is at 2.50 meters.

Balance Beam: a band 10 cm wide and 5 meters long, on which competitors perform daring exercises, while perched at 1.25 meters above the floor. Routines must include a variety of acrobatic elements, such as jumps and leaps, turns, step, combinations of walking and running steps, as well as wave and balance elements performed in a standing, sitting or lying position. The gymnast must use the entire length of the apparatus, while expressing simultaneously elegance, flexibility, confidence and self-control. The maximum required time for the beam exercise is 1 minute and 30 seconds.

Floor Exercise: is the gauge for skills and free expression. Accompanied by music, this performance is a blend of dance

¹¹ 'The term 'artistic gymnastics' emerged in the early 1800s to distinguish free-flowing styles from techniques used in military training' (Olympic.org, 2014).

movements and a wide range of tumbling and acrobatic elements. The gymnastics or acrobatic elements vary according to the tempo, the mood or the direction taken over the 12 square meter floor area. Individuality, originality, maturity, mastery, and artistic quality are the key ingredients for the highest score (2013).

As discussed, each of these events was developed from German gymnastics apparatuses and practice. The floor exercise is based on open space and free exercise for young men. The balance beam developed from GutsMuths' work with balancing on tree logs, built for developing balance in young men. The uneven parallel bars and vault were modelled on events developed by Jahn in the early nineteenth century and were amended from similar men's events. The performance at these events were shaped by female educators of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who attempted to maintain a 'femininity' in physical activity in order to accurately separate it from male sport. Indeed, Brenner et al. encouraged a grace and poise in movement, different from the aggressive male counterpart.

Contemporary gymnastics is described as a sport requiring 'strength, power, dexterity, grace, speed, and muscular endurance. Yet all this is manifested through the most "natural" type of movement, enhancing the creativity, autonomy and individualistic style of the performer' (Johnson in Gault, 1976: 11). Elite gymnasts are trained through similar principles of nineteenth century gymnastics: body control, body awareness, suppleness, strength, stamina, coordination and time, amplitude, and courage. While there are no set training programmes for the elite gymnast, most coaches will follow a 'holistic' training programme. A *holistic approach* in gymnastics training employs equal

emphasis on body and mental preparation, ensuring they are developed simultaneously and cohesively. Indeed, as Prestidge states, it is essential to 'improve and cultivate' the physical and the mental in the gymnast (1972: 15). The holistic training of the gymnast proved extremely important to the practical research of this project and will be discussed throughout Part 2 of this thesis.

Elite gymnasts are members of a specific 'club' gymnasium and instructed by an individual or set of coaches. The average gymnast first encounters gymnastics between the ages of three and seven. Gymnasts usually begin formal training around the age of seven and most often compete in elite competition between the ages of ten and twenty-two, retiring when entering early adulthood. Training will include endurance training, strength training, flexibility training, and mental preparation. It will also include an equal emphasis on each of the events, providing the gymnast with a deep understanding of each apparatus. The gymnast is trained and taught according to their individual ability. The practical chapters of this thesis will provide further detail of contemporary training techniques and structures of elite gymnasts, focusing on key elements of the development process.

Women's contemporary elite gymnastics has increased in development since its emergence in the late nineteenth century. First beginning in competition in 1928 at the Amsterdam Olympics, gymnastics was a team callisthenic event. Only in 1952 did individual apparatus appear and a formal structure for competition was set in place. Since then elite gymnastics has grown across the globe. Western contemporary gymnastics competition and training are

based on German gymnastics principles and practices. There is a direct lineage from GutsMuths' and Jahn's gymnastics models and apparatuses to contemporary gymnastics events, training, and competition. I have outlined the current structures in place for elite gymnastics in order to give both a historical, contextual understanding of the sport and also to provide the foundations of practice that directly inform the practical research of this project and which will be discussed in Part 2.

Conclusion

The historical portion of this chapter outlined a clear lineage from the inception of non-elite gymnastics in German culture in the late seventeenth century, to the implementation of similar non-elite gymnastics practices in the UK and onwards to the US. Gymnastics, in this context, was the promotion of a physical culture through athletic exercise and bodymind attunement. This grew exponentially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The elite sport section of this chapter then detailed the history of elite gymnastics within the Olympic Games, its rise as an elite sport and current training and competition models. It particularly looked at the training and competition of contemporary women's elite gymnastics, which will feed directly into the practical investigation of this thesis.

This chapter has identified certain lineages of gymnastics in the West and has attempted to accurately situate gymnastics as an embedded practice in modern Western culture. I argue that gymnastics is now an omnipresent practice that most individuals will have encountered at some point in their

personal history, knowingly or not. The most common encounter would most likely be through a physical education class or sporting activity. Therefore, the practice already exists within our bodies and our consciousness, providing a further rationale for this research project.

Principles and practices discovered in this chapter were curated towards the development of the practical portion of this project and will be discussed further throughout Part 2. Principles and practices included: body and mind integration through physical practice (Jahn); preparatory exercises to prepare the body and mind (GutsMuths, Jahn); the relationship between the instructor and the gymnast (Jahn); grace, fluidity, and quality of ease (Brenner, US); body awareness and kinaesthetic control (Ling, UK); specific preparatory and physical exercises (Jahn, Brenner, GutsMuths); development of the individual gymnast (Jahn); emphasis on a physical culture (GR, UK, US); holistic training of the elite gymnast, and current practices of elite gymnastics training and competition. Similarly, through examination of contemporary practices of elite gymnastics, I would argue the principles of bodymind attunement are still being practiced through holistic training approaches. I discuss the holistic approaches of training the elite gymnast at length in Chapters 3–5 of this thesis as it is a key framework in the development of the work with gymnastics-based practices.

The most important discovery of this chapter, for the purposes of this research, is the understanding of what ‘gymnastics-based practices’ ‘are’. While cultural notions of elite gymnastics suggest it is a mimetic practice, with

sole focus on the virtuosic mastery of outward physical movement, the original conceptions of gymnastics promote it as an activity of mind and body integration. I would argue that non-elite gymnastics was a key component in the rise of physical culture in the West. The insertion of non-elite gymnastics in schools and teachings gave rise to an interest in the body and physical health. Non-elite gymnastics emphasised a physical refinement and a bodymind relationship through physical exercise. While the main aim, particularly in Germany, was promotion of nationalism, the individual aim was to promote an attunement of the individual. Simultaneously, as a socio-cultural interest in the body and physical culture ascended and was practiced through non-elite gymnastics, the competitive form of elite gymnastics was on the rise. I argue that there was direct influence of non-elite gymnastics on elite gymnastics, and vice versa. The social and cultural needs and interests of the time naturally influenced the elite sport and the outward forms and trainings of the elite sport influenced the original practice and teachings of non-elite gymnastics. Therefore, there was a direct inclusion of bodymind practice in the training of elite gymnastics during this period.

Overall, the chapter revealed the importance of *gymnastics-based practices* within contemporary Western culture and sport, particularly over the last three centuries.

Chapter 2

‘Gymnastics-based Practices’ in Theatre Trainings and Performance

Introduction

Chapter 1 of this thesis addressed the question of ‘What are ‘gymnastics-based practices?’ In consideration that gymnastics is an embedded practice in the West, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth century, I will now shift forward into investigation of gymnastics within theatrical trainings and performance. Obtaining knowledge of previous practitioners who employed gymnastics in their work is essential, as the main objective of this research project is to practically investigate the use of *gymnastics-based practices* for performer training. Therefore, this chapter will investigate the work of François Delsarte, Rudolf Laban, and Jacques Lecoq. This chapter does not exhaust all the complex practices of gymnastics within theatre histories; however, it does curate specific histories which are key to this overall research project. Specifically, selected aspects of the histories discussed in this chapter were drawn on in the practical exploration of this project and will be addressed further in Part 2 of this thesis.

As part of my bibliographical research, I explored twentieth and twenty-first century actor training models, specifically psychophysical and body-based training to situate my own research within the existing research field. In the twentieth century the West witnessed a paradigm shift towards the development of actor training models. Beginning with Stanislavski, and his attempt at ‘rationalising the actors’ process,’ Western theatre saw an increase

in schools and studios exploring the work and training of the actor (Hodge, 2000: 2). While the field is wide, I narrowed my research to existing psychophysical and body-based actor trainings due to the nature of gymnastics-based practices as both a physical and bodymind practice. I also aimed to situate my research within the field of these trainings.

In terms of research on body-based trainings, I found Mark Evans *Movement Training for the Modern Actor* (2009) most useful for this thesis. Here, Evans discusses the rise of body culture and the interest in articulating the actor's body towards a crucial vector of communication in the twentieth century. He argues that 'the twentieth century has witnessed a resurrection of the body yet movement training for actors has long been marginalised within the history and critical analysis of twentieth century acting' (2009: 1). He suggests 'movement training for actors stands in interesting relation to other subjects such as sport, gymnastics [...] in so far as it represents a field of body practice which has been subject to very little in terms of either quantitative or qualitative research' (2009: 2). Evans' book outlines historically significant practitioners in the work of movement training for actors, identifies gaps, misconceptions and implications of movement training, and re-examines the effectiveness of and need for movement training. Evans' book was particularly useful for this thesis in understanding key lineages of body-based trainings in the West over the last two centuries, particularly within wider socio-cultural contexts. Similarly, his articles 'The influence of sport on Jacques Lecoq's actor training' (2006) and 'Playing with history: personal accounts of the

political and cultural self in actor training through movement' (2014) proved especially useful in both historical and practical research in this project.

Bodymind exploration has been a central component of actor training in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and has been key to this investigation, particularly regarding the interest in mind-body processes and strategies. The two books most useful for this thesis were Bella Merlin's *Beyond Stanislavsky: The Psychophysical Approach to Actor Training* (2001) and Phillip Zarrilli's *Psychophysical Acting: an intercultural approach after Stanislavski* (2009). In Merlin's book she describes psychophysical training as a direct lineage from Stanislavski. She states psychophysical training is 'one in which body and psyche, outer expression and inner sensation, are integrated and interdependent' (2001: 4). In his book, Zarrilli discusses his pedagogical training, which draws on Asian meditative and martial arts towards guiding the actor in the psychophysical process. My understanding and use of the term 'psychophysical' in this thesis is directly influenced by these existing definitions of the term. Throughout this thesis, where I refer to the term 'psychophysical', I am considering it through my own understanding of the concept as taught to me in training with Phillip Zarrilli, in which the actor is a continuously responsive vessel working towards a mind and body integration and optimally 'reaching an alternative state in which bodymind dualism is transcended' (Zarrilli 2009:85). Similarly, this thesis considers gymnastics as a psychophysical process through which the gymnast is trained through a holistic approach. These concepts are discussed in great detail throughout the thesis, particularly in Part 2.

Current texts on actor training often refer to gymnastics alongside acrobatics and refer to it as a necessary yet secondary practice. In *The Articulate Body* (1995), Anne Dennis describes tumbling and acrobatics (gymnastics) as 'an actor's skill' but argues that, 'acrobatic expertise is only as useful as is the actors ability to incorporate it into the needs of the theatre moment' (1995: 99). Dennis argues that if one employs the use of acrobatics to train the actor, there is the:

[N]eed for careful, clear teaching, especially at the moment when the actor begins to acquire the skills as his own. It is an intense training to be able to achieve the skill of a tumbling actor [...] Acrobatic skills are simply serving a very different purpose (1995: 102).

Dennis' book proved useful for this thesis in understanding the actors' needs versus the needs of the athlete. However this thesis will argue for the usefulness of gymnastics skills (tumbling) in addressing the actors' needs.

Similarly, Dymphna Callery suggests the 'technical mastery of acrobatic movements [...] can be useful because it will give the actors greater freedom to invent' (2001: 21). However, she argues 'acting does not require athletic training' (2001: 19). Callery warns that 'systematic athletic and gymnastics training regimes can be inappropriate.' Indeed, she asserts that 'they are designed to serve a preconceived muscular structure' whereas 'preparatory training for actors is about attaining a more neutral body' (2001: 20). While Callery's assumptions are accurate (training regimes can be inappropriate), she misinterprets the training of the gymnast. This thesis challenges these

notions and discusses the trained gymnast's body and how it can be useful for the actor.

In *Movement Training for the Modern Actor*, Evans notes the European physical education movement as an impetus to European interest in 'scientific analysis of the body' (2009: 16). Within this, he refers to the gymnastics tradition as 'primarily functional' with emphasis on physical fitness and the creation of national identities. While he accurately depicts the general movement of gymnastics in the late nineteenth century as a precursor for actor movement training, he fails to acknowledge the 'mind' component of the physical trainings. As argued in Chapter 1, the nineteenth century Western gymnastics tradition was partially based on ancient Greek ideologies, whereby body and mind were trained in cohesion — through gymnastics. While these resources point to the limitations of gymnastics within actor training, they have also been useful in tracing lineages of gymnastics within theatre trainings and pedagogies. For instance, Evans' text makes clear connections between Georges Hébert's 'natural gymnastics' to the work of Copeau and Lecoq. Similarly, Evans notes the increase of interest in 'natural movement' in Europe due to the Swedish gymnastics regime (2009). I discuss this in relation to the work of Genevieve Stebbins later in this chapter.

While the existing citations of actor training gave me clear insight into psychophysical work and body-based exploration, there are no existing texts suggesting gymnastics as the primary framework in actor training models. From the current bibliography I understand that a variety of different avenues

of physical trainings for the actor have been taken: martial arts (Zarrilli), acrobatics (Delacroze, Lecoq, Copeau), mask exploration (Lecoq), dance (Laban) and yogic practices (Stanislavski, Grotowski, Zarrilli). These existing texts helped me to establish my own methodologies and frameworks as well as situating my research within the field of performer training.

As mentioned above, there was a rise in attention to the actor's body in the twentieth century. Evans suggests practitioners became increasingly interested in the performer's body as a crucial vector of communication: 'The twentieth century has explored, and exploited, the body's cultural prominence with a rigour and enthusiasm particular to its time' (2009: 1). This surge in corporeal exploration invited actors to 'avoid the mood of Chekhovian theatre, which transforms acting into the passive experience of emotions and reduces the actors' creative intensity,' (Meyerhold in Carlson 1984: 318) and instead to become 'the creator and communicator [...] of accessing and developing his/her emotional, imaginative and physical instrument' (Arrighi 2003: 9). I argue that the rise in interest in the actor's body was in direct correlation with the rise in non-elite gymnastics in the West. As non-elite gymnastics became embedded throughout European and American cultures, practitioners began exploring this physicality within theatre trainings and practices. Within these trainings, practitioners sought to train the body and through training of the body to begin a deep connection between internal and external, body and mind – the psychophysical. Over the last two centuries, both physical and bodymind trainings have continued to be significant models in the West for contemporary actors. However, I would argue that this interest in body-based

and bodymind work actually took shape within the development of non-elite gymnastics in Germany. Indeed, Lecoq backs this assertion by stating that the rediscovery of the moving body occurred through ‘the resurgence of physical exercise [and] through the arrival of sport’ in the nineteenth century (2006: 35). This chapter will address the influence of *gymnastics-based practices* on three key practitioners of the nineteenth and twentieth century. I hope this will demonstrate how gymnastics has also become an embedded practice in certain Western theatre practices and trainings.

As mentioned above, this chapter focusses specifically on the work of François Delsarte, Rudolph Laban, and Jacques Lecoq. I will address these specific practitioners’ influences, training and performance methods, legacies and how forms of gymnastics fed into their practices and research. As Mark Evans asserts:

[T]he careers of practitioners such as Lecoq and Laban ...demonstrate the developing social and political need for a new kind of physical education that was less mechanical and martial than its predecessors and more grounded in a sense of the cultural significance of movement and its importance for personal development and artistic expression (2012: 165).

It should be stated that much has been written on each of these practitioners in previous publications and this thesis does not attempt to give a full historical account of each. Rather, it has selected certain practices and principles that are essential to this research project.

The practitioners discussed in this chapter were specifically selected for several reasons. As stated in Chapter 1, Delsarte's work and legacy was a direct influence on the physical culture and cultivation of bodymind practice in America. Laban's practice and work during the rise of physical culture 'blurr[ed] the lines between gymnastics and dance' (Evans, 2009: 32) and Lecoq's practice and teachings were directly influenced by his experience as an elite gymnast and his physical education. Secondly, the cohesion of mind and body was a key framework of each of these practitioner's trainings and practices. They each drew on elite and non-elite gymnastics principles as a framework to explore this cohesion. These practitioners offer an interesting view of the use of *gymnastics-based practices* in theatre trainings and practices. Through investigating these key histories, I aim to further cement the centrality of *gymnastics-based practices* in theatre trainings and practices, provide foundations for the practical investigations, and outline key principles that will be explored in Part 2. At the end of this chapter I will also give note to three examples of contemporary companies who are drawing on *gymnastics-based practices* in their practices and performances, in order to clearly demonstrate the ongoing use of *gymnastics-based practices* within theatre practice.

This project acknowledges that there are other Western practitioners and methodologies which could have been included in this thesis. These include: Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Feldenkrais, and the Alexander Technique. Although each of these somatic practices would have been interesting to look at, they did not meet what I considered to be the requirements for

investigation within this project. The three practitioners were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Explicit use of gymnastics principles and practices
2. Influences on and by elite and non-elite gymnastics
3. Bodymind work
4. Gracefulness and quality of ease in practice
5. The way in which ideas/principles were disseminated

These requirements were selected by careful consideration of what I deemed to be important practices and principles for this research from original non-elite and contemporary elite gymnastics practices. Most importantly, each of the practitioners selected for this project explicitly used non-elite or elite gymnastics in their practice.

While it is common to recognise the work of Grotowski as psychophysical based and incorporating gymnastics (Fowler 1985), Grotowski outwardly rejected the practice of gymnastics in training. While Grotowski did use acrobatics in his practice, Stephen Wangh reflects that there was something ‘that removed his work entirely from the world of gymnastics’ (2000: xix). Indeed, in an interview given with Richard Schechner, Grotowski noted that one of the four key principles in his exercises was ‘to avoid ‘beauty’ and ‘gymnastics’” (in Cody and Schneider, 2013: 241). In *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968) Grotowski argued that performers should ‘eliminate from every type of exercise any movement which is purely gymnastic’ (225). The word ‘gymnastics’ comes up in other texts surrounding his work (Schechner 2013); however, his direct rejection of the practice gives reason to exclude him from this study. Furthermore, the amount written on Grotowski’s physical work is

extensive (Grotowski 1968; Wangh 2000; Richards 2003; Schechner 2013) and this thesis was interested in exploring lesser practices within other key practitioners. For instance, while much is written on Laban's life and choreographic work (Maletic 1987; Preston-Dunlop 1998; Hodgson 2001; Bradley 2008), his influence on and by gymnastics, particularly his work with 'new gymnastics', has been under-explored.

Similarly, the same argument can be made regarding the other practitioners listed above. For Feldenkrais and Alexander, traditional gymnastics was mechanistic and soulless by nature and their work focussed on conscious control of the body through somatic practices (Evans, 2008: 59). Feldenkrais argued 'there is practically no connection between this method of reeducation of the frame and gymnastics' (2002: 155). He states that 'we do not achieve the full range of play of each articulation by repetition, muscle exercising, or increasing speed and force' (ibid). For Barba, pure gymnastics was part of a beginning 'program of set exercises that [they] taught to everybody and that everybody had to follow' (1972: 48). He claimed the exercises were of 'an acrobatic nature and very violent' and were called Bio-mechanics after Meyerhold (ibid). However, later Barba rejected gymnastics claiming it was a repetitious and ingenuous practice which lacks 'personal justification' and can cause injury (1972: 54). Barba argued gymnastics and acrobatics lacked imagination needed for the performer.

While it might be argued that these practitioners indeed used principles and practices of gymnastics, each of them outwardly rejected the practice. For this

reason alongside the other reasons listed above, I have chosen to exclude them from this study. However, it should be stated that while I have not directly written about these practices, I have considered them within the wider field of performer training. I understand Western performer training to be a field of interconnecting histories and shared practices and acknowledge that there are shared principles between their work and the work explored in this project.

François Delsarte

This section of the chapter will explore the practice and legacies of François Delsarte. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis, ‘harmonic gymnastics’ became a key practice in the physical culture movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly in the United States. Students of French music and acting teacher, François Delsarte, developed ‘harmonic gymnastics’. This portion of the chapter is specifically interested in addressing ‘harmonic gymnastics’ through an exploration of his principles and practices. ‘Harmonic gymnastics’ and Delsartean practices are key examples of non-elite gymnastics practices within theatre trainings and important for this specific research project.

Before discussing Delsarte’s students and ‘harmonic gymnastics’ at length, it is important to acknowledge the foundations on which they were based. François Delsarte, although noted as one of the central figures in the lineage of American modern dance and physical education, is often overlooked as a crucial practitioner and theorist in contemporary actor/acting training.

Delsartism is frequently 'understood as either a short-lived, anti-modern histrionic acting style or an affected regimen of self-improvement and physical culture, and is virtually absent from discussions of modernism' (Preston, 2009: xx). However, his pedagogies of bodymind practices were 'an attempt to approach acting and other forms of human expression from a more consistent vantage than was usually found in the traditional repertory and conservatory styles of teaching in his period' (Clarke, 1982: 1). Therefore, investigation into his principles and practices are extremely useful for this research project.

Beginning with 'dissatisfaction with what he considered artificial and harmful in the singing and acting instruction he had received at the Paris Conservatory', Delsarte went in search of a new methodology for training musicians and actors attempting to understand the meaning of human movement (Ruyter, 1996: 62). In hoping to rid future students of the same fate, Delsarte dedicated his life and work to addressing and understanding human expression and 'the great general laws and principles of art' (Shawn, 1954: 15). After his death, he was revered by his students in France and America, who saw him as the first and only practitioner of the time to understand the true meaning of artistic-human-expression, and 'he alone understood what art is, and he formulated its synthesis' (in Shawn, 1954: 19). This contrasts with his place in current models of practice, where he is virtually unknown and almost certainly inadequately recognised for his influences.

Delsarte was specifically interested in how 'real people do move and speak, in every possible emotional situation' (Shawn, 1954: 16). He began to

understand movement as an expressive medium where 'each spiritual function responds a function of the body. To each grand function of the body corresponds a spiritual act' (Ruyter, 1996: 63). In other words, his discoveries were based in bodymind expression, or psychophysical engagement. Delsarte believed 'every inner experience is expressed through a physical action' (ibid). This idea of the bodymind connection in daily human existence led Delsarte towards the creation of his methodologies. Delsarte had a direct interest in the relationship between what was tangible and intangible and expressed this through his Law of Correspondence whereby:

[A]ny thought, intention, psychological state, character trait, emotion - or 'spiritual function' — will have a bodily manifestation; and conversely, gesture, facial expression, voice, carriage, physical mannerism, bodily rhythm, breathing — or any 'function of the body' - cannot help but reflect or express some kind of meaning (Ruyter, 1996: 63,64).

He was directly concerned with the body's ability to express the thoughts and emotions of its mental counterpart and to uncover the gestural meanings of these transactions. His ideas were often dismissed as a static code for gesture; however, he was developing a psychophysical language that could be individualised by each performer.

The imagination of the individual performer played a significant part in Delsarte's theories of connectivity to physical motion. According to Delsarte, the human imagination was:

[T]he rule and divine power [which] is never governed. The rest of man is but an instrument on which that plays, a canvas on which that paints. [...] While work must be done, the instrument perfected, art is

only valuable as it expresses goodness and greatness in the soul (Stebbins, 1902: 160).

Delsarte sought to move away from imitation and towards a body and mind that work cohesively together, 'boundless in power' (Ruskin in Stebbins, 1902: 160). Delsarte's theories and practices were continued and developed through his students. The next portion of this chapter will discuss important figures in the Delsartean legacy and their development of 'harmonic gymnastics' through Delsarte's original principles.

Steele MacKaye

Of his students, American theatre practitioner Steele MacKaye is the most well-known proponent and disseminator of Delsarte's work. MacKaye began working with Delsarte in 1868 in Paris after he became frustrated with formalist theatre trainings and performance in the United States. Steele became Delsarte's greatest pupil and the disseminator of his ideologies. MacKaye 'accepted Delsarte's exalted view of theatre, his mystical philosophy and his natural and infallible laws of human expression, which emphasised gesture and stance' (Curry, 1966: 210). MacKaye was most likely a student of the German gymnastics system in the US, as it was, at that point, implemented into American culture. After attaining what he believed to be a full understanding of Delsarte's practices, Steele developed new ideas for exercises and structures, which combined physical exercise with Delsarte's principles of human expression. These exercises were under the 'system of gymnastics designed to prepare the student physically' in order for them to 'use Delsarte's laws of gesture' most optimally (Shawn, 1954: 18). MacKaye,

already being a well-known actor and director in America, brought the Delsarte-based work to the US in 1871 and almost immediately gained a large following. According to Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter:

There were three phases of American Delsartism. The first began in the early 1870s and was closely associated with the professional training of speakers and actors. The second phase, coming to the fore in the 1880s, emphasised physical culture for the general public. It became particularly popular among women. In the third phase, which began in the late 1880s and was the broadest of all, Delsartean aesthetic theory was elaborated and applied to all aspects of life (in Pfister, 2013: 129).

These phases of American Delsartism began through the dissemination of Delsarte's work by MacKaye. The MacKaye-coined term 'harmonic gymnastics' became widespread as interest in physical and emotional expression increased. MacKaye's courses were based on development of flexibility and pliability of the human body through relaxation exercises as a way to release tension in the body. He focussed on the quality of ease in movement, grace in motion, necessity for sufficient muscle tone, and poise or equilibrium and power -- all through 'harmonic gymnastics': a psychological training of the human body. His courses were simultaneous to the non-elite gymnastics movement in America. Indeed, 'harmonic gymnastics' played a significant role in the 'application of these [Delsartean] principles into physical culture' (Kirby, 1972: 55).

Within MacKaye's 'harmonic gymnastics' there are thirty-five lessons, each of which focusses on developing the physicality of the body in order to access the internal. In lessons 1-3, the actor is guided in balancing and centring the

body. MacKaye refers to this as 'harmonic poise'. During these first lessons MacKaye focussed on an understanding of the body through physiological and habitual consideration. Most significantly, in the first three lessons, 'MacKaye also introduces [...] decomposing and recomposing exercises. The first removes habitual tendency; the second expands physical possibility in expression' (Hébert, 1997: 106). In the decomposing exercises, the student is guided towards flexibility and ease in physical expression, while the recomposing exercises promoted strength and fitness. Both of these exercises started and ended in the 'harmonic poise' position, or neutral. For MacKaye, like other non-elite gymnastics teachers, gymnastics was the pathway towards an attuned bodymind. However, where Steele expands the boundaries of non-elite gymnastics is through expressivity of action. This expressivity is directly influenced by his work with Delsarte on human gesture. In MacKaye's 'harmonic gymnastics', for example, he endeavoured to 'have the student minimise habit to maximise physical potential in the manifest of expression' (Hébert 1997: 106). Specifically, MacKaye worked with particular areas of the body to remove physical hindrance and habitual movements in order to find the 'natural' expressive movements of the body. For instance, in lessons 5-14 he works with hands, eyes, feet, torso, head and limbs to find the expressivity of each body part in relation to nature. As the lessons continue, MacKaye guided the actors towards more acute attunements such as the upper eyelids, lower eyelids, and eyebrows (Lessons 24 and 25). For MacKaye, once the actor had a deep understanding of their own body and physical control, the remainder of the expression, which could, apparently, project to the rear of the auditorium, would both follow and appear natural

(ibid). This directly relates to contemporary elite gymnastics where gymnasts are guided towards a deep understanding and control over their own body and mind. During the practical portion of this research project, I drew directly on MacKaye's ideas of 'natural' human gesture explored through deep understanding of one's own physical possibilities. Similarly, I drew on his ideas of fluidity, quality of ease, economy of movement, and 'harmonic poise' or balance. These will be discussed throughout Part 2 of this thesis.

After his death, MacKaye's students continued to further develop his work. In particular, the work of Genevieve Stebbins is an important history to acknowledge in this thesis. Stebbins 'fully elaborated and carried out to the full perfection' of Steele's work on 'harmonic gymnastics' (Stebbins, 1892: 58).

Genevieve Stebbins

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, Genevieve Stebbins was a second-generation Delsarte student and a key figure in the non-elite gymnastics and physical education movement in the United States. Stebbins studied under MacKaye and was a large influence on the spread of Delsartism in America and 'has been one of the most important in the context of dance history' (Ruyter, 1988: 381). Her books *Delsarte System of Expression* (1902) and *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892) are perhaps the most detailed writings we have on the ideas and teachings of Delsarte, Steele, and Stebbins during this time. Stebbins work is particularly important to look at as she furthered the practice of 'harmonic gymnastics', which is central to the practical portion of this thesis. I discuss her work in relation to specific

exercises developed in Part 2 of this thesis, particularly her work with 'dynamic breathing' and 'artistic statue posing'.

Where Stebbins shifts away from MacKaye is through her interest in Ling gymnastics and yogic practices. Stebbins, after studying under MacKaye, moved on to develop her own work as a teacher of Delsarte. She began expanding his ideas and practices and transforming the work into her own unique style, drawing on Ling gymnastics and yoga practices. According to Jody Weber, 'Stebbins' interest in the Ling system had a strong influence on her work in developing the gymnastics component of Delsartism' (2009: 42). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Ling gymnastics used no apparatus and was focussed on 'all-around educational and training methods, strict self-discipline, good posture, and moral and aesthetic development' (Quennerstedt and Ohman, 2008: 295). Stebbins drew on Ling's idea of physical exercise towards the attunement of the mind and body, which she believed to be mostly disregarded by other practitioners. She drew on Ling's belief that 'harmonious development of the body worked in conjunction with harmonious development of the psyche' (Weber, 2009: 43). Stebbins coined the term 'dynamic breathing', which aided the artist in increasing 'physical, mental and magnetic power' (Wilbor in Stebbins, 1902: 475). 'Sargent gymnastics', developed by Dudley Sargent, also influenced Stebbins. Sargent gymnastics was a 'physical training based on material he learned as a professional circus performer' (ibid).

Stebbins 'harmonic gymnastics' was a 'combination of callisthenic movement, deep respiration exercises, relaxation, and creative mental imagery' (Singleton, 2010: 146). She developed a 'system for the development of body, brain, and soul', which drew equal influence from Ling gymnastics, Delsarte's System of Expression and MacKaye's 'harmonic gymnastics' (ibid). Stebbins was particularly interested in these three as they were 'properly combined and graded into systematic, progressive exercises, constitut[ing] a perfect system of gymnastics [with] all the elements essential to evolved beautification of form, graceful motion, and artistic presentation' (in Ruyter, 1988: 387).

As Ruyter argues, 'Stebbins' own contributions to the system (Delsarte) were substantial' (1988: 382). Stebbins developed several exercises for the actor including 'dynamic breathing' exercises, 'energising' techniques and 'artistic statue posing'. Artistic statue posing, for instance, is based on Greek antiquity sculptures, which Stebbins believed to hold 'the idea of absolute calm and repose of an immortal soul, possessing infinite capacity for expression' (in Foster, 2004: 80). Here Stebbins explored 'harmonic poise' and Delsarte's Law of Correspondence, which investigated the oppositions of the internal and external. Stebbins believed that Greek statues inherently held this opposition and were the perfect lens to access embodiment. In 'artistic statue posing' the doer makes himself 'the living image of the statue' and is then invited to transition between movement and stillness, embodying the 'essence' of the statue at all times (Stebbins, 1887: 459).

It is important to note that Stebbins considered her own developed form of 'harmonic gymnastics' to be a psychophysical process for the performer. She argues that although she draws on Ling and Delsarte, neither system is 'perfect because they lack that vital principle which expands the mental powers of the brain and stimulates the soul' (1892: 59). According to Stebbins, psychophysicality is the perfect union of 'harmonic gymnastics', 'dynamic breathing' and 'mental imagery' (ibid).

Stebbins belief in the Delsarte system never faltered but rather expanded what she believed to be his true intentions for harmony of expression. Stebbins classes focussed on bodily harmony, rhythm, movement, and corporeality. Her emergence at this time was central in the expansion of Delsarte ideologies and practices in American culture.

The work that MacKaye, Stebbins, and others produced and propagated firmly rooted itself in the building of a bodymind through work in non-elite gymnastics exercises and human expression. They believed that Delsarte was able to understand human expression on an entirely new level 'starting by breaking down the barriers that inherited instincts and fashionable cultivation had erected between the true self and its unworthy representative' (Wibor in Stebbins, 1902: 474). Currently, Delsarte is rarely mentioned as an influence of more popularised twentieth century practitioners. However, several practitioners specifically note his work as an influence. For example, in an interview with Jerzy Grotowski he states that 'we began work with the Delsarte system. I was very interested in Delsarte's thesis that there are

introverted and extroverted reactions in human contact.’ Indeed, he states he studied the less ‘stereotyped’ elements of Delsarte’s work in order to realise the goal of his own programme (Schechner et al., 1968). Similarly, we can also see examples in Etienne Decroux, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn’s work (Leabhart, 2007; Thomas, 2003; Shawn, 1982). Delsarte, MacKaye and Stebbins’ investigations were key parts of theatre practices and physical culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. ‘Harmonic gymnastics’ was developed concurrently with the rise of physical education and culture in the West. Americans in particular were largely attracted to Delsartism practices as it promoted physical culture combined with artistic expression.

As this section noted, non-elite gymnastics heavily influenced and was a key component of Delsartean principles and practices. As previously mentioned, in Part 2 of this thesis, I draw specifically on principles and practices from Delsarte, MacKaye, and Stebbins towards development of *gymnastics-based practices* for performers. Particularly, I draw on ‘harmonic poise’ (Chapter 3) ‘dynamic breathing’ (Chapters 3-5), and ‘statue posing’ (Chapters 4 and 5) throughout the three projects. I discuss these instances in more detail in the subsequent chapters.

Rudolph Laban

This next section will introduce the work of choreographer and director Rudolph Laban, a key practitioner of the twentieth century. Laban is particularly important to this study as he uses non-elite gymnastics within his

practice, deriving directly from his personal experience with non-elite gymnastics. Similarly, his theories of the bodymind connection are in direct cohesion with those principles of gymnastics.

However, before exploring Laban's practices and principles, the next section of this chapter will look directly at important influences on Laban. I argue Laban's principles and practices were clearly influenced by the rise of physical culture through non-elite gymnastics in Europe. I also argue that his practices drew on his experiences within German gymnastics systems.

Born in 1879 in Bratislava, Laban was brought up at the start of the physical culture movement in Western Europe. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the German gymnastics system spread throughout Europe and was the dominant physical education for young men during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Therefore, it is more than likely that Laban was educated in non-elite gymnastics. Evelyn Dorr (2007) confirms this by stating Laban engaged in gymnastics classes during his time in Paris and Vienna.

Throughout his childhood his mother and father gave Laban convoluted messages of support for his choice to be an artist. Laban's father, an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, wanted him to join the military while his mother encouraged his active imagination and wanderlust. As Laban entered adulthood he became more interested in human behaviour and by the 1890s 'along with many writers and things in Budapest, he was caught between the old world of traditions and stories, which he understood as powerful and

compelling, and the emerging questioning of the direction of human culture’ (Bradley, 2009: 5).

In 1899, Laban entered the military, where he received German gymnastics training in ‘riding, social dancing, military manoeuvres, fencing, French, German and “nationalist dogma”’ (Bradley, 2009: 5). As mentioned in Chapter 1, certain strands of non-elite gymnastics were used as military training. In this instance, non-elite gymnastics was used as ‘physical training in Prussia for the German people. [...] They discipline[d] their children to be stronger so they [could] defend their country’ (Lecoq, 2006: 35-36). According to Bradley, although he only stayed in the military for a year and a half, Laban was fascinated by the exercises and patterns of movement in his training. These informed much of Laban’s movement interests and skills (2009: 5).

Furthermore, according to Lilian Karina and Marion Kant, ‘the period before the arrival of Laban on the scene from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1920s was marked by all sorts of efforts to renew dance and the art of movement [...] gymnastics and pedagogy’. Alongside this was, ‘the growing interest in the promotion of the body and body culture’ (2003: 11). By the time Laban began work in the 1920s German gymnastics had been wholly renewed and was the main source of physical education throughout Europe.

For idealists like Laban and Delsarte, who revered the new social movement reform, ‘the Darwinian revolution of 1859, with its theory of a unified developmental history of man and nature, offered [them] a scientific

justification for their new ideology' (Dorr, 2003: 2). When Laban started work in the theatre as a young adult he developed an aversion to conventional theatre stating that 'the greatest problem was unquestionably, the performers' (Laban, 1975: 171). This rejection of traditional theatrical dramaturgies urged him towards dance practices. He stated that dance was attractive to him because it 'gave me the opportunity if even compelled me to disregard the non-essentials of external influences on a person. Thus, I could put the chief emphasis on representing the ethical qualities of his inner disposition' (ibid). Indeed, Laban's life work became about the codifiers of human expression through bodily movement.

Laban began his practice through the influence of the factors discussed in the above section, primarily: physical education, military training, rejection of formalist practices, and the renewal of physical culture. With this understanding, the next portion of this chapter will discuss key practices and principles of Laban's work, which are essential to this research project.

Laban's career and research began in 1910 with his move to Munich. There, Laban found a network of artists and theorists more accessible than in his previous post in Paris. Between 1913 and 1915, in collaboration with dancer Mary Wigman, Laban began developing two approaches to choreography: his global approach to movement and his communal, improvisational and participatory style of the Movement Choir. During this process, he was particularly interested in exploring the adult's need to 'learn, use, see and understand their bodies' (Hodgson, 2001: 125).

However, Laban's work and exploration thrived in the 1920s, particularly beginning with his opening of a movement school for adults, *Zentralschule*, in Hamburg that explored 'expanding and condensing, individual and group consciousness, breath and story, space and expressivity' (Bradley, 2009: 18).¹² The school allowed Laban to establish his 'clear vision, revolutionary spirit and inner strength' in his work on the renewal of dance and human expression (Ulmann in Laban, 1975: preface). During this time he came to realise he needed to be aware of the other forms of movement, but could only work in a way that would serve him and his visions (Laban, 1975: 165). Laban believed that dance was an art that could not 'be caught and canned by a machine,' that dancing 'needed the whole, living person and plenty of space into which he can project his happiness or sadness' (Laban, 1975: 3).

'New Gymnastics'

Laban's approach to movement was deeply concerned with the analysis of each movement and he was specifically interested in physical training towards cohesion of the body and mind. Laban discusses 'the benefits that can accrue from gymnastics — physically, spiritually and morally' (Hodgson, 2001: 126). However, in Laban's understanding:

The new gymnastics is not to be confused with apparatus skill or other arts. It is neither a game, nor an art. It is concerned with freedom of expression; it is dance with an educational purpose. The expressive is as important as the exercise aspect (Hodgson, 2001: 123).

¹² Translation for *Zhentralschule*: The Central School

According to Laban, his form of gymnastics should give the performer, 'physical freedom and lead to harmonious development of the whole person; freeing the body leads to enriching of the mind and spirit' (Hodgson, 2001: 124). Similarly, Laban had strong connections to the gymnastics movement in Europe. In 1925, Laban had taken on the patronage of *Deutsche Gymnastikbund* with practitioner Elsa Gindler.¹³ Laban immersed himself in the gymnastics movement, producing two books on the education and cultural value of gymnastics training, *Des Kindes Gymnastik und Tanz* (1926) and *Gymnastik und Tanz* (1926). In both of these, Laban 'advocated the cultural-educational ideals of the gymnastics movement' (ibid). While Laban saw the benefits of gymnastics, his work specifically moved beyond it towards the development of an 'infinite variety of artistic possibilities' (Laban, 1926: 122). Within his practice, Laban drew on basic gymnastics skills to explore movement processes. For instance, as I discuss below, several gymnastics elements became key movements in Laban's notation system of human movement.

Laban, like Delsarte, was interested in the 'deeper human story buried within the movement' and how gestural movement could be both 'universal communications of messages as well as specific to identity, role, and culture' (Bradley, 2009: 70). However, while Delsarte explored this through voice and actor training, Laban investigated these notions through dance and movement. Laban, like Delsarte, was directly concerned with human

¹³ While not discussed in this thesis, Gindler was important to the gymnastics movement. Her bodywork and somatic practices were directly derived from the work of Delsarte and his students.

expression through movement. Laban created a codified pedagogy through his research and teachings entitled Kinetography. Kinetography, as Laban envisaged it, was a notation system which 'would cover every articulation of the human physique and that would also indicate the expressive nature of these movements' (Newlove and Dalby, 2004: 60). Kinetography in its most simplistic form was based on four principles: weight, time, space, and flow. The principles are each, according to Laban, 'bipolar. Weight ranges from firm to light; Time ranges from sudden to sustained; space varies from direct to flexible; and flow varies from free to bound' (Knapp and Snoeyenbos, 1979: 21). According to Laban, from exploration of the body in space, they should build the expressive alphabet of the performer. Therefore, kinetography aimed to develop this physical alphabet or vocabulary for the dancer through 1,002 physical exercises. The exercises are split into different sections based on the principles of movement. Several of the exercises found in the *Dictionary of Kinetography Laban* are taken directly from gymnastics, for instance: the 'handstand', 'somersaulting', and 'cartwheeling' (Knust, 1979). Similarly, included are walking, jumping, sprinting, and leaping, each taken directly from Jahnian gymnastics. According to Laban, each of these movements provides a key understanding of the body for the dancer. Through these actions, Laban aimed to develop a 'kinesthesia' or kinaesthetic awareness in the performer, which is 'foundational to all sensory experience and to consciousness itself' (Lindley and McMahon, 2008: 104). This work of Laban was particularly useful to the practical portion of this project. I specifically drew on this in relation to understanding and facilitating the basic elements of elite gymnastics and also

towards the development of a kinaesthetic awareness in the performer. I discuss these experiences in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

There are clear connections between Laban's 'new gymnastics' and 'harmonic gymnastics'. Like MacKaye and Stebbins, Laban was concerned with balance, equilibrium, and movement from repose. Indeed, as Vera Maletic states, we can trace 'analogies between Laban's principles or Law of Harmony and Delsarte's laws and orders of movement' (1987: 73). Furthermore, Laban directly accredits Delsarte's work as 'ingenious new concepts of the laws of natural movement' (1928: 155). For Laban, as in 'harmonic gymnastics', all movement occurs through a state of equilibrium. According to Laban, 'from the weight level and directional viewpoint, all movements can be understood' (1956: 27). Here, Laban is suggesting that by beginning with balance, unlimited physical expressions of the body can be reached. I explore this in relation to the practical projects and 'harmonic poise' in Part 2 of this thesis.

Laban's work in dance and movement training spread widely across Europe and America. However, Laban's wider influence also extended to physical education. Laban's arrival in England in the 1930s was particularly influential for British physical education systems: 'Women physical educationists were the first to recognise the importance and value of Laban's concept of human movement in which the motion factors of Time, Weight, Space, and Flow were conceived as the common denominators' (Holbrook, 1973: 4). Lisa Ullmann 'who pioneered Laban's work in dance in education', and Ruth Morrison

opened the field of movement training through dance and gymnastics education in schools. Their approach to 'modern educational gymnastics' training demanded a reappraisal of original concepts in physical education. This approach was fully recognised by the Ministry of Education in 1952. According to Mark Evans, 'during the mid-century, as a result of the increasing interest in 'natural', movement, the strict Swedish gymnastics regime popular in the early decades gave way to a more expressive approach to movement, based largely on the teachings of Rudolph Laban' (2009: 32). Therefore, Laban was not only influenced *by* non-elite gymnastics systems but also had a large influence *on* non-elite gymnastics systems in the twentieth century, making him an invaluable resource for this study. Laban's 'systematised but expressive approach to physical training [was] the intersection between physical education and dance/theatre performance training' (Evans, 2009: 33). As previously stated, I draw on key principles and practices from Laban's work in the practical portion of this thesis, particularly his ideas of harmonic movement, equilibrium and balance, kinaesthetic energies, and movement forms. I discuss these in more detail in Chapters 3-5.

Jacques Lecoq

The final practitioner explored in this study is Jacques Lecoq. Lecoq was the only theatre practitioner who also trained as an elite gymnast. While others were influenced by non-elite gymnastics, Lecoq is the only practitioner to openly acknowledge his elite gymnastics training as being of influence on his practice and training (Lecoq, 2001). Therefore, the next section of this

chapter will focus on the specific influences gymnastics training had on the work and practices of Lecoq.

Like Laban and Delsarte, Lecoq was fascinated in the inner emotive state of the actor expressed through outward gesture. However, where Lecoq separates himself from Delsarte and Laban is his 'life-long fascination with sport as a perspective on the human body in movement and a commitment to investigating and encouraging the athleticism, agility, and physical awareness of the creative actor' (Evans, 2012: 164). Beginning as an elite gymnast himself at the age of seventeen, Lecoq began exploring the ideas of human movement through his training in parallel and horizontal bars at *En Avant*. Lecoq says of elite gymnastics: 'the movement of the body through space demanded by gymnastics exercise is of purely abstract order. In doing these physical movements I discovered extraordinary sensations which could be carried over into everyday life' (Lecoq, 2009: 3). This first-hand knowledge Lecoq held of gymnastics training and practices and his physical education background highly influenced his work. Lecoq found a way to bridge sport and theatre trainings into a cohesive methodology for performers, proving him an important case for this research project.

After training as a gymnast, Lecoq attended college at Bagatelle in the Parisian suburbs for physical education. During his time at college, his close friend and French policy leader on physical education, Jean-Marie Conty, introduced him to the connections of sport and theatre. Lecoq immediately took an active role in the interest of human movement and 'physical poetry'.

Conty appointed Lecoq as the physical educator of his school, *L'éducation par le jeu Dramatique*. According to Lecoq, the transition between sport and theatre was clear. He reflects that through his training as an athlete he had already inherited a fundamental gestural language. And for him, 'sports, movement and theatre were already closely related' (2000: 4).

Through a series of friendships and relationships, Lecoq began working as an actor with Gabriel Cousin in 1945. When their company performed at Grenoble, 'Jean Daste came to see [them] and invested several of 'them' to join the company he was putting together called *Les Comédiens de Grenoble*' (ibid). Through Daste, Lecoq became interested in the work of Jacques Copeau, who was a major influence on Daste's work. Lecoq became heavily influenced by the work of Copeau through their shared interest in training the actor through physical preparation. Lecoq and Copeau also shared similar notions on the articulate body of the actor and work with the mask, *commedia dell'arte* and Greek tragedy. Lecoq referenced Jacques Copeau as a large influencer of his work and pedagogy.

'Natural Gymnastics'

Similar to Copeau, Lecoq drew on Georges Hébert's method of 'natural gymnastics'. Hébert was a French physical education teacher in the early twentieth century who 'revolutionised physical education' in France (Murray, 2003: 28). Hébert's 'natural gymnastics' was influenced directly by his time spent travelling in the navy, Rousseau's notions of physical development, Jahnian gymnastics training, and Greco-Roman representations of the human

body. Hébert's method encouraged a physical and moral synthesis through training of the body: specifically, the development of 'strength and flexibility for sporting' (Rudlin in Hodge, 2000: 68). Indeed, Lecoq drew directly on Hébert's work in developing his movement analysis. Specifically, Hébert's 'natural method, analyses movement under eleven categories: pulling, pushing, climbing, walking, running, jumping, lifting, carrying, attacking, defending, and swimming' (Lecoq, 2000: 71). He argued that feelings, states, and passions are expressed through gestures, attitudes and movements similar to those of physical actions (ibid). Through a consideration of 'natural gymnastics' and 'physical education for both body and mind', Lecoq was influenced towards development of his movement analysis, in particular his three principles of bodily movement: undulation, inverse undulation, and eclosion (Lecoq, 2006: 37). For Lecoq, these three movements are the basis for all human movement pathways. For instance, 'undulation is the human body's first movement, the one underlying all locomotion' (2000: 73). Undulating movement is the forward motion the body makes, 'the driving force behind all physical effort manifest in the human body' (ibid). Lecoq was able to draw this conclusion through use of 'natural gymnastics' pushing and pulling. I draw specifically on principles of movement derived from Lecoq's influence in conjunction with kinaesthetic energy and in relation to Delsarte and Laban's theories of natural human movement in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

Lecoq's interest in natural human movements shows similarity to the work of both Delsarte and Laban. All three practitioners were deeply interested in movement that stemmed from a place of balance, equilibrium, and neutrality.

Similarly, each developed a set of 'natural' movements of the human body which connected to internal expression. As previously mentioned, for Delsarte these were eccentric, concentric, and neutral. For Laban, his movements were based on the principles of space, time, weight, and flow. The physical movement of the body to access the internal is a key principle in *gymnastics-based practices* and proved extremely useful in the practical portion of this project.

Gymnastics and Physical Preparation

According to Evans, Lecoq's history in sport training, particularly his training as a gymnast, shaped his teaching and pedagogy at the school (2012). For instance, in the first twenty years, when Lecoq's school was shifting between gymnasiums and other temporary venues, Lecoq was forming his ideas and methodologies. During this time, Lecoq 'tried to create theatre using the rules of sport. Two teams performed around the same theme — jealousy, for example within the parameters of a basketball court' (Lecoq, 1987: 118). The school gave Lecoq an opportunity to understand theatre and play through the lens of his sport history. This allowed Lecoq to further explore the accessing of human emotion through gesture and movement of the most dramatic form.

In his writings, Lecoq often refers to gymnastics in similar contexts as his contemporaries and predecessors: as 'dramatic gymnastics' or 'acrobatics'. According to Lecoq, the beginning physical preparation of the actor is partially through 'dramatic gymnastics' in which 'every gesture, every attitude, every movement is justified' (2000: 70). During the training of 'dramatic gymnastics'

the actor is educated in breath control and vocal dimension. Lecoq rejected many of the actor training models that existed in his period, specifically ones who used relaxation methods, codes of classical dance or gesture, exercises in group dynamics, and pure athletic exercises. He thought all of these concepts were damaging to the actor's growth, development and deep understanding of their body. Simultaneously, while Lecoq used simple human gesture to express internal emotion or feeling, he pushed the boundary of the human form through 'dramatic acrobatics'. In dramatic acrobatics, Lecoq explores rolls, flips and somersaults while showing equal focus on 'suppleness, strength, balance (hand-stands, head-stands, shoulder-stands) on lightness (all the different jumps)' (2000: 73). However, in each of these movements, Lecoq forces a dramatic justification. In his work with gymnastics, Lecoq was not interested in the teaching of overt acrobatic movement, for its virtuosity. He was interested in the 'play' of the actor and how the use of 'dramatic acrobatics' could aid this play. 'By means of acrobatic performance, the actor reaches the limits of dramatic expression. That is why we pursue dramatic acrobatics throughout the two years' (ibid). Lecoq found the acrobatics particularly useful in mime and bufón performance. The use of dramatic acrobatics proved useful in the practical exploration of this project, and will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

As this section has addressed, Lecoq's work and practiced was influenced by both non-elite gymnastics and his training in elite gymnastics. His continued work towards development of the body through physical training, harmony of the body and mind through human action and gesture, and the expressive

body through play were all informed by these two lineages of Lecoq's past. In Part 2 of this thesis, I will specifically draw on Lecoq's theories of natural movement of the human body and his work with 'dramatic acrobatics' towards bridging *gymnastics-based practices* with the performer's needs.

Understanding key practices and principles of Delsarte, Laban, and Lecoq has proved essential for this research project. As displayed, forms of gymnastics that emerged in Europe in the late eighteenth century influenced each of these practitioner's principles and practices. *Gymnastics-based practices* are a central, yet, often under-acknowledged component in their work. As mentioned above, I draw on selected practices and principles of these practitioners as supplementary frameworks in the practical portion of this thesis.

As a further extension of this chapter, the next section will give note to contemporary performances and practices drawing on non-elite gymnastics and elite gymnastics to further demonstrate the integration of the sport into theatre practices, the gap that exists in contemporary practice, and the space for applying *gymnastics-based practices* towards performer training.

Contemporary Practices and Performance

Currently, while Delsartean training is virtually non-existent, both Laban and Lecoq schools are still very much present and highly influential as performer

training models in the West.¹⁴ Alongside these larger training models and schools, contemporary performance exists that draws on gymnastics as a topic of inquiry, a key structure, and a performance tool. In this section, I will specifically look at UK-based companies Bodies in Flight and Rhum and Clay, and US-based company, Raymond and the Strength Crew Project. It should be noted that the following are not extensive case studies, but rather short demonstrations of current work drawing on or using gymnastics.

Bodies in Flight

The UK-based company Bodies in Flight has been making performance for the past twenty-three years under the artistic direction of Sarah Giddens and Simon Jones. In their most recent production, *Gymnast*, the company continues their investigation of 'being caught between our physical and psychological selves,' through devised performance (Jones, 2013). In this performance the company sought to explore their 'fascination with the athlete's drive to physical excellence, their supreme attention to bodily task' and the 'continuing power of the Olympian ideal of athlete as interface between human and superhuman, the mortal and the divine' (Bodies in Flight, 2013). As I describe in detail below, *Gymnast* is a site-specific performance that intersects live choral music and gymnastics practice into an hour-long piece.

¹⁴ During this research I was only able to find two existing schools in the West who use Delsartean gymnastics or the Delsartean System – Franck Waille (Atelier Delsarte, France) and Joe Williams (The Delsarte Project, USA)

I had the opportunity to witness this particular performance twice: once in February 2012 at Bristol Old Vic Theatre as a part of Bristol Ferment and further developed in May 2013 at the City of Bristol Gymnastics Centre. For the purposes of this research, I will specifically discuss the site-specific performance of *Gymnast*.

When entering the gymnasium, the audience was guided towards the spectator seating along the right-hand wall of the gym. Once the audience was seated, a choral choir entered the space and began to sing an a cappella tune conducted by female conductor and composer, Jen Bell. As the choir sang, male and female gymnasts entered the gymnasium and took paused positions amongst the different events. Once they had all entered the space, they individually engaged in a stretching warm-up while the choir continued to sing. At the completion of the opening song, the choir shifted as a unit towards the men's high-bar event. The performing of exercises, skills, and routines by the gymnasts accompanied the songs of the choir. The lyrics to the songs emphasised the inner workings and emotions of the elite gymnast. They also emphasised the specificity of the body in action, taking the extreme of the gymnast's body movement and distilling it into a vocal note or word. Throughout the performance, the choir and the gymnasts remained separate entities, never fully engaging one another. The choir would often circle the gymnast performing. For instance, in the final song, the choir encircled the male gymnast performing a pommel horse routine and sang about strength and poise. However, the gymnasts never acknowledged the presence of the choir and remained mentally centred on their physical tasks. In an interview

with Simon Jones, regarding the performance, I enquired about the relationship between the choir and gymnasts. Here he admitted they had not rehearsed together and no clear relationship existed between the two units of the performance. Bodies in Flight had not had the opportunity to work with the gymnasts towards performance modes and never worked with the choir in gymnastics training or exercise. Without the deep understanding of the sport from the choir and the understanding of theatre performance from the gymnasts, the performance was often disjointed and lacked any in-depth engagement.

This specific performance offers a unique perspective on the use of competitive gymnastics as performance, specifically the elite gymnast as performer and the exposition of the mechanics of gymnastics on stage. However, in terms of this research, Bodies in Flight's work also displayed and perpetuated certain problematic cultural conceptions of gymnastics discussed earlier in this thesis. The problem existed in the use of the elite gymnasts. The gymnasts were not performers but rather a spectacle. The choir surrounded the gymnasts in hovering positions, singing at them as they 'showed off' their skills. This created a pedestal effect reinforcing a common practice of voyeur culture within the sport. This was also made clear through Jones' reflections of the work with the gymnasts, as mentioned previously.

Raymond and the Strength Project Crew

In the work of US-based Raymond and the Strength Project Crew, the company explores street performance and spectacle using gymnastics-based

acrobatics and tumbling as key performance structures. Now based in California, US, the company is often found on the sidewalk of Venice Beach or surrounded by large crowds of pedestrians. They engage the crowds through extreme energy and spectacle. Their entire performance happens on concrete and in public spaces. Throughout the performance they use audience volunteers and perform seemingly impossible physical tasks. In the performance I watched, the Crew began through getting the surrounding audience to clap in order to 'pump up' the performers. The first performer began the performance bare-chested and doing handstand push-ups. He then increased the difficulty of the action by dropping to his elbow, then lunging forward to his chin, and back up into the handstand position. This developed a deep excitement and engagement of the audience. The audience physically moved closer to the performers following a desire to be closer to the action. As the performance continued, the acts and movements became increasingly more difficult. At times the members would form statues comprised of gymnastics elements while another member would run and somersault or flip over the statue. They consistently engaged the audience as active members of the performance and vital to the performance's success. For the finale of the performance, the company invited an audience volunteer to line up with six other members of the company, bending over at the waist. As the seven people crouched in position, Raymond ran towards them and front flipped over all seven of them. The audience was stunned by the feat and was equally invested in the success of the performer. The execution of gymnastics elements and skills drove the entirety of the performance. In-between tricks and stunts, the performers danced, interacted with one another and the

audience, and prepared for the next routine. The leader (artistic director) of the company, Raymond Bartlette, originally began his training on a beach, where he taught himself the basics of gymnastics. 'I would do sloppy back flips and handsprings and handstands' (2012). Later on, he trained as a key member of the Calypso Tumblers, an amateur gymnastics group, in New York and New Orleans, USA. Raymond reflected that the company trains through a 'no fear' policy, stating 'if you live in fear, you will never get anything done' (ibid). The company uses aerobic exercise, weightlifting, and strength conditioning to build their performer bodies. In learning gymnastics elements and skills, the company members work on the beach and the concrete, throwing themselves about without any formal guidance or training. The problem in the case of Raymond and the Strength Project is the lack of daily structured training. While they use gymnastics-based skills as a form of spectacle, they are limiting their performative boundaries through not engaging in the proper learning of skills and structures. If the company received proper extra-daily instruction, they could begin to expand their performance abilities and understanding of their bodies on a deeper level.

Rhum and Clay

As a final example, UK-based theatre company Rhum and Clay devise each of their performances drawing on their training at the École Jacques Lecoq in Paris. I note this specific performance in relation to this project as rather than 'showcasing' physical skills the training is applied to a more naturalistic dramaturgical aesthetic. This performance was extremely useful in considering Practical Project 3, which will be discussed in Chapter 5 of this

thesis. Here, I attempt to explore and draw attention to the possibilities of applying *gymnastics-based practices* to a naturalistic dramaturgy. The company devises highly physical and narrative-based performance as an ensemble and is one of many examples of current companies drawing on Lecoq's dramatic acrobatics in performance. Their use of Lecoq principles, practices, and languages has guided their practice. Alongside this, they draw heavily on acrobatics and large gestural movement within their performances. Unlike the previous two examples, Rhum and Clay do not use gymnastics as the main structure for performance; rather they draw on Lecoq's dramatic acrobatics from their training to guide their performance development. In their 2012 performance, *A Strange and Wild Song*, the company explored the story of three orphan children who encounter an American soldier in northern France during World War II. Throughout the performance, the three young boys rarely spoke and instead used extreme physicality, acrobatics, and absurdist behaviour to portray internal emotions and communication. The members of the company noted that the learning of dramatic acrobatics and movement training at the Lecoq School has allowed them a freedom of their bodies and the ability to explore extreme physicality and play.

In noting these examples of current performance using gymnastics-based work, I aim to further cement my research rationale. I use each of these as examples to demonstrate the different kind of performances existing, using gymnastics in a variety of dramaturgies and frameworks. I also aim to identify gaps in current practices and performances using gymnastics principles or practices. Other current performances drawing on gymnastics principles or

practices include: Fuel's *The Roof* (2014), which demonstrates parkour in the form of a live-action video game and Metro-Boulot-Dodo's *Safe House* (2014), which uses tumbling, parkour, and aerial work in a multi-media outdoor performance. In each of these examples, the core performers and members of the company have not been trained in gymnastics. Rather, they either used a surface level understanding of acrobatics and tumbling, dramatic gymnastics, and acrobatics or elite gymnasts themselves. Here is where I believe a gap exists in performer training. Companies are clearly drawing on *gymnastics-based practices* in contemporary performance and performance development, yet there is no existing structure in which to train the performer in *gymnastics-based practices* towards these types of performance. While previous trainings use non-elite and elite gymnastics as a secondary practice, there is currently no existing training which uses *gymnastics-based practices* as a main source. I argue that the work developed and detailed in Chapters 3 – 5 could begin to address this gap in performer training.

Conclusion

As the first two chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, *gymnastics-based practices* have strong lineages in Western socio-cultural, sport, and theatre contexts. Two strands of gymnastics emerged in the eighteenth century — one in the Olympic/competitive sport context, and the other in a physical culture context. I argue that both non-elite gymnastics and elite gymnastics developed concurrently and both build on the same core principles — physical health/culture and bodymind awareness. Non-elite gymnastics then became integrated in Western theatrical trainings and pedagogies as a key principle in

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while elite gymnastics continued to grow in power and practice. In Part 2 of the thesis, I explore practical methodologies drawing on the principles I have discussed from both elite gymnastics and non-elite gymnastics towards the development of *gymnastics-based practices*.

Part 2

A Concise Introduction

Part 1 addressed the following key research questions:

- What are '*gymnastics-based practices*'?
- How have *gymnastics-based practices* already influenced performer training, particularly in the work of François Delsarte, Rudolph Laban, and Jacques Lecoq?

Karl Spracklan suggests physical activity and sport are 'so ingrained in our everyday lives that it is difficult to step away and question how and why they have the roles they have today' and where we personally fit into that (2014: 10). The research in Part 1 of this thesis allowed me a deeper understanding of, not only the complex histories of gymnastics, but also my own place within those histories and within contemporary physical culture. With these new understandings I went on to undertake a personal investigation of re-imagining my practices of gymnastics and performer training towards the development of gymnastics-based practices for performer training. To do this, I have applied the historical research of Part 1 alongside my personal experience of contemporary elite gymnastics and performer training in three practical projects.

Before undertaking the practical work I reflected on my own work as a performer and what my needs were in this context. I found the following key areas were at the core of my needs: individual development, body, mind, movement, voice, and ensemble work. After identifying these as my central

necessities, I considered how my new understanding of gymnastics-based practices might contribute to addressing these. Therefore, the following three chapters will unfold my personal investigation in the hope of shedding light on potential new ways to provide for the contemporary performer.

I believe that through my extensive knowledge and the practical work of this project, I can begin to develop work that adds to the existing body of contemporary performer training.

The aim of Part 2 is to address the following overall research question:

- How can *gymnastics-based practices* be understood, applied, and developed in order to contribute to performance/performer training?

(Chapters 3-5)

I will discuss the three projects in detail, each in a separate chapter.

Note on Terminology

In the next portion of the thesis, I will use key phrases and terminology inherent to gymnastics practice and training. I have included a Glossary of Terms under Appendix 1.0 with definitions for each term for the reader. Secondly, terminology that is italicised has been developed in this PhD project and does not already exist in the standard gymnastics-based vocabulary, unless otherwise specified. The conclusion of this thesis includes a lexicon of all terms and vocabulary developed within this project. This lexicon will be an important part of this research as it extends the current languages of training and performance.

There are also DVDs attached to the back of this thesis that accompany these next chapters.

Chapter 3

Practical Project 1: Developing 'Gymnastics-Based Practices' Through Self-practice and Evaluation

'Gymnastics has been my inner fixed point, it has given me physical strength
and pleasure; here I am just me'

Unknown in Else Trangbæk (1997: 136).

Introduction

Broadly, sport science literature on gymnastics as a discipline is limited. Publications mostly refer to gymnastics within the wider field of elite sport. However, a few key publications exist detailing elite gymnastics training, which have emerged over the past twenty years (Gula 1990; Karacsony 1996; Pica 1998; Cogan and Vidmar 2000; Irwin et al. 2005; Readhead 2011; Jemni et al. 2011). For instance, Lloyd Readhead's *Gymnastics: Skills, Techniques, Training* (2011) gives an overview on the training of men and women gymnasts. Readhead argues that when developing a training programme for gymnasts, coaches should adopt a comprehensive physical preparation programme stating 'it is essential for all levels of competitive gymnastics' (2011: 24). Readhead's text has been useful for this thesis in outlining the general principles of elite gymnastics training and competition. The text most useful for this PhD project on the training of gymnasts has been the International Federation of Gymnastics (FIG) 'Code of Points' (COP) (2013). The COP outlines every existing gymnastics skill and element through written description and illustration. This rubric has proven extremely valuable towards facilitating the non-athlete actor in the learning of these elements. Similarly,

the COP provides detailed information on elite gymnastics competition and training guidelines.

In recent publications, researchers suggest there are no set models or programmes for the training of the gymnast but rather they give insight into several different strategies towards training (Readhead 2011; Jemni et al. 2011). However, these sources do suggest the existence of a mind-body training that exists across training models, stating that the gymnast receives both mental and physical training simultaneously. For example, Readhead argues for a 'holistic approach' to aid in the 'long-term development' of the gymnast (2011: 84). He emphasises the need for equal physical (flexibility training, endurance training, strength training) and mental preparation to guide the gymnast towards optimum performance and development. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, this concept of the *holistic approach* of the gymnast is a central component of this thesis and the practical projects.

Perhaps the text most valuable for understanding training methodologies was *The Science of Gymnastics* (2011) by Monem Jemni et al. Their book details specific understandings of the gymnast's training and competition within sport science contexts. The authors suggest the 'book was born from a worldwide need for a gymnastics textbook to serve students, teachers, lecturers and coaches', and hoped it would fill a gap they believe existed in gymnastics resources (2011: xx-1). They suggest that since its development, gymnastics has 'witnessed a significant expansion,' and yet there is paucity in resources to reflect this wide expansion (ibid). The text is split into four key parts: physiology for gymnastics, biomechanics for gymnastics, psychology and

mental training for gymnastics, and interaction between physiological, biomechanical and psychological aspects of gymnastics performance. Jemni et al.'s book gave me insight into these concepts as applied to gymnastics. Similarly, it gave me insight into the interactivity of these concepts in relation to the coaching process. This insight was helpful in the studio-based explorations of this project. Similarly, *Sport and Exercise Science* by Joanne Thatcher et al. (2009) proved extremely effective for this thesis. It provided me with insights into sport science research and general sport science knowledge. Most significantly, the text offered information about 'Exercise Behavioural Models', which became extremely effective in the practical portion of this project.

The University of Loughborough Centre for Gymnastics Research has produced a number of PhD theses and articles in relation to elite gymnastics. Their research focusses primarily on scientific perspectives for quantitative knowledge of competitive performance. Specifically, they investigate competitive performance through the use of computerised models to enhance performance outcomes and 'insight into the motor control of skilled performance' (Loughborough University - Sports Biomechanics and Motor Control Research Group, 2014). Their research findings are often 'incorporated into the coach education programme of British Gymnastics and the International Gymnastics Federation' (ibid). Investigation into the research done at Loughborough was helpful in establishing the current research areas of gymnastics training and competition in the UK. Similarly, it was also useful for understanding a range of gymnastics training models.

Each of these sources and more played integral parts in the practical research of this project. I draw on their understandings of contemporary trainings throughout this chapter and the subsequent two chapters.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Practice-as-Research methodologies were used in this project to obtain qualitative findings: specifically, the potential of drawing on *gymnastics-based practices* towards performer training. This project utilised Edmond and Candy's frameworks for practice, theory, and evaluation (2010). This project worked through practice and evaluation of that practice to develop theory. Secondly, I used documentation to formulate qualitative knowledge, which as Nelson suggests is necessary for Practice-as-Research (2006). This chapter will discuss the process and findings of the first practical project of this research.

The first practical investigation of this project ran from October 2011 to March 2012 at Exeter University. Over the course of four months, I questioned my own elite gymnastics and how those pedagogies could be reframed through the lens of performer training. In conjunction with my own practice histories, I drew on the practices and lineages discussed in Part 1 of this thesis. This specific exploration drew on my personal trainings and practices as the main sources of inquiry. In relation to the balance between non-elite gymnastics and elite gymnastics within this specific project, more focus was placed on elite gymnastics, while non-elite principles and practices were used as a bridge to performative work. During this project, I also drew on my previous

practices in actor training, including: psychophysical acting, Butoh practices, and Stanislavski work. Zarrilli describes this type of critical self-evaluation as the point of, '(re)consideration [...] when practice and thought crystallise in an insight, which clarifies [...] embodied performance practice and technique' (2000: 2). Before working with performers, I chose specifically to work with myself, taking on equal roles of practical-researcher, facilitator, and performer. The aim was to address certain fundamental needs of the contemporary performer through consideration of my own needs as a performer. It was also important for me to formulate the potential frameworks of the practice before disseminating the work to performers.

In relation to the overall research questions of this PhD project, I developed secondary questions for each individual practice project. Over the course of this process, I aimed to tackle the following key research questions through this studio-based inquiry:

- What are the specific languages, processes, and practices of elite gymnastics training and how can I understand my own gymnastics training through these languages, practices, and processes?
- How can I explore and adapt this training in order to find ways to 'activate' me as a performer?

The aims of the project were:

- To uncover key structures, training methodologies, and practices of the gymnast.
- To understand how these can be translated/adapted to activate me as a performer
- To devise gymnastics-based exercises to activate me as a performer.

- To examine how the application of *gymnastics-based practices* could inform a performance exercise.

| Practical Project Phase | Time Length | Work Development Plan |
|-------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Phase 1 | 8 weeks | Training |
| Phase 2 | 4 weeks | Adaptation and Play |
| Phase 3 | 3 weeks | Performance Exercise |

Figure 5: Practical project 1 phases

To begin addressing the research questions I considered the methodologies and processes by which I would work in the studio. The project occurred in three distinct phases as shown above (Figure 5). The first was the Training Phase, where I investigated my own gymnastics training and re-discovered basic forms, principles, and languages of this training. In the second phase, Adaption and Improvisation, I explored my gymnastics training through improvisation, play, and workshop. In the final phase of this process, Performance Exercise, I drew on understandings gained from the first two phases and applied this knowledge to the performance of a naturalistic monologue. Each of these phases was integral to the overall investigation of this practical work. I have selected specific moments from these three phases to discuss in this chapter; exposing certain key practices, exercises, and discoveries. The chapter will specifically address how certain key needs of myself as a performer were addressed through exploration of *gymnastics-based practices* and principles. Before moving into these discoveries, I believe

it is important to identify what *my* training is in order to situate my practical investigation more concretely.

What is *my* Training?

After researching the historical lineages of elite gymnastics and non-elite gymnastics within theatre practices and pedagogies, I aimed to investigate my personal engagement within these selected histories. Beginning with twelve years of elite gymnastics, I learned to reflect on and understand my body's capabilities and limitations.

As discussed previously, while gymnastics is often referred to as a strictly physical activity where mastering overt movement is the ultimate goal, I understand that the process of self-development is never complete and learning is a continuous lifelong development that 'requires months or years to achieve and thereby requires enormous [...] investment of the body' (2011: 28). Olympic gymnast, Nadia Comaneci describes this as understanding that competition and practice was about:

[T]he next time and the next and then the one after that. It was about improving my body and mind – overcoming frustration, anger and jealousy so that, in one shining moment, my body became a tool driven by unwavering concentration and desire (2004: 29).

As Lavalley and Warriner point out, 'such a commitment necessitates an active exploration of different roles and behaviours and the accomplishment of particular developmental tasks' (Lavalley and Warriner, 2008: 302). The gymnasts' training increases over time, directly correlating to their personal investment in development. This is similar to Zarrilli's psychophysical training,

where the actor begins with basic forms of Kalaripayattu and as their development advances, they learn more complex forms and sequences. Each brings the doer closer to a state of bodymind cohesion.

I begin by addressing the question: 'What is *my* gymnastics training?' for the purposes of this research. When I use the term 'training' throughout this thesis, I am referring to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experience through a set of extra-daily structures. For example, elite gymnastics training is a process of bringing the athlete to their peak of performance through reiterated practice, instruction, physical, and psychological education. As is so often misinterpreted, it is not about:

[P]ushing the body beyond its limits, shutting out the pain, and so on. [...] As it happens, they are neither. The goal of athletic activity is not victory over one's own body at all: it is not autocratic control. It is unity: the regaining, for those brief moments for which it lasts, of perfect immediacy between body and mind (Howe, 2003: 99).

As discussed, I competed as an elite gymnast for Gymnastics Unlimited in Federal Way, Washington, USA. I was an all-around team member and when I retired was competing as a level 9/10 gymnast¹⁵. Although engaging in young, playful gymnastics from 1988, my first encounter with elite gymnastics took place in 1990 at Gymnastics Unlimited, USA. I was five years old at the time¹⁶. My mother had taken me for a summer camp, introducing the basics of gymnastics to young children for a week. At the end of the workshop, a coach

¹⁵ All-around refers to a female gymnast who competes in all four events: vault, uneven parallel bars, balance beam, and floor exercise.

¹⁶ Gymnastics Unlimited is a registered organisation of USA Gymnastics, the sole national governing body for the sport of gymnastics in the United States. It is an extension of the US Olympic Committee and the International Federation of Gymnastics (FIG).

of the gym, Mike Davis, asked my parents if I would be interested in trying out for the competitive team stating I had 'natural talent'. My parents asked if I was interested in gymnastics and I eagerly responded, 'yes'. A formal tryout process was held, where my flexibility, strength, endurance, dexterity, mental stamina, and learning ability was tested. At the conclusion of the tryout, I was offered a place on the competitive team, beginning at Level 4.

At this level my training started with three days per week at three hours per day. My team had anywhere between five and ten members at a time, each coached by Davis. Davis' structure was unorthodox and at times, erratic. For the first three years, he trained the others and myself at a higher level than we were competing. For instance, while competing at Level 6, I was already learning routines for Level 8. Once I reached Level 8, which is the beginning of the optional levels (where coaches devise the individual gymnast's routines), Davis' eagerness levelled off and a more formal and fluid training structure began to emerge¹⁷. We began training in a *holistic approach* with equal and simultaneous focus on mental preparation, flexibility, strength, and endurance training. This also included set training schedules and intended learning outcomes. We were provided with a sport psychologist, who guided us in visualisation techniques and mental preparation. Visualisation became an important element to this study and will be discussed in detail in this chapter, as well as in Chapters 4 and 5. We were also provided with a nutritionist to emphasise a well-balanced diet and had the opportunity to work

¹⁷ During the process of this research I attempted to locate Davis and ask his reasoning for his training style and regime, but I was unable to find him. He is no longer a registered coach in Washington State.

with Nikken Wellness Magnets and professionals to guide in natural health remedies. These were all alongside our training, which occurred four days per week at four and a half hours per day. During the summer months in this period, we trained six days per week at six hours per day, with optional extended practices. I trained and competed under the guidance of Mike Davis from 1990 until 1999. In 1999, Mike Davis left the club and I began training with Gymnastics Unlimited owner David Mackey and coach Jen'ai Decano, both previous gymnasts and coaches for several years. I continued training and competing under their guidance until my retirement in 2002. They continued and strengthened the ideas of a *holistic approach* during this time. My own training increased to upwards of thirty hours per week during competition months and upwards of forty hours of training in the off-season. Though their coaching style was different to Davis', it complemented my learning process and strengthened my understanding of gymnastics. Between 2000 and 2003, I also competed on a sub-gymnastics team as part of my school education. My coaches during this period were Mandy Tomervick and Gina Massey. Each of these coaches were trained and certified under the FIG requirements.

During my training as a gymnast, beginning in 2000, I also sought work with Dr. Bob Freeborn, a massage therapist who uses natural health practices¹⁸. He worked extensively with my body and mind to more fully integrate their relationship. Alongside the massage therapy, he also guided me in Tai Chi

¹⁸ I met Dr. Freeborn at Gymnastics Unlimited. His two daughters were also training competitively. His knowledge and investment in elite gymnastics strengthened his understanding of my physical and mental needs. At this time, he is still a practicing massage therapist in Federal Way, Washington.

and beginning yogic practices. I met with Dr. Freeborn twice monthly for the final three years of my elite training.

My history of gymnastics competition is detailed in the chart below:

| Year | Level |
|-----------|------------|
| 1990-1993 | Level 1-4 |
| 1993-1994 | Level 5 |
| 1994-1995 | Level 6 |
| 1995-1996 | Level 7/8 |
| 1996-1997 | Level 8 |
| 1997-2001 | Level 9 |
| 2001-2002 | Level 9/10 |

Figure 6: Breakdown of personal gymnastics history

In January 2005, I was hired by Washington State University to convene the gymnastics module in the Physical Education Department. In this module, I trained undergraduate men and women in the basics of gymnastics, highlighting both men and women's competitive events. Simultaneously, I was beginning my own training as a performer in the university's Drama Department. During this period I was able to extend my previous knowledge as a gymnast towards that of a coach and facilitator. I structured the module, created intended learning outcomes for participants, gave feedback, and marked participants according to their engagement and participation within the course. I was able to begin creating my own language as a coach and facilitator, drawing on my previous knowledge as a gymnast. I continued

teaching at Washington State University until 2006. During winter and summer holiday breaks I would return to Gymnastics Unlimited to train occasionally with Mackey and Decano, continuing to hone my skills and physical repertoire.

According to my understanding of gymnastics and my fifteen plus years of continued practice, I believe I possess a rich and full understanding of the sport's current trainings and extended possibilities. I will return to certain points of my learning through each of my coaches and adjunct teachers in relation to specific exercises and workshops in the practical projects of this research. It should be stated that my own understanding and experience of gymnastics has been largely influenced by my past teachers, coaches, and doctors. My knowledge of elite gymnastics-practices is purely through my own training as an elite gymnast as well as through the historical research of Part 1. It is my understanding of my own training in my specific gym at that point in history.¹⁹

As I stated above, this training was combined with my training as a performer over the last ten years. From 2005-2008, I undertook work in actor training at Washington State University. Here, I was guided through Stanislavskian work, exploring character development and naturalistic acting, taught by Professor Terry Converse and Stan Brown III. Most of the training was drawn from Uta Hagen's *Respect for Acting* (1973) and Konstantin Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* (1937). In this training we were guided through acting exercises to

¹⁹ It is important for me to state this as elite gymnastics has changed largely over the last ten years. There is a new scoring system in place and skills have become more difficult. Gymnasts are also attempting more difficult skills at lower levels. Gymnastics has shown this exponential growth in difficulty since its inception at the Olympics in 1928.

address specific roles within specific texts. From 2008-2010, I trained with Professor Phillip Zarrilli in psychophysical acting at Exeter University. This training used Asian meditative and martial arts to prepare the actor. It focussed on extra-daily psychophysical principles towards integrating a bodymind relationship in the performer. During my training with Zarrilli, I also encountered workshops with Fran Barbe (Butoh), Tara McCallister-Viel (Voice Training) and Marjolein Baas (Clown and Michael Chekhov). Each of these workshops also focussed on psychophysical principles towards different performative contexts. Each of the experiences mentioned above has influenced my consciousness of actor training processes and methodologies and has been considered in combination with my previous gymnastics training in the practical work of this project. I will discuss this throughout the next three chapters.

Phase 1

During Phase 1 of this project I investigated the following research question:

- What are the specific languages, processes and practices of elite gymnastics training and how can I understand my own gymnastics training through these languages, practices, and processes?

To begin to evaluate my own questions of what my specific training was, I first had to unpack my knowledge through a process of practical distillation in order to understand the manner by which I learned and was taught.

In the last 25-30 years 'a number of researchers have traced the developmental milestones, causes, and characteristics of expertise

development in sport trainings' (Salmela in Jemni, 2011: 114). Initially, 'Bloom's View', developed in 1985 by sport scientist B.S. Bloom, outlined the three stages of the artist's, athlete's, and scientist's development. Over the course of development in the research of expertise in sport, this has expanded into 'Cote, Baker and Abernethy's Views' developed by sport scientists J. Cote, J. Baker and B. Abernathy in 2003. Their view outlines three stages of learning in detail: the Sampling Years, the Specialising Years, and the Investment Years. The Sampling Years are characterised as the experimentation of several avenues of their chosen field, i.e., painting, sculpture and photography for an artist. The Specialising Years are a period where the student becomes autonomous and there is a 'mental changing of gears' where they hone in on their craft (Salmela in Jemni, 2011:116). The Investment Years are then where the:

[G]ymnasts have committed themselves to a concerted attempt at succeeding at the highest levels; the serious deliberate practice phase begins in which the intent is to improve on a daily basis, and to refine partially learned skills into highly polished ones (ibid).

The three main phases of the athlete's career are followed by the Maintaining Years, in which the athlete continues the training but on an extra-daily level without expectation of increasing ability. The overall arc for this breakdown is from novice to expert, increasing exponentially by years of practice and intensity of training. As a gymnast, I currently consider my work within the Maintaining Years and researching the potential of developing work for performers ranging from the Sampling Years through to the Maintaining Years. Using this model was an effective way to realistically map the potential development of beginning participants.

Within this wider scope of learning, there exists, according to Lloyd Readhead, a more specific learning pattern for gymnasts and acquisition of elements. Readhead states that 'gymnastics skills are generally learned after many repetitions of progressive part and whole skills, but the learning will take place through three distinct stages' as follows:

1. Cognitive Stage
2. Associative Stage
3. Autonomous Stage

1. Cognitive Stage: In the early stages of the learning the gymnast will be concerned with which movements are required in order to understand the skill.

In this stage the gymnasts begin by using visualisation. Most gymnasts are educated in the use of visualisation techniques. They close their eyes, picture him/herself in front of themselves performing the skill and/or set of skills and then internalise this image into their body and attempt the move.

2. Associative Stage: In this stage the gymnast will begin to refine the movements as they have more understanding of the skill.

Once the basic outline of the skill is learned, the gymnast is invited to make internal notations and external corrections until the skill is mastered.

3. Autonomous Stage: The movements will eventually become automatic and the skill is said to have become 'over-learned'. The skill will continue to improve and be consolidated with just very fine changes being made:

In this stage, the gymnast should be able to move freely to and from the learned skill adding it to their repertoire of elements, calling upon it for sets or beginning points. Once the skill has reached the

autonomous stage, it will become part of the athletes' body memory and added to their physical vocabulary (Readhead 2011: 84-85).

For gymnasts, these learning patterns, 'provide practical instruction in such mental skills as goal setting, arousal control, mental practice (visualisation) and how to maintain concentration under pressure. In general, research shows that such programmes are effective in improving subsequent sport performance' (Moran 1996: 47). To keep in line with this structure of learning, I chose to consider the actor's learning structure within the same model for the remainder of this research. The actor begins their training in the Sampling Years, at the Cognitive Stage. In considering the performer's training and learning in this respect, I chose to work back to this point to fully understand what could be learned at these beginning stages. At this point in my expertise, I would consider my repertoire of skills to be in the Autonomous Stage, where without cognitive questioning, I can move freely within and between elements. Upon coming to this understanding, I questioned how I could travel back to the Cognitive Stage. As I entered the studio I found difficulties in breaking down the basic elements and understanding them from the learner's perspective and not the expertise perspective. Therefore, the process of refinement started within a psychological state, rather than a corporeal state. By this, I mean that instead of attempting to understand my training through my body, I started by using an analytical process. While addressing this

learning process throughout the project I simultaneously worked towards the development of extra-daily²⁰ practices.

The Body

In the first instance, I began my exploration by looking at the warm-up. I did this for two reasons: my own personal training, both in the gym and the studio, always begun with some form of warm-up, and also the importance of the warm-up according to past practitioners and non-elite gymnastics lineages. Furthermore, as I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the stretches and exercises often undertaken in these 'warm-ups' are embedded in a deeper cultural history extending back to non-elite gymnastics in nineteenth century Western Europe, often unknown or unacknowledged in contemporary practices. Therefore, I felt it important to examine in this practical project.

In a 2009 study on British professional athletes, scientists revealed that athletes who engaged in a warm-up were less likely to incur severe injury and the warm-up aids in progression of the athlete. The warm up 'improve(s) the players core stability, strength and proprioception' (Thatcher et al., 2009: 62). While there is no set warm-up for athletes across the sport spectrum, scientists and sport-based doctors believe a practical and effective warm-up should be strongly encouraged (ibid). Within my individual practice, my coaches led us through a daily warm-up that included running, conditioning,

²⁰ As mentioned in the introduction, extra-daily is a term coined by Eugenio Barba. It describes activities or practices that distinguish themselves from ones used in one's daily life. According to Barba, those activities that are considered 'extra-daily use[s] of the body, are what is called technique' (2005: 5).

stretching, and visualisation practice. This start to each practice was an essential pathway towards an agile body and mind for the day's work.

In consideration of the importance of the warm-up to gymnasts, I explored the implementation of warm-up processes in actor trainings. Anne Dennis states the warm-up is one 'of the uppermost importance in an actor's work and any training programme must be responsible for teaching how this work should be approached' (2002: 59). For Dennis, 'only a prepared body, sensitive and capable, will provide the actor with the physical possibilities to communicate [...] the body is his instrument' (2002:50). Yet, as in gymnastics, there is no prescribed warm-up existing for the actor. Mark Evans' asserts 'the warm-up is a liminal space' within the studio, often encouraging students to take personal space and engage in individual stretches, etc. Students will often do exercises they have learned in previous trainings that they have seen others do, that feel good. Indeed, I noted similarly in my previous my training with Zarrilli, students would often arrive 10-15 minutes early to 'warm-up' before the session started. This often took form in quiet, with light stretching, body loosening jumps, and breathing exercises. This is similar in other workshops and trainings I have encountered, where when given the freedom, students will revert to non-specific exercises that warm the body.

It is my argument that a warm-up is as equally important for the actor as it is the athlete, and great attention should be paid to this practice. Therefore, a look into how this can be explored is essential. Furthermore, through exploration of the warm-up I also offered myself an opportunity to address one

my key needs as a performer: my body. For me, refinement of a supple and prepared body is paramount to my work as a performer. It allows me to enter different performative contexts with a sense of receptiveness. Indeed Lorna Marshall backs this by arguing that our body is our main connection to the outside world and the more prepared it is as a 'sensitive receiver', the more prepared we become to connect with the world around us (2000: vii).

However, a warm-up also provides the actor/athlete with more than just a physical process. It gives them an opportunity to engage a mental and physical focus that can be carried through the remainder of the rehearsal and/or performance. As Leslie Howe states, 'the goal of athletic activity is not victory over one's own body [...] it is unity' (2003: 98). Physical preparation of the gymnast is a key factor in developmental and training processes. As previously stated, it is my understanding that the gymnast is trained through a *holistic approach*, whereby all parts of the gymnast (mind and body) are trained with equal emphasis. It is also my understanding that the performance of gymnastics elements requires a honing of the body and mind.

In consideration of these key factors, I chose to explore the idea of the 'warm-up' and its centrality to both sport and actor/acting training to allow bodymind openness for the more complex work to begin: 'The purpose of the warm-up is to raise the body temperature, improve blood circulation and increase the rate of breathing. This will lead to the muscles becoming more flexible and more efficient' (Readhead, 2011: 28). According to Readhead, the gymnast should 'always warm up the whole body before flexibility training' and that 'specific

flexibility and warm-up training should be included in the training program' as an equally important aspect of the training session. Because of the intense physical and psychological complexity of gymnastics training most coaches are encouraged to take a multi-dimensional approach to their long-term development, incorporating the ideas of biomechanics, sport psychology and healthy nutrition along with complete understanding of the physical body and the language it conveys (2011: 30). The warm-up of a gymnast is divided into three separate yet equal parts: endurance, strength and flexibility.

Endurance Training

To follow this structure, I started each session with a twenty-minute run outside, as the beginning endurance training. I specifically chose to do this to draw on my own elite gymnastics training coupled with non-elite gymnastics, which encouraged running and outdoor work in order to draw from the natural environment.²¹ During my training as a gymnast, we commenced practice through this approach, therefore I reverted directly back to this method of practice. While gymnastics is considered an anaerobic sport, high levels of aerobic fitness are encouraged as part of the overall training structure. Running, considered a form of aerobic exercise, results in improved performance, endurance, strength and speed. It also increases oxygen delivery to the muscles enabling a regulation of breathing. Running increases the participants exercise threshold in intensity and duration. Running simultaneously works the outer physiological body and the internal body.

²¹ This can be seen in the practices and principles of Gutsmuths, Jahn, and Stebbins as discussed in Part 1 of this thesis. Similarly, Jahn argued outdoor running gave a certain liberation to the body that indoor exercise could not.

Within the first few sessions of investigation I used the run purely as an external exercise, just as it was taught to me in my training: as a mode of gaining speed and endurance. I then began to implement the breath — a key component of non-elite gymnastics and psychophysical actor training. According to Zarrilli, all psychophysical training begins with the breath. The actor must learn to control their breath from the body's centre in order to begin moving the body and mind as one. The breath originates from and returns to the nose. Each inhalation and exhalation is equal in length and derives from the body's core. Similarly, in non-elite gymnastics, the breath was a key principle of the work, as noted below. In consideration of this, I employed breath control learned through my elite gymnastics practice: diaphragmatic breathing. Diaphragmatic breathing is a process by which the doer strengthens the abdomen muscles (core strength) by contracting the breath to and from the diaphragm. Here, we were invited to inhale and exhale through the nose, to maintain proper breath control, focussing on breathing down to our core. In conjunction with this, I drew on elements of the breath used in non-elite gymnastics, particularly in the work of Stebbins and psychophysical breathing learnt with Zarrilli. As previously mentioned, Stebbins worked with 'dynamic breathing', which is a key structure of 'harmonic gymnastics'. Stebbins developed breathing exercises 'to control tension and to use the body's energy efficiently' (Ruyter, 1988: 382). For Stebbins, gymnastics exercise should be a rhythmic harmony of the body in motion. Dynamic breathing is a central component of this harmony. Stebbins argued dynamic breathing is:

[T]he deep rhythmic motion of the whole internal economy, from the pelvic region upward to the chest walls, [which] develops an amount of dynamic energy within the organism which physiologically corresponds in its action in the development of the muscles to the ethereal essences (1892: 73).

Indeed, the breath supplies the oxygen and energy throughout the gymnast, which accompanies each particular movement of the body. This type of deep focus on the breath allows the body to maintain suppleness while simultaneously strengthening and reaching optimal breath control. According to sport psychologists Damon Burton and Thomas Raedeke, 'mastering the breath in a natural, relaxed manner is a necessity' in order to maintain optimal engagement (2008: 15). This is especially important when working physically as 'growth and increase of muscular strength is the natural result, when the energy supplied is fully equal to the demand, which is determined by the dynamic capacity' of the breath (ibid). I maintained working with the breath as a key component of the work throughout the practical projects, and will refer to this type of breathing as *gymnastics-based breathing* for the remainder of the thesis. The run with the breath implemented allowed me to open my senses to my surroundings while warming up my body and gaining a relationship to the ground through my feet.

I then followed this with an indoor run, opening myself to the studio space. The aim of the indoor run was to allow a spatial relationship between the

working space and myself.²² The slight jog discovered in this part of the process also allowed for corporeal relaxation and readiness, flowing energy throughout the spaces and warming the muscles for further stretching and exercise. As the jog continued, I invited myself to explore variations of the movement. I used this exploration to further investigate the relationship between my feet and the floor and also the relationship between my body and the space. Examples of this exploration are:

- Extending the legs and allowing the feet to slide side-to-side across the floor, in an ice-skater fashion.
- Bending the knees to 45 degrees and inviting the heels to take the weight of the body as it moves across the space.
- Slightly releasing the knees and raising the heels so the toes are the main connector of the body to the ground.
- Slowing down the pace of movement into long strides and lunges across the floor.
- Stretching the arms towards the ceiling, extending the body completely and sliding the toes across the floor.

(See DVD PPI 1.1)

One of the main focusses of this light warm-up was to control my breath during each movement. I drew on Delsartean ideas of breath as connected to physical gesture and movement. In his book *Bone, Breath, Gesture* (1995), Don Johnson explores the roots of breath in the physical training. Johnson asserts that Jahn 'opened the first door of "body consciousness" through gymnastics' (1995: 77). However, he states that the real work of 'body consciousness' began through the work of Delsarte and Stebbins, who

²² At this point, I would remove my shoes and the rest of the studio work would be done barefoot.

worked with breath to unlock the physical body. For this work, I particularly considered the notion of 'breath [as] a connecting force,' as 'it creates a bodily equilibrium and balance and helps us to make inner and out impressions interchangeable' (Johnson, 1995: 77). Using *gymnastics-based breathing* in this exercise allowed me to create a dynamic relationship with the architecture of the space and to also become aware of my own 'self' in the space.

Strength Training

Moving forward from the endurance training of the warm-up, I transitioned into strength training. The strength training explored during this process was derived directly from my elite gymnastics training. I also drew on notions of non-elite gymnastics to work the whole body. Through this I explored strengthening of the lower limbs, stomach/core, and upper limbs/body.

- Lower limb strengthening included: lunges, squats, leg presses, single leg squats, balancing, toe raises and leg lifts.
- Stomach/core strengthening included: sit-ups, plank holds, hollow holds.
- Upper limb/body strengthening included: push-ups, up-downs.

Over the course of the work, the strength training increased my muscular strength, power, and speed. It also provided deep muscular energy and heightened my body awareness. As a second strand, throughout the strength training I worked towards a quality of ease within the exercises. In gymnastics, the gymnast is asked to perform physically demanding tasks with a sense of effortlessness and grace, extracting visible tension from the body and face. To begin work on this, I employed *gymnastics-based breathing* to reduce outward strain and force through and to release tension. In my work with Zarrilli, he

often invited use of the breath as a source of release, using the inhalations to source the strain, and the exhalations to release it. Here, the use of breath allowed me to focus on the physical task without experiencing over-exertion. Furthermore, the use of breath brings oxygen to the muscles allowing for further strengthening. I used this strength training for 15-20 minutes each session. Over time I could see and feel a change in my outer body, and connect with a deeper awareness of its strength and capabilities.

Flexibility Training

After the muscles in my body were warmed, I shifted into flexibility training. The flexibility of the gymnast is key to their overall fitness. Unlike most other elite sport trainings, flexibility makes up a crucial 1/3 of preparatory training in gymnastics. This is due to the skills performed within the sport, and the need for a flexible, supple form to execute these skills. Apart from providing flexibility of the muscles and joint complexes, flexibility training reduces the risk of injury and increases the reflex response and ability to engage in a symmetrical range of motion on both sides of the body. During the flexibility training, I explored several stretches to activate and address each section of the body. The stretches (as listed below in Figure 7) each derived from my continued gymnastics training.

Stretches Explored:

- Pike
- Straddle
- Frog
- Full Split – Right
- Full Split – Left
- Full Split – Centre
- Backbend
- Hamstring
- Thigh
- Calf
- Rolling Wrist
- Rolling Ankle
- Shoulder
- Twist

Figure 7: Example of stretches explored

In every instance the flexibility training began through reconsideration of MacKaye's 'harmonic poise'. This allowed me to start in a balanced position from which all other movement then began. I started with feet at shoulder width, knees released, arms hung to the sides of the body and eyes focussed ahead. Both Laban and Lecoq work with this notion of a beginning pose and point of entry in to the work, referring to it as the neutral position. Similarly, Zarrilli would often use this stance at the opening of work and invited us to 'drop-in' to focus/attention. Starting with MacKaye's 'harmonic poise' enabled me to understand the benefits of beginning and ending through balance and equilibrium, which are key components of elite gymnastics. Therefore, throughout the remainder of this project and Practical Projects 2 and 3, I started and concluded every exercise in harmonic poise to promote a deeper connection with balance and equilibrium.

This warm-up increased in difficulty and length throughout the project. As in gymnastics training, as the athlete/performer's body adapts and strengthens

the difficulty in training will increase to accommodate for this. Also, the exercises and stretches in the warm-up would alternate daily to access all areas of the performer's body. Each exercise and stretch used in this process was directly drawn from my own training as a gymnast, my research in Practical Project 1, and from my research into other gymnastics training programmes.

During this phase of the process I encountered several moments of difficulty and understanding. In a journal entry dated 11 November 2011, I stated:

Today, I tried skipping the warm-up to test its effectiveness. In return, my focus, flexibility, strength and stamina suffered. My body seemed to need this warm-up in order to function optimally. I'm curious if this is just today or a pattern. (See Appendix 1.2 for full journal entry)

Without allowing myself the time for the warm-up in this particular instance, my body and mind responded in the following instinctive manners: heaviness, stiffness, and wandering of the mind. Similarly on a separate occasion, I attempted to condense the warm-up sequence. I chose to do this to understand if all the exercises/components of the warm-up were necessary for full engagement. I was again confronted by a lack of mental and physical energy. The warm-up sequence became an integral part of the extra-daily work I was undergoing and necessary to my progress.

As Jahn and GutsMuths describe: these preparatory exercises are necessary for work on the entirety of the body, 'to call forth the hidden and to cultivate

and increase' all aspects of the gymnast (Jahn, 1828: Vi). This specific warm-up allowed me to connect to the work in psychological and physiological states. It also provided me with a more prepared and attuned body to call upon in the studio. It is therefore my assertion that a gymnastics-based *extra-daily warm up* could be used to actively guide the performer towards a receptive body and beginning integration of a bodymind relationship. I pushed the development of this *extra-daily warm-up* forward in the subsequent practical projects and will note its development throughout the next two chapters.

The Mind

Mental training is a key factor in most elite sports training and plays a large part in gymnastics practice and competition. Alongside endurance, strength, and flexibility, mental training is an equal component of gymnasts' development and training. Mental preparation of the gymnast is often referred to as visualisation. The continuous use of mental preparation in gymnastics training alongside the physical training is a key component that makes gymnastics training a holistic approach aiding in the development of the bodymind relationship. For me, the mental training of the gymnast can be translated towards addressing a key need for me as a performer: the mind. In this thesis I adopt the theory that the mind and body are not separate entities but one single interconnected structure and must be trained simultaneously to reach optimal performance. It is true that others have suggested similar routes (Marshall 2000; Zinder 2002; Zarrilli 2009) yet this next portion of the chapter

will look at how visualisation might be an additional way to train the performer's mind and thus enhance the bodymind relationship.

Visualisation versus Imagery

Throughout my training as gymnast, I was guided and re-guided through visualisation processes. Visualisation is considered to be a mental preparation tool often used in sports training and sport psychology. The mental preparation of the gymnast is a crucial component for training and competition. Within the mental preparation of the gymnast, they are educated in the use of vivid imagery, also known as visualisation. For me, visualisation became an inherent practice that formed a deep connection to self-evaluation, personal growth and development, and deep understanding of my body. When I began my training in performance, I was led through imagination exercises, beginning with undergraduate studies in Stanislavskian approach and character development. In my work with Fran Barbe and Zarrilli, both focussed on embodying activating images towards activation of the body. I began to notice the connections between my visualisation training and image-based work in performance. Therefore, this next portion of this chapter will look at visualisation and imagery as a key component of the practical exploration.

Several practitioners, both past and present, have drawn on imagery as a key tool to activate the performer. Therefore, I believe it is important to now make the clear distinction between visualisation and imagery for the purposes of this research. It is my understanding that in visualisation, the gymnast uses

themselves as the main stimuli for the image. This may occur through external imagery, internal imagery, or proprioceptive imagery. External imagery refers to the 'visual image of the gymnast performing a skill or routine as someone else would see them'. Internal imagery refers to the 'visual images as the gymnast would see themselves performing'. And proprioceptive imagery refers to how 'the gymnast feels the movement in the muscles as if they were performing the skill or sequence' (Readhead, 2011: 87). In each case of visualisation, the gymnast is the main source of the image. As I understand it, imagery uses outside stimuli, often non-human, to guide internal feeling. Phillip Zarrilli describes activating imagery as, 'not static pictures. One does not look at a specific image. [...] the mind does not wander, but is active as one enters and embodies the image' (2009: 90). Zarrilli, for instance, often uses the image of water flowing through the body to guide the actors' breath control and activate awareness of the 'whole body'. While actor-based imagery has been explored in detail in various different trainings, visualisation has mostly been used in sport training.

This thesis does not reject the usefulness of imagery in activating the actor. Rather it emphasises the use of visualisation as another tool for internal activation. In the practical work, I often drew on imagery to supplement the visualisation work with myself and other performers. As an example of this, I explored the use of imagery in this practical project as an activation tool towards work on a monologue. I believe that visualisation and imagery are not dualistic and rather can work cohesively towards guiding the actor. I argue visualisation, like imagery can 'allow a particular kind of shifting balance, or

dialogue, between body and mind' (Hulton in Hodge, 2000: 161). In this context, I am referring to visualisation as the use of vivid imagery; where you 'practice actually feeling the sensations in your body as you perform' using internal and external forms of imagery (Cogan and Vidmar, 2000: 41).

Visualisation serves multiple purposes for the gymnast, including allowing them to embody a skill or element before attempting the performance of it. The athlete trains their mind to see every potential outcome of a projected task prior to the execution of the task.

They do this because they regard this ritual as mental stages which lead them progressively to higher levels of concentration and performance. Another idea about pressure control concerns the importance of mental rehearsal. By visualising in advance the precise actions one wants to perform in a potentially difficult situation, one cultivates a calm and focussed attitude to it (Moran 1995: 50).

While other elite sports draw on visualisation as a general tool, gymnastics views it as a key component of extra-daily practice, weighted equally in the overall training regime. Gymnasts employ visualisation in every stage of their process, making it a crucial part of their development and performance. As stated previously, the Cognitive Stage invites the gymnast to 'see' themselves performing the elements before attempting them. The gymnast closes their eyes, begins to breathe deeply into an open and energetic state, and then pictures their detailed figure in front of themselves. They then watch themselves perform a certain element with optimal execution. After this is repeated several times, the gymnast opens their eyes, prepares themselves,

and attempts the skill. Sports psychologists Karen Cogan and Peter Vidmar give the following guidelines for effective sport imagery:

1. Use all your senses.
2. Develop control of your imagery skills and visualise positive outcomes.
3. Use internal and external imagery.
4. Practice imagery regularly.
5. Practice imagery in a relaxed state.
6. Develop coping strategies through imagery.
7. Use cues or triggers to help your imagery rehearsal.
8. Practice kinaesthetic imagery.
9. Image in 'real time'.
10. Use imagery logs.²³ (2000: 40-42)

Visualisation has also been used to allow the gymnast to engage in different performance modes. Jemni describes gymnastics competition in comparison to 'the modern triathlon or pentathlon. The duration, effort, intensity, power, strength, flexibility, speed of stretch, coordination and endurance as well as the energy required to perform in each of the(se) events differ' (2011: xxiii). Each event in gymnastics provides different tasks for the gymnast and the gymnast must be prepared to 'drop-in' instantaneously. The anaerobic and aerobic nature of gymnastics competition allows the gymnast the time to engage in multiple encounters of visualisation. John H. Salmela considers:

Emotionally, the gymnasts performing on the pommel horse or balance beam would require an alert but more relaxed mental state, while on the floor and vault, for both sexes, the gymnasts must be firing on all

²³ I continually returned to these guidelines throughout the practical projects and drew on them for different aspects of the work. I discuss examples of this in more detail over the next three chapters.

cylinders, requiring maximum speed to accomplish the somersaulting and twisting movements (2011: 110).

Thus, the mental preparation for these events will vary. The time between events in competition allows for the shift in cognitive modes.

Basics of Gymnastics

Olympic gymnastics coach Marta Karolyi states:

There must be mastery over the basics, which are truly the most important building blocks of a gymnastics career. The basics include strength, conditioning and the perfection of the easiest skills so that the more difficult ones are built upon a rock-solid foundation (2004: 25).

In drawing on this and non-elite gymnastics principles of preparatory exercises, I addressed the re-discovery of the basic elements of gymnastics. The aim of uncovering the basic skills and building blocks of gymnastics was to begin to determine what elements of gymnastics could be pulled forward in addressing the performers' needs.

Using the ideas generated from the visualisation techniques mentioned above, I began work towards understanding my own training, re-learning ingrained concepts and principles and uncovering the basic skills and elements. After the analytical distillation process of deciphering the basic elements - handstands, turns, cartwheels, scales, jumps, leaps, and rolls - I engaged in visualisation to understand the learning process of these skills. In this process, I began by lying on my back, arms at my sides, legs extended and muscles relaxed. Here, I employed *gymnastics-based breathing* to begin

the work. I then closed my eyes, released external thought and began picturing my own body in front of me. I started with space, imagining the gymnasium and understanding its size and structure. I then placed myself within the space. I examined my own body and attempted to visualise an accurate image of my form. I then watched the image of myself perform a handstand. After I repeated this several times I could then dissect in my mind the key moments of movement required for the handstand:

1. Harmonic poise.
2. Place right foot forward, keep balance on left leg.
3. Shift balance to right foot.
4. Lift left leg backward into a scale.
5. Lever body forward, with balance still on right foot.
6. Shift weight onto both hands.
7. Lift right leg off floor.
8. Lift body to an upside down vertical stance.
9. Focus eyes between hands.
10. Balance with strength from body's core.
11. Split legs.
12. Lever body back towards ground.
13. Place right foot on ground.
14. Lever body backwards, with balance on right foot.
15. Place left foot on ground.
16. Harmonic poise.

After dissecting the key components of the handstand using a cognitive distillation in the visualisation process, I systematically attempted the handstand with my body (See DVD PPI 1.2). I used this same technique when exploring each of the other basic elements. This allowed me to reconsider the learning process of the gymnast and also re-engage myself with the use of

vivid imagery. Through analysis of the techniques used, I found the application of the following most useful for this process: use of all the senses, use of internal and external imagery, regular practice of imagery, visualising in real time and practicing of imagery in a relaxed state (Cogan and Vidmar, 2000). However, through this process, the connotation of the word 'imagery' proved to be counterproductive for the work. As previously discussed above, I have distinguished a difference between the terms 'imagery' and 'visualisation'. Therefore, when utilising Cogan and Vidmar's techniques, I adapted them to use the word visualisation. In this instance, the term visualisation allowed me to accurately visualise my surroundings and myself. Furthermore, visualisation is an ongoing process of refinement, constantly honing the relationship between the doer and his or her own body, mind, and performance. Whereas the term 'imagery' is often 'visually descriptive or figurative', visualisation grounds the gymnast in the reality of his/her own performance (Syers and Conolly, 1984: 47). Syers and Connolly assert 'visualisation is the process of watching yourself on a screen in your mind's eye, consciously evoking' scenarios 'usually towards a specific end.' Furthermore, they state that visualisation requires a unique focus on 'auditory and kinaesthetic (feeling) component(s)' (1984: 47). In consideration of this, and the deep practice of specific visualisation in gymnastics training, I will refer to this specific visualisation as *gymnastics-based visualisation*, from here onwards.

This use of *gymnastics-based visualisation* proved to be equally as useful and vital in the second and third stages of this research project. I discuss the

development, application and importance of *gymnastics-based visualisation* to this PhD project in more detail over the next two chapters and in the conclusion of this thesis and how it can be a useful tool for the performer across a variety of contexts.

Movement

After the completion of Phase 1 of this project, I reflected:

While it was useful to uncover the basic elements of gymnastics and visualisation, I'm wondering how I'm going to bridge gymnastics with performance. Is it just a process of trial and error? It seems as though I'll need some sort of adaptation process to connect the two practices. (See Appendix 1.3 for full journal entry)

While the exploration in Phase 1 was integral to this process and developed the beginning foundations of this work, I started questioning how I could bridge the work into performative contexts. Phase 2 of this project became about addressing another one of my key needs as a performer: movement. During Phase 2, I attempted to use forms of gymnastics as primary material in movement-based improvisation and play workshops and exercises.

Through the work of Phase 1 of the process, I developed further practical research questions. Specifically:

- How can I use my training as a gymnast to activate me as a performer?
- How can I use basic elements of gymnastics as beginning points of activation for theatrical performance?
- How do the external forms of gymnastics enhance my corporeal awareness?

Below I will discuss one example of the work I explored in the studio, which was beneficial to the overall process and provided insight for the next two practical projects.

Acrobatics in Play

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis, the idea of the refinement of the body to create a strong physical culture can be seen in the rise of gymnastics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries across Western Europe and America. This lineage has directly affected my own practices as a gymnast and a performer on levels not previously realised before this research. In applying the understanding gained from Part 1 of this thesis, I drew on principles of 'harmonic gymnastics', Laban's 'new gymnastics', and Lecoq's 'dramatic acrobatics' towards bridging the gap between overt gymnastics and work necessary for the actor's process.

As a first point of entry, I explored the engagement that 'emerges not from continuous movement but a change from static to more fluid bodily efforts' (Preston 2011:66). Here, I interrogated Stebbins' statue poses using elite gymnastics scales as starting points. As mentioned in Chapter 2, statue posing 'belongs to a long tradition of "living pictures". [...] Performers singly or in groups either copy the bodily positions and spatial arrangements depicted in existing art works or create original scenes' (Ruyter, 1999: 116). From the statue pose the performer transforms through expression in movement exposing the inner life and movement of the statue. 'The activity of statue posing [...] was conceived as an instrument by which people [...] could reap

spiritual as well as physical benefits' (1999: 117). To begin work on the statue poses, I employed *gymnastics-based visualisation* to initiate the exercise. Here, I visualised my body in my mind's eye, standing in front of me. I then 'saw' myself in a basic scale and watched my body move freely in my mind. At first I was concerned the 'fluid bodily efforts' would be forfeited by contrived preconceived ideas of movement. However, by using *gymnastics-based breathing* as the starting point, in both visualisation and movement, I freed myself of this outcome. In a journal entry dated 30 January 2012 I noted, 'It felt surreal. I had seen my body do things I did not know it could and then felt my body do things, I did not know it could' (See Appendix 1.4 for full journal entry). I was able to feel through my body what my mind had visualised. This was achieved through deep knowledge of what my 'self' was capable of from years of intensive training and self-development. This touches on Leslie Howe's ideas of the self and the body, in that 'the self is inextricably related to the body, while it is also a construction out of the body-generated consciousness not reducible to body alone. Simply, the self is more than body, but without body there is no more' (2003: 95). Thus through understanding my body through my 'self' I was able to formulate images that subsequently translated into actions. In this instance, *gymnastics-based visualisation* was able to create a bridge between the formalised gymnastics elements and performance play.

To continue looking into the *gymnastics-based practices* as impetus for improvisation and play, I looked at Delsartean ideas of movement. I began

with Delsarte's 'excentric', 'normal', and 'concentric' movements. In Delsarte's work there is:

[D]ifferentiation of elements in dynamic terms: each element belongs to one of three categories: 'excentric', moving out from the centre; 'normal', the centre itself; and 'concentric', moving towards the centre. Thus everything in the universe is viewed as either suspended (centred) or in motion (Ruyter, 1996: 63).

In understanding this within gymnastics and performance contexts, we can see the gymnast/actor in either a neutral ready stance (suspended) or within elements (in motion). To explore this idea, I looked at cartwheels and rolls as gymnastic-based starting points. For me, the cartwheel accentuated 'excentric' movement and the roll emphasised 'concentric' movement. Similarly, as Laban discusses, the 'cartwheeling' movement provides unique actions of the body. He states:

Normal cartwheeling, in which the body tilts sideways, is a rotation of the body around its forward-backward axis. The extraordinary fact of this movement is the occurrence of two secret turns, i.e., a renaming of all space directions, with the exception of vertical (Knust, 1979: 192).

For Laban, the movement of the cartwheel provides progression, allowing for other movements to follow subsequently. Therefore, the body should feel the natural impulse to respond physically at the end of the cartwheeling motion.

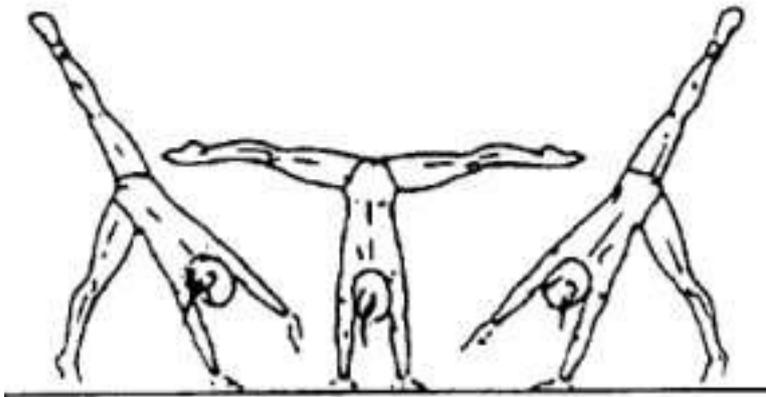


Figure 8: Depiction of a basic cartwheel

When applying this in practice, I sensed the connection between the written ideas of these movement forms, but the actuality of creating movement improvisation proved especially difficult. I struggled when using the overt gymnastics movements as starting points for physical improvisation. I found 'I cannot seem to move freely out of the cartwheel or roll. My body becomes stuck and the organic energy is lost' (See Appendix 1.5 for full journal entry). I felt the internal and external extensions and contractions of my body, but could not adapt the overtly presentational moves of cartwheels and rolls towards sufficiently addressing my performer needs. To work through this, I drew on Lecoq's 'dramatic acrobatics' as the next stage of development.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Lecoq's previous gymnastics training heavily influenced his own pedagogy. Lecoq's movement training for the actor uses elements of elite gymnastics (acrobatics) and non-elite gymnastics (preparatory exercises). One of his key arguments is that acrobatics should not be used for movement's sake but rather everything should emphasise 'play'. Using acrobatics, Lecoq guided the actor towards re-discovery of

freedom of movement: ‘Dramatic acrobatics begin by leaps and somersaults which become gradually more difficult, progressing to diving rolls, forward and backward flips’ each reverting back to the dramatic justification of the movement (Lecoq, 2000: 73). For instance, ‘a somersault might be accidental — say I bump into an obstacle, fall and roll [...] By means of acrobatic performance, the actor reaches the limits of dramatic expression’ (ibid). In considering Lecoq’s notions of acrobatics, I chose to explore the basic gymnastics elements with a deeper sense of playfulness in the hope this would activate me as a performer.

Part of the aim of exploring the overt gymnastics movement in theatre play was to dispel cultural perceptions of gymnastics being a mimetic form, with no internal requirements. I also sought to directly use basic gymnastics elements, exposed earlier in the project, towards play and improvisation, thereby bridging the gap between the pre-performative and performative. In response to these aims, I developed the following exercise, which I explored in the studio:

Step 1: Play a piece of music.

Step 2: Enter the space.

Step 3: Stand in harmonic poise.

Step 4: Employ the *gymnastics-based breathing*.

Step 5: Begin exploring the basic elements of gymnastics (handstand, cartwheel, turn, leap, jump, and roll).

Step 6: As the movement continues, begin allowing the body to extend the moments between the movements – drawing on the kinaesthetic energy from the completion of each movement.

Step 7: Begin allowing the kinaesthetic energy to move the body

through space, moving freely between the basic gymnastics skills and free movement.

Step 8: Allow the basic gymnastics skills to grow and evolve, playing with the kinaesthetic energy to drive the non-gymnastic and gymnastics movement.

Step 9: Allow basic gymnastics elements to fade, towards open acrobatic-based movement, moving freely throughout the space.

Step 10: Let the movement fade, return to harmonic poise²⁴.

(See DVD PPI 1.3)

This exercise also brought forward a key principle of gymnastics training and performance: kinaesthetic energy. Kinaesthetic energy is described as the energy the body possesses gained through motion. Within elite gymnastics training and competition, the gymnast is guided to develop a deep connection with kinaesthetic energy and response. For instance, in the vaulting exercise, the kinaesthetic energy of the gymnast is built up through the sprint leading to the springboard. This harnessing of kinaesthetic energy allows the gymnast to propel from the springboard to the vaulting horse and into a dismount of his/her choosing. The harnessing of kinaesthetic energy allows the gymnast to adapt and play with movement; it maximises movement possibilities while limiting exertion.

²⁴ I have written this exercise from the perspective of the performer/participant. When facilitated for other actors, the exercise would be described/disseminated differently.

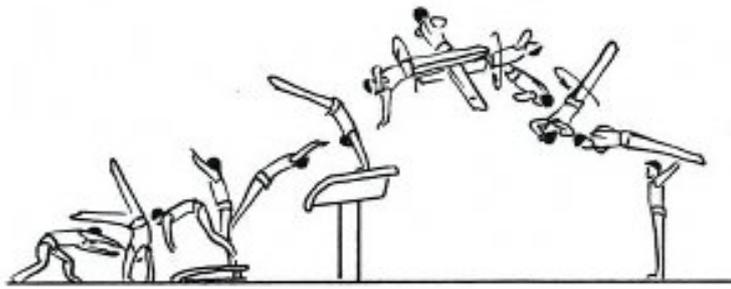


Figure 9: Kinaesthetic energy in vaulting exercise.

By drawing on this kinaesthetic energy in this exercise in the studio, my body was afforded a sense of play in action. It was not confined to its habitual action, but rather followed a kinaesthetic response to move. This provided a continuous interplay between the internal and the external. During this exercise, I began by drawing solely on the basic elements of gymnastics. I then allowed my body to engage in the kinaesthetic energy drawn from each movement. This energy began to develop an impulse, which I explored by moving between free-movement and basic gymnastics elements. I then drew on Lecoq's notion of play, and began to allow the gymnastics skills to take different forms, beginnings, and endings. This then grew into open free acrobatic movement, where my body was in a constant state of kinaesthetic play. I discovered that through exploration of the basic gymnastics elements in play, the body began to explore further possibilities, extending my corporeal vocabulary.

At the end of Phase 2 I began to question, what points of *gymnastics-based practices* could be used in order to gain a more extensive bodily vocabulary? Which points of gymnastics activate me as a performer towards performance?

These questions led me into the final phase of the process, where I applied the use of languages, practices, and processes of gymnastics training I had investigated in the first two stages towards a performance exercise.

Phase 3

In the third phase of the process, I attempted to understand the key points of activation that my gymnastics training could give towards theatre performance. This focussed on addressing the following research question:

- How can I explore and adapt this training in order to find ways to activate me as a performer?

From this initial question, I formed subsequent questions that guided this phase. How can I take the purely external forms of gymnastics and distill them into internal activation points for performance? What are the potential capabilities of using my gymnastics training towards different theatrical dramaturgies? These questions were the basis of the performance exercise exploration. This phase worked into four main stages ending in a short text-based performance exercise based on the opening pages of Nadia Comaneci's autobiography, *Letters to a Young Gymnast*²⁵. More importantly it began to address the notion of 'imagination' and how gymnastics-based work might facilitate this.

²⁵ Nadia Comaneci (1961-present) is a retired Romanian gymnast who competed in the 1976 and 1980 Olympics and is best known for scoring the first perfect 10.0 in Olympic history at the 1976 Olympic games.

Imagination

In order to move from training and improvisation and play towards application in a performance exercise, I needed to develop a new structure for working. The sessions were no longer about merely using my body to explore my past training in new terms, but now to investigate the training within a performance frame. The working framework for this stage involved exploring the use of *gymnastics-based visualisation* towards building an activating image vocabulary and the exploration of the body and voice through embodiment of imagery. I adapted this framework for this practical project.

In the optional levels in gymnastics, each routine is specifically modelled for each gymnast taking into consideration: her skill set, body type, and creative nature. Each event in elite gymnastics is distinctive and requires different modes of engagement and energies. The balance beam, for example, requires:

[P]recision, steadiness and fearlessness. It requires a gymnast who can tumble, leap and dance in a straight line on a piece of leather-covered wood that is approximately four feet off the ground and about four inches wide. She also has to demonstrate anxiety control, flexibility, grace and power all at the same time. Beam probably requires the most diverse skills of all the women's events (Cogan, 2000: 81).

Drawing on this, I chose the balance beam as my beginning source of external forms. I wanted to see if after distilling the beam routine down into a performative state, I could retain the original principles of the event. Could I feel a sense of power, grace, and quality of ease within a monologue? Could

this be achieved through distillation of overtly physical movements? On a secondary level, I also chose to explore a balance beam routine to shift away from floor-based acrobatics and investigate the other events in women's gymnastics.

I began the process with the *gymnastics-based visualisation* used in Phase 1 and Phase 2 to address this notion of a 'wholly in sync' body and mind. However, this time, I imagined my gymnast-self in approaching the balance beam and performing a balance beam routine, through cognitive thought. Here I was moving beyond the basic form of gymnastics-based visualisation as explored earlier in the practical work, towards specifically addressing my needs as a performer. By this, I mean I was employing a certain level of creative imagination to the process. Within the visualisation process, instead of only visualising the skills within the routine, I imaginatively created an entire routine, involving the skills and choreography. After repeating this several times and having the beam routine firmly set in my mind, I internalised the visualisation and translated it in physical movement in effort to demonstrate the connectivity of the body and mind. By understanding my own corporeal repertoire, I was able to create a physical sequence out of use of visualisation techniques and then internalise those visualisations and perform the physical score with a sense of preparedness. However, on the first attempt after the visualisation I noted I felt 'nervous, as if I wouldn't be able to actually perform the moves. I felt as though my body would fail me. A body that has grown older; a body that is no longer what it was when I was competing' (See Appendix 1.6 for full journal entry). I allowed my mind to block my body

through fear and an ingrained 'I cannot' instead of allowing the connection of the bodymind to guide me towards a state of preparedness and readiness. Church describes this as 'experiencing a body/body part as no longer one's own, that is when it resists integration into one's life, either due to something like a loss of neurophysiological control [...] or athletic dysfunction' (in Howe, 2003: 97). To shift back towards bodymind integration and ownership of my body, I drew again on the preparatory exercises and *gymnastics-based visualisation* to guide me. This time, I allowed my body to feel each movement as my mind's eye produced it. At moments, my physical body even responded in small notes of movement. In gymnastics practice, 'the most important thing about imagery and mental practice is making the images clear and precise and then putting them into practice in the most efficient way, which may include the anticipated actions, thoughts, emotions and results' (Salmela in Jemni et al. 2011: 150). Thus, when I repositioned myself to embody the images in a physical movement sequence, I was prepared both mentally and physically.

Through this process I attempted to accentuate the effectiveness of mental preparation for physical performance. Through use of the *gymnastics-based visualisation* I allowed my body to perform the beam routine I had visualised: connecting the mind's images with the body's movement. This process accentuated my understanding of my own corporeal awareness and my knowledge of my own body vocabulary. This performance of the ingrained balance beam routine (within a studio space) moved me towards the second

stage of my process, where I addressed internalising the overtly physical towards inner activation.

After creating this routine and practicing it, I wrote down the score of movements from mount to dismount. I did this in the same fashion as in Phase 1 when uncovering the basic elements. Each precise moment was denoted creating a written movement score (See Appendix 1.7 for full breakdown of routine). From this score I used a Zeami reduction exercise learnt in the structured improvisation sessions of Zarrilli's training, whereby the actor is asked to begin with 100% external form and is slowly invited to reduce the external movement towards 100% internal engagement.²⁶ Zarrilli describes this sequence as follows:

Standing with feet at shoulder width, repeat three cycles of the opening breath-control exercise, keeping your internal eye focussed on the in-breath and out-breath. Check your awareness: above, behind along the back, of the soles of the feet, to the periphery. Sense the completion of the final out-breath, and on the impulse of the next exhalation allow the arms to come to shoulder height (2009: 101).

In this specific sequence I used the score as impetus for reducing the overtly presentational forms of gymnastics towards internal embodiment and impulse. Similarly, in elite gymnastics, visualisation is used in this way. The gymnast is invited to visualise their routine from beginning to end, feeling every movement within their body but not executing it outwardly. In the DVD

²⁶ In this exercise, Zarrilli invites the actor to begin in a neutral, ready stance and breathe down to the center of the body. When the performer is prepared, Zarrilli invites them to engage in the sequence. As the exercise continues, Zarrilli gives simple directions of percentages by which to reduce the physical movement of the breathing sequence towards an entirely internal engagement of the breathing sequence.

attached the reader can see both the balance beam routine, followed by the embodied impulse (See DVD PPI 1.4).

It was at this moment that I discovered a pure potential for activation through *gymnastics-based practices*. As I worked my way through the balance beam routine using internal engagement, images began to arise within my mind's eye. These images differed throughout the improvisation and at one point were in a power play with the original improvisation. I wrote, 'my body felt as though it wanted to follow some of the images arising, it wanted to move with them' (See Appendix 1.8 for full journal entry).

As previously mentioned, activating images, according to Zarrilli, are a way of engaging the 'the mental (awareness) element within the bodymind as a gestalt' (2011: 90). In response to my body's impulse to follow images, I drew on notions from Stebbins, who used mental imagery alongside breath to activate the body. According to Stebbins, through mental imagery we can 'perceive the images and sensations of our surroundings, and formulate real or symbolic imagery of ideas, things, and events' (1892, 22). For Stebbins, dynamic breathing in conjunction with mental imagery animates the body. Similarly in Zarrilli's work, for example in the yogic breathing exercises, the performer is asked to imagine a steady stream of water, flowing up from the floor, through the feet towards their core, through the body and out through the finger tips into the extended space. This image allows the actor to be in a continuous flow of movement and ease.

In sport science, the image as a result of visualisation work can cause overt physical response or show the body's 'kinaesthetic intelligence [...] respond[ing] to the expressive powers of the mind' (Sheikh, 1994: 159). It is said to show physiological response such as 'salivation, increase in papillary size, increased heart rate, changes in electromyograms, increases in blood glucose, inhibition of gastrointestinal activity, and changes in skin temperature' (ibid). This autonomous response of the body was present in my work, as I noted the sweat build up in my hands and feet as the visualisation and imagery progressed. From the sports psychology perspective, Pribram's model of imagery understands the development of physiological response to 'further describe the interdependence of the mind and body' (ibid). Pribram's model is identified as the 'TOTE and TOTEM systems. The TOTE system refers to the exchange of feedback' or communication between the mind and body 'and feed forward mechanisms between the environment and the organism in order to produce movement' (ibid). In other words, my body was feeding backward and forward to my visualisations creating imagery out of the interplay created.

Through active repetition of this improvisation I discovered and selected particular activating images and wrote them out as a movement piece in the same approach as the previous two exercises. In this particular process, I used the imagery produced from the previous exercise and embodied them towards kinaesthetic energy. I began through employing the *gymnastics-based visualisation* again, saw the movement score clearly in my mind, internalised the movement and images and let my body outwardly translate

the images. Each moment of the movement was activated through the image that I had internalised and the body continued to respond by drawing on the harnessed kinaesthetic energy.

In this process, I could feel my physical gymnastics vocabulary working cohesively with the imagery and performative physicality. My body felt free and able to feed back and forth to my mind in a fully engaged manner. This led me into the final stage of the application towards performance process in which I re-internalised the images once more towards performance of a text.

In a final stage of this exploration I took the movement score created by the images and visualisation and internalised them towards performance of a piece of text. As mentioned, for the performance, I chose to select excerpts from the opening of Nadia Comaneci's autobiography, *Letters to a Young Gymnast* (See Appendix 1.9 for full text). I specifically chose this text to relate back to the gymnast's internal narrative in competition. By distilling the external movement of a gymnastics routine down to images, and then inserting the images into a gymnast's self-narrative, I aimed to draw on a clear connection between the two. In the DVD attached, the reader can see the activating images exercise followed by the monologue (See DVD PPI 1.5). This next section of the chapter will reflect critically on the performance of this text and expose discoveries that arose from the performance.

In the performance I drew on the images as activation to engage my body and voice. I realised it was essential that I fully understood within my body the first

three stages of this process for the engagement to work optimally. For example, I needed the internal knowledge of the activating image score I built out of Stage 3 to allow the images to flow freely while speaking the text. If I had been consciously thinking of the images while attempting to perform the text, the two would not have been able to work harmoniously and the engagement would have been forfeited.

On the first attempt to internalise the images towards the text, I noted that the images could not sustain the amount of text I had chosen, thus not allowing a constant flow of image energy. The text felt contrived and I felt as though there was more to tell through less vocal language. This realisation led me towards allowing the images to not only guide the body and voice, but to bring about text. In response to this, I memorised the entirety of the original text. However, on any given occasion, I allowed the images to produce whatever text felt appropriate in that given circumstance. In one instance, only a few words came about, and in another almost the entirety of the text was spoken. Each repetition of the internalised images brought about new physical and vocal engagement for me as the performer. I moved this forward into performance, allowing myself the freedom to 'play' and to explore the unknown. Within the performance I was able to draw fully on the images at play. I spoke text, which I had not previously, and did not speak text, which I had previously.

The application stage allowed me to investigate the continuous interchange of communication between body and mind through imagination. From body

image, to mind image and back to body image, each stage of Phase 3 explored the heightened relationship between the two entities allowing a cohesive and engaged response of the performer. The application phase provided several discoveries, particularly a pathway towards performance development and activating the actor within performance.

Conclusion

This practical exploration focussed on understanding my previous elite gymnastics training and revealed itself in three key phases. This project allowed me to explore key elements of elite gymnastics training and the application of elite gymnastics and non-elite gymnastics towards performative work. More importantly, by addressing my own performative needs, I was able to discover selected *gymnastics-based practices* that could address these needs. These included: an *extra-daily warm-up* to activate my body, *gymnastics-based visualisation* to activate my mind and imagination, and basic elements of gymnastics and exercises to emphasis movement and play.

In the interest of moving the research forward towards Practical Project 2, I consider the questions 'What is training?' and 'What is it for?' as they proved to be a central investigation of this process. Through assessment of the findings in this practical project, I argue that gymnastics is, in fact, a holistic process by which the gymnast is trained towards development of a bodymind continuum. The gymnast is simultaneously trained physically and mentally so that competition (performance) is executed with a deep bodymind cohesion and preparedness. Bela Karolyi reflected on this idea stating 'our kids had

more physical hours in their bones, more definition in their systems, and that meant we were going to be more consistent than any other team' (1994: 2).

This project helped rectify some of the major questions and concerns I was having towards understanding actor training and performance through the lens of gymnastics trainings and processes. My own understanding of my trainings became clearer and more solidified through this process, specifically the understanding of the importance and usefulness of mental preparation and training.

Throughout the process, I made several discoveries and developed new research questions for future practices. The following *gymnastics-based practices* and principles were discovered within this process and were developed further in the subsequent practical projects:

- The learning structure of the gymnast and application of this structure towards the learning structure of the actor.
- *Extra-daily warm-up*
- The basic elements of gymnastics towards extended physical vocabulary and body awareness
- *Gymnastics-based visualisation*
- *Gymnastics-based breathing*
- *Gymnastics-based exercises* towards improvisation and play
- The key principle of kinaesthetic energy and how it can be used in actor training and towards activating the performer.
- The use of *gymnastics-based visualisation* in combination with activating imagery can be used towards performance work.

However, certain limitations of this project became clear upon further reflection. In particular, while this work may have been beneficial in addressing my own needs as a performer, I also realised that I have a deep connection and understanding of my own body. This might not be the case for other performers. Similarly, in the visualisation processes, I was able to see my self do particular tasks quite clearly. However, I understand this is partially because I have had years of practice. Furthermore, as it was a self-reflective process it did not address how to facilitate performers in this work, particularly performers with little to no background in gymnastics. Therefore, in Practical Project 2 I explored the relationship between coach and gymnast in the hope of discovering strategies for working with non-gymnast adults. Nor did the project address the relationship with other performers or working in a setting with multiple other performers. Indeed, I was able to focus solely on my own process and development. In response to understanding the need of individuals within group settings, Practical Project 2 worked to address individual development of the performer and ensemble work.

Finally, this project produced a number of observations and questions, which were brought forward in exploration in the subsequent projects. The next chapter of this thesis will examine the work of Practical Project 2, in which I investigated the *gymnastics-based practices* towards work with performers. Practical Project 2 continued the development of discoveries from this practical project and also developed further exercises, workshops and languages using *gymnastics-based practices*. In this chapter I will discuss the

ways in which I disseminated *gymnastics-based practices* to the non-gymnast adults in order to fuller understand the potentiality and trajectory of this work.

Chapter 4

Practical Project 2: Developing 'Gymnastics-Based Practices' Towards Facilitating the Contemporary Performer

An actor must be given the tools of his trade: the understanding of methods. By this we mean an understanding of what he must do in order to obtain the skills of dance, or mime, or acrobatic movement. But this process must be taught in context of an actor's needs, which will be different from those of a dancer or acrobat (Dennis, 2002: 112).

Introduction

Here we see Dennis' argument that actors require a certain set of skills, specific to their performative needs. She argues this may include acrobatics and gymnastics, but they must be adapted for the processes of the actor. Practical Project 2 considered Dennis' argument of adapting processes to the contemporary actor's needs and addresses how *gymnastics-based practices* might be useful in providing for the contemporary performer.

The second practical exploration of this research took place over twelve weeks from January to March 2013. In this investigation I interrogated *gymnastics-based practices* towards work with performers. Through reflection on the first practical project, I extracted key frameworks to move forward the development in Practical Project 2, including the *extra-daily warm-up* and *gymnastics-based visualisation*. Again I used elite-gymnastics as the main source of the work, with non-elite practices and my former actor trainings as bridges between the physical exercise and the participants.

This process occurred in three main phases. In the first phase I guided eighteen first-year undergraduates in the Research and Performance module at the Exeter University Drama Department. In the second phase the same eighteen students were invited to develop and perform a 40-minute performance. Finally, in the third phase, three of the eighteen students volunteered to partake in an extension project of the work for the explicit purposes of this research.

The training phase was an opportunity for me to explore and consider the building blocks of gymnastics elements and pedagogies and languages of gymnastics processes towards work with performers. In the second phase, I acted as a facilitator during a process of devising for the participants where I drew upon the languages and vocabulary built during the training period towards facilitation. In the final phase, I worked intensively with the three participants in a devising and rehearsal process towards a devised physical performance. Each of these phases proved to be integral to my overall understandings and the development of this overall project.

I based the practical exploration around addressing the following key questions:

- What specific languages, processes, and practices of *gymnastics-based practices* could be useful for the performer?
- How can I communicate and 'transmit' these languages, processes and practices in order to facilitate the contemporary actor in a gymnastics-based process, towards a devised performance?

The key aims for this exploration were:

- To further develop an approach to performer training using gymnastics-based practices.
- To uncover what aspects of gymnastics-based practices might address the contemporary performer's needs.
- To reveal how gymnastics-based practices can be used in the process of performance development.
- To uncover the performer's 'understanding' of gymnastics-based practices.

Project Development

I deliberately developed this practical exploration based around existing structures of gymnastics training discussed in Chapter 3. As mentioned in the conclusion of Chapter 3, one of the limitations of Practical Project 1 was my pre-ingrained understanding of gymnastics and performer training. I understood this could prove difficult moving into working with other individuals who perhaps did not have the same level of experience. To tackle this, I further explored the learning process of the gymnast. I considered the participants in Practical Project 2 to exist within the Sampling Years and develop from the Cognitive Stage of learning towards the Associative Stage.²⁷ Furthermore, within elite gymnastics there are four main stages for training and development: preparation, pre-competition, competition, and transition. The preparation phase usually accounts of 70 percent physical preparation and 30 percent technical training. The concentration is on general physical preparation, endurance training, consolidation of core skills and learning individual skills and combination of skills. The pre-competition phase is usually

²⁷ Because of the short time frame of the process, I did not attempt to guide the performers towards an autonomous stage of learning. I felt this would be rushing the process and hinder the overall research.

40 percent physical preparation and 60 percent technical training. The content includes general and specific physical preparation, perfection of skills and combinations and practicing part and full routines. The competition phase is 30 percent physical preparation and 70 percent technical training. The normally high workload is reduced in this phase to enable the gymnast to focus on the quality of routines and mental preparation (Readhead, 2013). Finally, the transition phase occurs after all other phases are complete. After the demands of the competition phase, a period of relaxation and recovery is implemented followed by an introduction to the next cycle of training. Understanding the importance of these models in gymnastics training, I chose to mirror this structure of learning and training throughout the practical process. I hoped this would provide a feasible structure for learning and development.

| Gymnastics Training Phases | Practical Project Phases | Role | Time Length | Number of Participants | Work Development Plan |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------|------------------------|---|
| Preparation Phase | Phase 1 | Trainer | 6 weeks | 18 | Training |
| Pre-competition Phase | Phase 2 | Trainer Facilitator | 3 weeks | 18 | Performance Development and Rehearsal |
| Competition Phase | Phase 3 | Trainer Facilitator | 2 weeks | 3 | Two week intensive training, devising and performance process |
| Transition Phase | Phase 4 | Facilitator | 1 week | 3/18 | Reflection/Evaluation |

Figure 10: Phases of Practical Project 2

In this chapter, instead of providing a detailed account of the process, I will focus on three main points, which I believe to combat Anne Dennis' argument above and display how this work might contribute to addressing the needs of the contemporary performer. The main concepts explored are: individual personal development, bodymind relationship development, and ensemble work. Within these larger elements I also look at the relationship between facilitator and performer, and devising work.

Phase 1

As stated above, during the first phase I worked with a group of eighteen students over six weeks. During this period I addressed the following research question:

- What specific languages, processes, and practices of *gymnastics-based practices* could be useful for the performer?

This phase focussed heavily on the continued development of the *extra-daily warm-up* explored in Practical Project 1, development of the gymnastics-based vocabulary and elements, creation of *gymnastics-based exercises* and further development of *gymnastics-based visualisation*. I used my own understanding of gymnastics and performer training and drew upon histories and practices of gymnastics discovered in Part 1 of this thesis. I also used sport science and psychology models to aid in this practical research. In this next portion of the chapter I will examine some of the practices in this phase and how they addressed the work of the performer, specifically: individual development, bodymind development, and ensemble work. I also discuss the coach-gymnast relationship and how that was developed in this project.

Individual Development

When entering the studio I was aware of the implications of bringing overtly physical work into the room, particularly to individuals who may have never consciously practiced gymnastics. I was also aware that each student would need individual attention and development and that up until this point I had only facilitated myself in the work. Therefore, moving forward from Practical Project 1, one of the aims of this project research was to understand the work from the position of the facilitator. I questioned the difference in the language of the coach or facilitator and the language of the gymnast or the participant and how I could transpose my understanding as the gymnast (participant) towards an understanding as the coach (facilitator). During Phase 1 of this project one of the challenges I faced was apprehension and fear in some of the performers. I believe this is important to mention as I had predicted such an outcome in my first practical exploration and believe that it could be an ongoing factor in the work. To navigate these apprehensions, I worked closely in line with the participants' individual availability and learning, rather than at the pace I originally intended. I had originally planned a more extensive process. However, it became clear that each student's individual growth would occur in his or her own developmental time frame. In understanding this, I worked more specifically on small forms, elements, and structures. I believe this was the best course of action to encourage optimal growth and development in the students. It also aided in my overall understanding in how the work can be translated and disseminated to performers.

Similarly, as I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I developed a methodology towards gaining qualitative understanding of the development of the individual and the group:

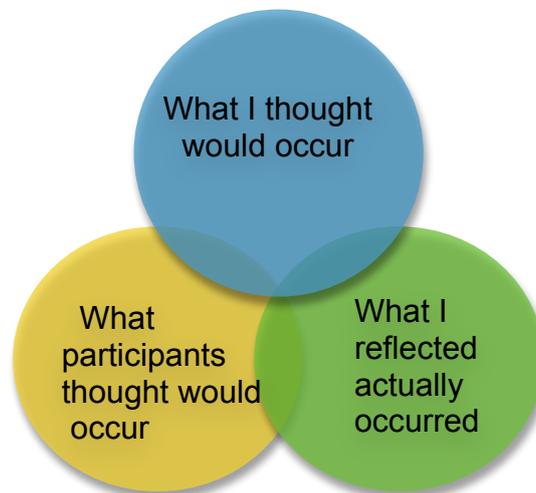


Figure 11: Triangulation of discovery

As mentioned in the Introduction, this triangulation allowed me to make certain qualitative evaluations about the process and the effectiveness of the work. Furthermore, according to the existing Practice-as-Research bibliography, to acquire knowledge through practice the researcher can draw on the following: journals from the participants, pre and post questionnaires, video documentation, and interviews with the participants (Nelson, 2009, 2013; Edmonds and Candy, 2010). For this practical-based work, to obtain qualitative understanding, I asked each of the students to complete a questionnaire detailing their physical, performative, and athletic history. (See Appendix 2.3 for full questionnaire) I also chose to do this to gauge the different beginning levels of each student and to understand the effectiveness

of the work for each individual. The opening questionnaire gave me the following results:

- 89% of the students considered themselves to be non-athletic.
- 84% of students admitted to engaging in physical activity less than once per week.
- 78% of students had no previous intensive actor/acting training.
- 95% of students had no previous engagement with gymnastics.

These results, along with others received from the questionnaires, allowed me to form a working structure that I considered most useful for the students' learning trajectory. I took these results directly into the first day of practice, adjusting the work to meet the specific needs of the group. This questionnaire was also bookended with a questionnaire given to each of the participants at the end of the process. I aimed to understand their growth and internal assessment of the work. Alongside this, I invited the participants to keep a daily journal recording their thoughts, feelings and understandings of each day's work. Furthermore, I documented several of the workshops through video recording in attempt to gain an objective perspective. This consistent documentation allowed me to engage fully in the work and reflect back critically on the process.

To begin work on the individual and to push the work of Practical Project 1 forward, I began each day with the extra-daily warm-up developed and discussed in Chapter 3. While I will not go into detail about this work, it was an important factor in the development of each individual. Over time, the structured warm-up increased their muscular strength and flexibility, endurance, understanding of their own body, physical vocabulary, bodymind

relationship, and preparedness for further work. Indeed, in a post-exercise discussion, Armonie Melville commented, 'I can see the difference in myself. I have more energy and I feel more physically capable. This makes me feel like I can do a lot more than I thought I was capable of' (2013). Similarly Joe Hennessy reflected, 'At first I didn't want to do the exercise. I thought, "This is a drama class, not PE." But as we go on, I crave it. I find I need it in order to feel prepared for the other stuff we do in class' (2013). Several of the students began displaying this deeper pro-active attitude towards their own development and reflection of their own needs. These reflections and understandings of their own needs continued to develop over the course of the work. For the purposes of this research, I have included an example of the extra-daily warm-up below.

Example of ***Extra-Daily Warm-up***:

- **Endurance Training:** 20 minute run outdoors around Exeter University campus
- **Cool Down** – jog/walk indoors
- **Strength Training:** 12 minute circuit training
 - 6 groups of 2-3 students
 - 2 rotations of 1 minute sets
- 5 minutes free movement
- **10 minutes Relaxation**
 - Relaxation pose
 - Mental note taking and release of muscular tension
- **Flexibility Training:** 20 minutes stretching

Figure 12: Example of *extra-daily warm-up*

Coach-Gymnast Relationship

The relationship between the coach and the gymnast is a crucial part of the elite gymnast's core development. Friedrich Jahn believed the instructor and the gymnast's relationship was central to the training development of the gymnast. Indeed, he argues that the instructor must strictly observe a set of laws to ensure this deep development of the individual gymnast. Similarly he states:

The instructor of gymnastics ought not only to know but also to perform what he teaches [...] Self practice and experience alone afford a clear and distinct idea of every movement and exercise and of the effects each one produces (1828: 152).

Jahn argues that through experiential knowledge of gymnastics, the coach can develop a deeper and more well-rounded relationship with his pupils. One of the questions I had at the conclusion of the first practical project was how to transfer my knowledge of gymnastics as the gymnast towards understanding gymnastics as a trainer, coach, and facilitator. To begin forming this understanding, I drew on my own experience of gymnastics teaching combined with my experience in facilitating theatre play and workshops. I also drew heavily on existing suggestions of the coach-gymnast relationship. I aimed to discover if these could be transferred towards development of the relationship of the facilitator-performer. During all phases of this practical project I worked towards:

- Integration of a common language and vocabulary between the participants and myself.

- Use of side coaching to facilitate the performers towards embodied practice²⁸.
- Individual attention within group dynamics.
- Transparency to facilitate trust and open communication.
- Positive reinforcement to promote the performer's self-narrative and confidence in workshop, rehearsal and performance²⁹.
- Hands-on guidance, to promote a physical trust between participants and myself.³⁰
- Teamwork to promote ensemble development.

I will discuss these terms and processes in deeper detail throughout the remainder of this chapter.

The role of the coach and the relationship of the coach and gymnast became a key framework during this process and towards the development of the pedagogical work. In this instance, I embodied the role of the coach and the participants embodied the role of the gymnast. It should be stated this was not directly communicated to the participants until the end of the process when I held a feedback discussion on the work. The aim of this was to create and nurture a relationship without the barriers of expectation. In post-

²⁸ The definition of side coaching is the act of the director, teacher or coach giving instruction, comment or suggestion on the side to heighten performance of the actor, performer or athlete.

²⁹ As discussed in Chapter 3, I discovered the common self-narratives between athletes and performers. Leonard Berkowitz defines self-narrative as 'the individual's account of the relationship among self-relevant events across time. [...] The individual attempts to understand life events as systematically related. [...] locating them in a sequence or "unfolding process" (1988: 19). Similarly, Jennifer Church argues self narrative cannot be defined without the body; that the self is inextricably rooted in the experiences of the body (Howe, 2003: 95). I drew on the body's experiences in the gymnastics-training to promote development of each individual's self-narrative.

³⁰ This was particularly important in the teaching of basic gymnastics elements, when spotting of the element was necessary. The participants could depend on me physically to guide them in the element.

module/project discussion and feedback, the participants reflected on the relationship to the self, other participants, and the facilitator (me). In relationship to the self, many reflected on an improvement of self-understanding, confidence, and communication. In relationship to the other, the participants reflected on the strength of the ensemble, a deep trust that existed, and promotion of one another. Finally, the participants reflected on the relationship between themselves and the facilitator (me). The general feedback mirrored the original intentions of the investigation. Cara Delaney offered the following reflection:

At the beginning of term you told us you would be transparent with us, if we agreed to be transparent with you. I was really nervous about this module. Gymnastics is not really my thing. But I felt safe and encouraged. The fact that I could be transparent with you and you would be back, automatically made me trust you (2013)³¹.

As Jahn described, the relationship between instructor and gymnast is invaluable and should continue to be nurtured and developed through trust and honesty.

I would argue that the combination of the coach-gymnast relationship and the extra-daily warm-up aided in the development of each of the individuals. By carefully working to each of the participant's needs and also creating a safe and supportive environment, deep individual work and reflection began to occur. I would also argue this work began to form a connection to the

³¹ It should be mentioned that all feedback was voluntary, and the participants were not required to attend this feedback/discussion session. Similarly, with this feedback and any other mentioned in this thesis, not all participants engaged in every aspect in the same way. For instance, while Cara felt a trust imbedded between, Scarlett Rushton did not particularly notice a strong connection between herself and I.

bodymind relationship, which increases a relationship to the self and an understanding of one's own development and developmental needs.

Gymnastics-based Visualisation

Part of my first practical exploration involved discovery of the basic gymnastics elements: scales, leaps, turns, cartwheels, handstands, rolls, and jumps. During Phase 1 of Practical Project 2, I attempted to teach the performers these basic gymnastics elements. This was an opportunity to introduce *gymnastics-based visualisation*, increase individual development, extend the physical repertoire and vocabulary, and further work on the bodymind relationship.

As I discussed in my first practical presentation, *gymnastics-based visualisation* for mental training and preparation is a key component in elite gymnastics. It is used in honing focus and concentration, development of skills and picturing ideal performances. It most often begins in the first stage of learning: the Cognitive Stage. Visualisation invites the athlete/performer to imagine the skill or set of skills they are about to perform. They are then asked to embody that visualisation and attempt the skills or set of skills. Mark Evans discusses Jacques Lecoq's work as a gymnast and how 'he would go over his exercises and routines in his mind on the way home after a session, sensing all the rhythms of the work enhanced through the impact on his imagination and his emotions' (2012: 163). British Olympic Gymnast, Imogen Cairns,

considered her use of visualisation as ‘an extremely important part of my work. I never go into any skill, routine or competition without visualising it at least ten times first’ (2012).

When guiding through visualisation I would often use key phrases such as ‘see yourself,’ ‘tell yourself,’ and ‘feel yourself’. I found the act of facilitating through side coaching allowed the performers to take control of their image. They could begin to use their sensory awareness to deeply engage in their own image. I found this led to: control of nerves, decreased levels of stress in performance, positive self-statements and integration of a bodymind continuum. The use of visualisation in sport training and performance can also ‘improve learning and performance *in any subject* by up to 300%’ (Kemp, 2013: 2). This increased learning is due to what sport psychologist Joaquin Dosil describes as giving athletes the ability ‘to become mental control specialists (just as they are physical control specialists)’ (2006: 4). He argues that this ability aids in acceleration of learning due to control over his/her own holistic development.

Similarly, in drawing on ideas of the *coach-gymnast relationship*, the use of side coaching in visualisation processes can greatly help the development of the gymnast and further the relationship between coach and gymnast. According to Steve Ungerledier, gymnasts ‘have to be in sync with their coaches’. He stresses the importance of the coach in providing mental drivers for the gymnast. For example:

I know what you are feeling up there on the horizontal bar. I also know the sensations of fear, distress, and complete panic that you are going

to feel when you release the bar out of your giant swing for a dynamic triple back dismount. I also know the excitement and pleasure you will get from this maneuver. Once you visualise the element and get comfortable in your mind, you will then be able to perform it on the bar (2005: 177).

Ungerleider says this type of encouragement of the visualisation process allows the gymnast to get to a 'secure, emotional place' of trust in their coach and their own abilities (ibid).

To draw on these ideas and from my own use of visualisation in gymnastics, from the outset of the training, I invited each of the participants to engage in a basic *gymnastics-based visualisation* exercise. As none of the students had used visualisation prior to this, I began with a simple invitation, to start ingraining the use of visualisation into their work. I devised this exercise based on my work in Practical Project 1. Acting as a facilitator, I guided the participants in the following exercise:

Step 1: Invite the participants to lay in relaxation pose, used in the warm-up.

Step 2: Invite the participants to close their eyes taking their focus to their breath.

Step 3: Invite the participants to imagine a blank space.

Step 4: Invite the participants to begin seeing themselves standing in the blank space. Starting from their feet, all the way up to the top of their head, until they can see the image of their form clearly.

Step 5: Invite the participants to stand and embody the image they had created in their mind's eye.

Syer and Connolly argue that 'consciously or unconsciously, we are all adept at visual thinking. However, the step from visual thinking to visualisation is

similar to the step from natural sporting ability to sophisticated technical and tactical skill'. They go on to state that, 'like any physical skill, the ability to create powerful mental imagery needs to be taught and practiced regularly if it is going to improve performance' (1984: 47). The goal of this exercise was to engage the participants in beginning visualisation techniques. I also aimed to discover what level the students were able to engage in the visualisation. In post-exercise discussion, most of the students admitted difficulty in seeing themselves. They reflected they would see themselves for a moment and then the image would fade. When I asked if the image they saw of themselves was true to form, most admitted that it was not. Their bodies were often skewed or distorted. This is often the case for many in beginning visualisation work. The use of visualisation is implemented from the start of gymnastics training and can often take years to refine as a process by which the gymnast can always see every possibility of an action before performing the action. I asked the students to take mental notes of the areas of their body that were skewed in the image. I then invited the participants back into the same visualisation exercise. By repeating the exercise, it allowed the students the opportunity to reengage with the image, taking onboard their mental notes. This process of self-evaluation and understanding is extremely integral to the gymnast. Through deep understanding of their body and the ability to actively self-analyse and reflect, the gymnast can easily adapt and adjust in competition. I argue this deep understanding can be an effective and necessary tool for the contemporary performer. Through a deep understanding of our capabilities, and ourselves we can begin to expand our performative potential. It was my hope that through the integration of visualisation I could begin guiding the

performers towards this deep understanding. I continually came back to this exercise throughout the remainder of the work in the hope it would enrich this relationship over time.

In the next stage of the integration of visualisation into practice, I chose to explore the learning of basic gymnastics elements through *gymnastics-based visualisation*. Similar to the beginning visualisation exercise, the performers are invited to imagine their own form. To fully integrate the use of visualisation as an inherent practice, each skill was taught using the same exercise.

Step 1: Show the participants the guidelines for the skill in the FIG Code of Points and/or demonstrate the skill.

Step 2: Invite the participants to find a space in the room

Step 3: Invite the participants to take harmonic poise and close their eyes.

Step 4: Invite the participants to visualise themselves standing in front of him/herself.

Step 5: Invite the participant to visualise themselves performing the skill they have just encountered.

Step 6: Invite the participants to open their eyes and breathe.

Step 7: Invite the participants to embody the visualisation and attempt the skill.³²

Step 8: Invite the participants to close their eyes and engage in *retrospective visualisation* of the skill they just attempted.³³

Step 9: Invite the participants to re-visualise themselves performing the element at its optimal standard.

Step 10: Invite the performer to attempt the skill again.

³² I found the use of the word 'attempt' to be very important during the training as it helps eliminate the fear of failure in the participant. By 'attempting' the skill, rather than "performing" the skill, they feel more confident in actualising the movement.

³³ *Retrospective Visualisation* – This visualisation invites the participants to 're-see' through their minds eye what they have just physically completed.

Almost every time the element was attempted the second time, there was a high level of improvement. I believe this is partially to do with the body's understanding of the basic element and the mind's understanding of the optimal performance of the skill. Through visualisation and embodiment of the visualisation I found the performers began to access an internal conversation between body and mind and between thought and action. Once the basic accomplishment of the form had been discovered through visualisation, I side coached the performers to reach optimal performance of the element. To demonstrate how this works in practice, I will discuss my facilitation of learning the basic scale.

I began by inviting the performers into the space and into harmonic poise. I demonstrated the basic scale in action. I then asked them to close their eyes and visualise themselves doing the scale. I then invited them to attempt the scale. After the attempt I invited them into *retrospective visualisation* of what they just experienced. The aim of the *retrospective visualisation* was to guide the performers towards deeper understanding of their body in action. Through the 're-seeing' process, they began to form interplay between body and mind where they developed an ability to see themselves clearly in action, and then engage in crucial self-evaluation afterwards. Finally, I asked them to re-imagine themselves doing the optimal scale and whenever they felt prepared, attempt the scale again. At the completion of this exercise I took a poll of the students and asked how many of them 'performed' the scale as they had 'seen' it. In this instance, none of the participants were able to actualise the visualisation optimally. However, when I asked them to discuss the use of

visualisation, they noted that the ability to see themselves doing the skill before attempting it gave them more confidence in attempting the scale, a better idea of how the scale worked, a clear image of what they had done and a beginning understanding of what they needed to adjust in the second attempt. Philippe Edwards reflected afterwards: 'When you first told us we would be doing a scale, I didn't think I would be able to do it. I'm not very coordinated, you see. And although I fell over trying it, I think I might actually get the hang of it' (2013). Each practice, I would invite them back into the visualisation and attempt of the scale, continuously adding in side coaching. The basic scale draws on certain gymnastics principles for optimal execution. These include energy through the feet, core strength, balance and external focus. Once the Cognitive Stage was complete (i.e., the basic understanding of the element was reached), I began working within the Associative Stage of learning. During this Associative Stage I guided the performers in drawing focus and awareness to these principles. For example when the participants attempted the scale, I would invite them to bring their focus to their feet and their feet's connection to the ground. By inserting this language in this stage of the learning process, I hoped it would begin to become ingrained in the performer's process, developing their ability to self-correct and self-adjust during performance (See DVD PPII 2.1).

I realised the process of learning through visualisation and repetition relied heavily on self-reflection and self-analysis. At each stage of the learning process I attempted to engage the participants in a deeper understanding of their body and potential. It should be noted that this is an ongoing process

and could not be fully achieved in the short time period of this project. However, both the participants and myself noted their deep progression over this time. In no way did I expect finished results from this stage of the learning and encouraged the participants towards continued practice to further their development.

Bodymind Development

To begin moving beyond the simple understanding of movement as a purely external form, I developed an exercise entitled Body Response. This exercise grew out of my work in Practical Project 1, specifically the distillation of overt external movement down to impulse and internal feeling of each movement. This exercise draws on key principles of gymnastics training and competition: corporeal development, use of the 'whole body,' body memory, kinaesthetic response, freedom of form, impulse, and quality of ease. While some of the exercises developed drew on the gymnastics elements themselves, I specifically chose to work through the languages and principles of gymnastics for this exercise in the hope that it would bridge physical work with the bodymind relationship. I have detailed the exercise below:

Step 1: Invite the participants into pairs.

Step 2: Invite the pairs into the space and select silently who is the 'giver' and who is the 'receiver'.

Step 3: Invite the receiver into harmonic poise with eyes closed.

Step 4: Invite the giver to begin touching their partners on different areas of the body.

- a. Invite the receiver to simply 'feel the touch'. How does it feel? What are the qualities of the touch? What does it do to that area of the body?

Step 5: Invite the giver to continue giving physical stimuli.

- a. Invite the receiver to towards body memory by repeating in their bodymind the feeling of each stimulus.

Step 6: Invite the receiver to begin physically responding to each stimulus from corporeal impulse.

Step 7: Invite the receiver to allow the response to grow and begin to move them through space, continuing only through kinaesthetic impulse.

Step 8: Invite the giver to begin reducing the amount of physical stimuli given to the receiver.

- a. Invite the receiver to continue responding, drawing on their body memory as impulse.

Step 9: Invite the giver to only give stimuli if they feel their partner is stuck in stasis.

- a. Invite the receiver to continue to responding to the impulse of their body memory – each touch they felt, guiding an external movement.

Step 10: Invite the receiver to come to a paused, harmonic poise.

Step 11: Invite the receiver to use *retrospective visualisation* to see the whole of the exercise, from start to finish, and watch their body moving through space.

In this exercise I facilitated the ‘giver’ and ‘receiver’ through the use of side coaching. The aim of this exercise was to engage the receiver in developing a deeper connection to the relationship between internal and external; the impetus of movement and the internal engagement that forms an external movement.³⁴ Gymnasts are trained to move from their whole body and to be constantly connected from every inch of their form, starting from the core. The

³⁴ There are versions of this exercise that exist in other trainings and pedagogies, such as in the work of Growtowski. I became aware of these alternate versions after the development of this exercise. This exercise distinguishes itself through the direct use of gymnastics-based language. The focus on the kinaesthetic energy and response, coupled with the internal engagement is the key focus of this exercise.

use of corporeal activators relayed by the 'giver' in the exercise aimed to allow the performer to draw focus and access to all areas of their body from internal sensation. One of the mental tools a gymnast uses is proprioceptive imagery, where they 'feel the movement in the muscles as if they were performing the skill or sequence' (Readhead 2011: 87). I drew upon proprioceptive imagery for this exercise, inviting the 'receiver' to 'feel every touch and movement in your body' (2013). I found the proprioceptive imagery in this exercise allowed the participants to draw on corporeal impulses: feeling the movement in their body and then performing the movement externally. Part of the aims for the overall research of this project is to develop in the performer an extended physical vocabulary from which they can draw on, and a deep embodiment of body memory and body awareness. The use of this exercise and proprioceptive imagery directly feeds into this aim. The performers began to develop their body awareness through the corporeal stimuli, their body memory through the proprioceptive imagery of feeling the movement, and their physical vocabulary through actualisation of the movement. The example shown on the DVD is an extension of the exercise, where one pair used then proprioceptive imagery gained through the exercise to engage in a movement score together. They used kinaesthetic energy between them alongside the images and body memory from the exercise (See DVD PPII 2.2).

At the completion of the exercise, I invited the participants into a gymnastics-based self-evaluation process, where they critically reflected and evaluated their individual process and performance. Self-evaluation occurs throughout the training and competition phases of the gymnast's process. To engage with

this, I held a post-exercise discussion to invite the participants towards this deep engagement with their own process and performance. In this open discussion, Joe Hennessy reflected, 'umm...at first I felt uptight and self-conscious. But...umm...after a bit...I don't know...I felt freer. I moved in ways that I hadn't previously. My body felt light and at ease. (laughs) It was kind of crazy' (2013). Similarly, Kate Lines reflected:

I had the same sort of thing. At first I was thinking about the movement and the feeling. I mean, I was actively thinking about it. And then something changed and I was openly thinking. Does that make sense? Like the feelings in my body were feeding my mind and vice versa (2013).

These conversations continued throughout the remainder of the process. I found the self-evaluation process encouraged open communication and an active engagement in evaluation and critical analysis of participants' own development, process, and performance.

Ensemble Development

Alongside the extra-daily warm-up and the work on basic gymnastics, I also used the six weeks to develop a working ensemble relationship through gymnastics-based practices. I attempted to hone this relationship throughout the work. This began through promotion of teamwork and encouragement of one-another in the extra-daily warm-up and learning of basic skills. Although gymnastics is technically an individual sport, I always felt supported by my peers. This was an embedded practice, which developed out of one of the original principles of non-elite gymnastics: camaraderie. The support and encouragement by our fellow peers can bolster confidence, bravery, and

closeness among one-another. In consideration that most of the participants were beginners to gymnastics, I encouraged this camaraderie for multiple reasons: to create a safe and supportive environment, to guide individual development and progress, and to foster an ensemble atmosphere. Secondly, I employed gymnastics-based breathing exercises to bring focus and cohesion to the group. Similarly, Zarrilli began each session with opening breathing exercises, and while the main goal was self-focus and attention, I could always sense a collective breath between the rest of the group and myself. In drawing on this I used gymnastics-based breathing to forge a collective focus in this room. To further develop this relationship I devised workshops and exercises towards bridging gymnastics and performative play. In conjunction with this wider development, I also hoped these exercises would encourage other areas of gymnastics which I deem to be beneficial to the performer: bodymind development, bodily receptiveness and response, and fluidity and grace. Below, I discuss an example of exercises I used to explore these principles and practices.

Exercise: Kinaesthetic Energy

After giving the students the basic forms of gymnastics, I wanted to begin exploring how they could be used to activate the performer. In this instance, I chose to draw on kinaesthetic energy as the primary component.³⁵ As discussed, kinaesthetic energy is defined as the energy an object or a person possesses due to its motion. In elite gymnastics, kinaesthetic energy allows

³⁵ The term kinaesthetic energy was used during this process as a way to describe the moving energy of the gymnast. It also draws on ideas from Lecoq and Laban as discussed in Chapter 2.

the gymnast sustained energy during their individual routine, where they harness ‘the energy that fuels their performance’ (Burton and Raedeke, 2008: 140). They use the energy gathered from the opening move to continue response throughout the remainder of the routine. Similarly, working with kinaesthetic energy greatly enhances the gymnast’s awareness. According to retired gymnast and volleyball player Rudy Suwara, ‘the body control and kinaesthetic awareness from gymnastics helped with my volleyball skills’. He goes further to encourage ‘all our Olympians to work out with [gymnastics] to fine tune that body awareness’ (in Ungerleider, 2005: 200). Eugenio Barba originally described the kinaesthetic energy learned through gymnastics as effective practices for the actor because ‘they contribute towards developing the ability of immediate reaction. [...] Moreover, they teach the actor to master the craft’s physical and dynamic foundations’ (Barba, 1991: 117). In consideration of this I aimed to guide the participants towards development of an ingrained kinaesthetic response and increased awareness of one another in the space. To combine the use of gymnastics elements and skills, and the idea of kinaesthetic energy, I developed the following exercise to promote ensemble work:

Step 1: Invite 5-6 students to stand in a line across the space, facing the opposite wall.

Step 2: Give the students a physical vocabulary to work from.

- Basic scale
- Straight jump
- Running forwards
- Running backwards
- Sitting
- Lying down in relaxation pose

- Lying down in a lowered push-up position

Step 3: Give the boundaries of the space and the rules to the exercises.

- Rule 1: Work only from the given vocabulary.
- Rule 2: Move only forwards and backwards, keeping in your given lane.
- Rule 3: Keep your eyes focus directly ahead.
- Rule 4: Work from the kinaesthetic energy of yourself and your partners. If you do not feel an impulse through energy to move, wait until you do.
- Boundaries of the space: The line they are standing on is the back line and an invisible line at the front of the room is the front line. Arms fully extended out to the sides denotes their lane size.

Step 4: Invite the participants to stand in harmonic poise and focus on their breathing and energy through the feet.

Step 5: Invite the participants to begin the exercise whenever they feel ready.

In this exercise I invited participants to draw on their own kinaesthetic energy and the extended energy of their partners, to continue movement. During the exercise I invited them to draw on each other for support and energy, moving only if they felt a kinaesthetic connection. Before engaging in post exercise discussion, I invited the participants to engage in *retrospective visualisation*, seeing the entirety of the exercise in full. Once this was complete, I invited a discussion with feedback. When the participants first took part in the exercise, I noted their apprehension at the beginning of the work. However, when they honed their focus on the task and allowed their movement to derive from energy rather than pre-determination, they were able to engage deeply and immerse themselves in the work. In the discussion of the exercise I asked the

participants to reflect on this. The students who had been watching the exercise from the outside agreed they could see the shift in focus, energy and commitment. Sophie Haynes noted 'the most interesting points for me watching was when I could really tell you were working together; not forcefully though. The moments where you lost connection or were trying too hard, weren't as engaging' (2013). The students participating in the exercise agreed that they felt most connected when they were in sync with one another. The secondary aim of this exercise was to allow the participants to begin to engage internally, taking their mind away from the external forms and drawing on the kinaesthetic energy as impulse and impetus for the movement. Beginning to invite them towards a continuous communication between mind and body, where movement is linked from internal feeling and internal feeling is linked from movement. The students participating in the exercise reflected, once they felt their bodies understood the task, they could engage on a deeper, more connected level. Emily Lawes, acknowledged, 'It was not until my body understood all the rules, that I could really ground myself within it' (2013). I responded that perhaps this was similar to the learning of basic movement; once the body knew the boundaries of the task, the mind could engage. Emily and others agreed that once their bodies understood the task on a deeper level, like in the cartwheel etc., they could release cognitive thought. This exercise helped me realise that repetition of the movement of the body allows a strong corporeal memory to form and the mind to begin to engage. By creating a clearly defined structure and a small list of physical tasks for the performer could undertake, I allowed for a deeper internal engagement. The performers could move beyond basic thought of the

external movement and engage in the kinaesthetic energy that was driving the movement.

Phase 3

Both Phase 2 and Phase 3 of this practical project focussed on different devising tasks. This next portion of the chapter will focus solely on the work of Phase 3 and the work explored during this process as it was implemented specifically for the purposes of this research. Phase 3 took place in March 2013 over the course of three weeks. Three students volunteered to be a part of this process; Zoe Ozwell, Carmen Paddock, and Joseph Schofield. During this phase I guided the three participants in a devising process, which concluded in a short performance. The participants had main control of the material devised and the final performance creation, similar to the performance in Phase 2. It should be stated that I deliberately chose to employ this extension project to circumvent possible ethical issues of using students. This extension project was a voluntary process, separate from the module, and the students involved were not marked or graded in any way. I also chose to explore the project in this manner to address how the training can be transmitted to contemporary performers, how the performer understands the work and processes in order to evaluate clearly the areas that need further development.

Devising

One of the aims of this project was to address how *gymnastics-based practices* might be useful in the devising process. During this devising

process, I drew heavily on *gymnastics-based visualisation* and *gymnastics-based exercises* I developed to guide the performers. I aimed to address how *gymnastics-based practices* could inform a rehearsal and performance-making process. The performers had main control over the development of performance and its final outcome. During this time I acted as a facilitator and gave feedback on their process and performance. I also chose to have the performers devise the performance to evaluate their understanding of *gymnastics-based practices* and to also aid in the development of their devising skills. In this next section of the chapter I reflect critically upon this process and performance.

I considered Phase 3 of this process as the competition phase. The performers had been training for nine weeks prior to this and had a strong knowledge of the languages, process, and practices developed. The warm-up and training constituted 30% of the process whilst rehearsal and performance made up 70% of the process. During this time I believed it was important to maintain the *extra-daily warm-up* as preparatory work and continued deep engagement of the 'whole body'. Therefore, each rehearsal began with a modified *extra-daily warm-up*, which I developed for rehearsal processes. As mentioned, the gymnast's physical preparatory training condenses in the competition phase and the Autonomous Stage of their development. To continue along this framework, I developed a condensed *rehearsal extra-daily warm-up* that maintained the key focusses of the larger warm-up. I have detailed this modified warm-up below:

Example of *Rehearsal Extra-Daily Warm-up*

10 minutes Endurance Training

Step 1: Invite the performers to line up along the edge of one wall.

Step 2: Invite the performers into harmonic poise and to begin *gymnastics based breathing*.

Step 3: Invite the performers to move at a speed of 10 percent towards the opposite wall.

Step 4: Invite the performers to increase their speed by 10 percent, each time they reach the opposite wall until reaching 100 percent speed.

Step 5: Invite the performers to continue moving at this pace.

Step 6: Invite the performers to slow their pace by 10 percent, each time they reach the opposite wall, until reaching a still position.

10 minute Strength Training

Push-up

Squat

Lunge

Toe Raise

Plank

Sit-up

5 minute Relaxation

Relaxation pose

Mental note taking and release of muscular tension throughout the body

10 minute Flexibility Training Stretching

Figure 13: Example of *rehearsal extra-daily warm-up*

Similar to the extensive *extra daily warm-up*, as the performers developed the difficulty of the exercise would increase. For example, as the performers' endurance began to build, I facilitated them in more difficult tasks during the endurance training. For instance, I incorporated a gymnastics-based jump in the center of the room on each passing turn. I did this to draw their focus to a change of energy required for the jump, drawing back on kinaesthetic energy explored earlier in the project. As a further addition, and to draw on walking exercises from non-elite gymnastics, I invited the participants into repetitions of walking on high point, lunges, side squats, and bear crawls (See DVD PPII 2.3). It should be noted that these exercises could continue to be extended beyond the range of which I have explored in this process. I utilised the warm-up within the rehearsal process with the aim of continuing the development of

the individual, ensemble, and bodymind. The performers reflected that on a daily basis the warm-up gave them a sense of focus and heightened energy. They also reflected that on a long-term basis, the warm-up enhanced their body, both muscularly and flexibly, along with their awareness and understanding of their own body and its capabilities.

For the first week, at the completion of the warm-up, I would facilitate the performers in workshops and exercises specific to the day's work. I decided to create exercises and workshops to guide them in performance making processes to facilitate their devising skills and continue their individual development. Below, I outline a specific example of exercises I developed to tackle these aims.

Exercise: Free Movement

To begin linking the pre-performative work explored in the first phase of this project with this performative process, I developed an exercise that I believed would bridge this gap.

Throughout the term, during the warm-up, I gave the participants the opportunity to explore free movement. This would occur at the completion of the circuit training, and would last for roughly five minutes. I would invite the participants to engage with a particular piece of music, either moving to or against the rhythm. I chose to use music to ease the tension of the participants as often music can encourage a freedom of the body and self. I drew this directly from my gymnastics training under Jen'ai Decano (1998-

2002). After the intensive workout that began each practice, Decano would play music on the sound system and allow us to open our bodies to the space, letting go of muscular tension and external thoughts, and also to extend our physical vocabularies. She often said, 'a free body is a trainable body and a free mind is a trainable mind' (1999-2002). I took my understanding of her exercise with our team and transferred it towards the use of this process.

In extending this in practice, I developed an exercise that draws directly on free movement, *gymnastics-based visualisation* and repetition. As a secondary framework, I drew on principles from 'new gymnastics' and 'harmonic gymnastics'. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis, clear lines can be drawn between the theories of Delsarte and Laban; particularly the harmonic quality of movement, movement to and from an equilibrium state, and their views on holistic movement. I considered Delsartean and Laban ideas of harmonic movement to be in comparison to two main focusses of gymnastics training: quality of ease and movement from the body's core. In response to this, I have detailed an exercise below and will follow by discussing it in detail.

Step 1: Invite each of the participants to bring in a piece of music.

Step 2: Invite the participants to find a place within the space.

Step 3: Invite the participants into harmonic poise, external focus ahead.

Step 4: Press play on the music.

Step 5: Invite the participants to move freely to the music.

Step 6: At the completion of the music, invite the participants back into harmonic poise.

Step 7: Invite the participants to close their eyes and use *retrospective visualisation* to reengage with everything they have just done.

Step 8: Invite the participants to select key moments, movements or set of movements from their visualisation.

Step 9: Play the music again and invite the participants to explore these key moments in the space, forming a repetitive movement score.

Step 10: At the completion of the music, invite the participants back into harmonic poise and towards retrospective visualisation to re-engage with what they have just completed.

(See DVD PPII 2.4)

The main aim of this particular exercise was to offer strategies for generating material to the participants. I hoped by inviting them to move freely and then re-visiting their movements they might find performative material within this process. Subsequent aims of this exercise were to develop an extensive freedom of the body, integrate retrospective visualisation towards movement development, and further develop the bodymind relationship.

As the participants moved through the space, I would guide them using side coaching, inviting them to bring their attention to certain aspects at different moments. For instance, in having the participants begin in harmonic poise and employ *gymnastics-based breathing*, it automatically brought their attention back to their core, and centred their focus. Then, while in the movement I invited the performers to bring awareness to certain areas of the body. Witnessing each individual's habitual movement nature, I would guide each individually. I did this by drawing back on a key framework of the *coach-gymnast relationship*: paying particular attention to each individual within the

team, highlighting his or her individual growth and understanding. Jahn describes this as one of the essential factors in the optimal growth of the gymnast. Similarly, Readhead argues that ‘the key to a successful coaching relationship is to adapt the style of coaching to meet the needs of the individual gymnasts at each stage of their development’ (2011: 85). Readhead notes that while there are other styles of working, including the adoption of an authoritarian working model where the ‘coach demands respect and obedience, and expects results,’ the democratic form of coaching eventually develops a self-sufficient gymnast through consistent and supportive exchange. The self-sufficient gymnast then has the capability for greater understanding of his/her own ability. This understanding allows them to reflect and comment on their own performance and process with a certain level of objectivity. In the light of this, I chose to continue this style of facilitation throughout the remainder of the projects. In line with Readhead, I found this created a deeper ability in the performers to self-reflect and actively engage in their own development. I also found it encouraged open and honest communication in the space. For instance, on a particular day Zoe was feeling unengaged and stressed. She was able to see how her energy was affecting the rest of the ensemble and asked me to lead a ten-minute relaxation in an attempt to refocus her and the group. When I asked Zoe about this moment later, she noted:

Earlier in the term I wouldn’t have been able to do that, I don’t think. Honestly, I probably would have been shit and done nothing and then felt bad about it later (laughs). But I definitely wouldn’t have been able to acknowledge what I really needed in that moment’ (2013).

I have highlighted this moment because for me it is clear that her ability to address her own needs through open communication advanced her personal development towards becoming a self-sufficient performer. She was also taking steps towards understanding the needs of the ensemble as a whole.

Performance

At the end of the third week of exploration, I presented the practical work in a presentation and performance for my peers, supervisors, and examiners at Exeter University Drama Department (See DVD PPII 2.5). The performance, entitled *Via* was twenty minutes in length and used physical theatre as the main dramaturgical style. The performance was completely devised by the participants, with feedback given by myself throughout their process. Out of their original research interests, they chose to explore the notions of animalistic behaviours in humans. The movement within the performance was structured improvisation with key moments of choreography and contact. The entirety of this performance was devised out of workshops and exercises done over the course of the previous eleven weeks.

In understanding that performers' needs differ in rehearsal and performance, I formulated a performance-day process to prepare them. On the day of the performance I guided the performers in the *rehearsal extra-daily warm-up*, developed to bring their bodymind to a state of readiness. Once the warm-up was complete I invited the performers to put on their costumes. When they re-entered the space, I asked them to find a space in the room, lie on their backs in the relaxation pose used during the warm-up and visualise their

performance ten times in full. I chose to do this to fully engage the performers' thoughts and focus towards the performance. This brought their mind and body into focus as the two entities began to 'exist together synergistically' (Sheikh and Korn 1994: 158). The internal thoughts of the mind engage the body and give it a sense of preparedness for performance.

At the completion of the performance and presentation, I invited the participants to engage in *retrospective visualisation*. When this was complete, I engaged the performers in a post-performance discussion. I asked them to reflect on their performance and gave them feedback. Joseph admitted that he felt he rushed through the performance and did not allow each movement to settle in the body. He stated, 'I was already moving into the next thing, before ever completing the movement before' (2013). However, in contrast, Carmen felt prepared and receptive throughout the performance. She noted 'before we started I was nervous but I just tried to let that go and then I felt really in sync with Joe and Zoe, the music, the movement, the whole thing' (2013). These self-reflections were in alignment with my feedback on their performances. They were able to understand their own performances within the larger structure and were able to reflect critically on what happened, noting how they might move forward if given the chance to perform *Via* again. For example, Joe suggested he would focus more on his breath and grounding himself to allow for deeper engagement. When the post-performance discussion was complete I invited the participants towards *cognitive restructuring*. *Cognitive restructuring* is used in gymnastics at the completion of competition prior to the next practice or performance. Gymnasts

are invited to review a performance 'up until the point where the sequence broke down, and then a successful ending can be added. The successful performance of the whole sequence is repeated until the gymnast is confident' (Readhead, 2011: 89). In other words, the gymnast is trained to use *retrospective visualisation* to fully understand their performance and then employ *cognitive restructuring* to mentally adjust that performance towards an optimal outcome. In driving this forward, I invited the performers into this process. Since we did not have a second performance or another rehearsal subsequent to this, I believe it was an extremely important process for the participants to engage in to see clearly what they would do if there was a next time, and how they might internally correct themselves.

Phase 3 of this process offered several discoveries for the developing work. I was able to identify key structures, exercises, and workshops to draw on in a performance development and rehearsal setting. I developed further exercises deriving from *gymnastics-based practices* and languages including the Free Movement exercise, as detailed above. Upon reflection on the performance and process, I was able to identify the elements of *gymnastics-based practices* that the participants were drawing on and their current understanding of the work. For instance, the performers connected heavily with the use of *gymnastics-based visualisation*, the *extra-daily warm-up* and the key elements of gymnastics: movement from the body's core, strength and flexibility, breath, focus, quality of ease and connection through the feet. However, I reflected that greater attention needed to be given to the

adaptation of the work, particularly distilling the overtly physical practice into other performative contexts.

Conclusion

During this project I was able to make further discoveries in my overall research and confront new issues raised in my practical explorations. Alongside addressing certain needs of the performer, some of the discoveries I made included:

- The use of *gymnastics-based visualisation* to facilitate learning of basic gymnastics elements.
- *Retrospective visualisation*
- Self-evaluation of the gymnast/performer
- Development of exercises towards guiding the performer in training, rehearsal, and performance processes.
- *Coach-gymnast Relationship*
 - Side-coaching
- *Rehearsal extra-daily warm-up*
- A deeper understanding of how *gymnastics-based practices* can be translated to the performer to fit their needs.
 - Use of non-elite gymnastics practices and principles to activate the performer in training, rehearsal, and performance processes.
- Understanding how the gymnastics-based languages, processes and practices can be used in performance development, rehearsal, and performance.

During this process, I also encountered difficulties, such as the speed of learning and understanding in non-gymnast, adult performers. As mentioned previously, I had preconceptions about how the process would unfold and felt

unprepared for a different development. This led me to choose the specific elements I considered most integral to the process and focus acutely on them, rather than attempt to develop a larger repertoire of gymnastics skills in the performers. Secondly, understanding that while my body has been trained to an elite level, these participants' entry points to the work were different. Therefore, I needed to discover how *gymnastics-based practices* could be applied to a wide-range of abilities and also to allow individuals to work at their own speeds and gain understanding at a moment in time that was appropriate for them as an individual. I continued addressing these issues in Practical Project 3.

One of the main limitations of this project was work with the voice. Almost all of the work explored in this project was investigated through the body, including both performances devised by the participants. In consideration of the voice as a skill of the contemporary performer, I addressed this in the following project through work on a naturalistic text. Another limitation of this project was time. I understand that in this process I had a significant amount of time to work with the participants on understanding the principles and processes of gymnastics-based practices and in other settings, this might not always be possible. Therefore, in the final stage of this practical exploration I investigated how gymnastics-based practices might activate the performer in the rehearsal and performance process of a naturalistic text.

Chapter 5

Practical Project 3: Developing ‘Gymnastics-Based Practices’ in a Rehearsal and Performance Process

Introduction

Practical Projects 1 and 2 provided me with an understanding into the potential capabilities of reframing gymnastics towards performer training. In the first practical project, I was able to unpack my own knowledge as an elite gymnast and understand the basic languages, processes, and practices of the training. In the second practical exploration I explored these languages, practices, and processes through work with a small group of performers. Through both projects I developed *gymnastics-based practices* towards work with the contemporary performer, including an extensive *extra-daily warm-up* and learning of basic gymnastics skills. One of the major findings through the practices was the use of *gymnastics-based visualisation* and how it can be used to activate the actor in extra-daily, rehearsal, and performance processes. Taking these new understandings, I moved forward into the final practical exploration.

The final project of this PhD research took place from May to June 2013 culminating in the performance of the whole directed text of August Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* and applying the developing *gymnastics-based practices* towards a naturalistic performance. This investigation was founded on the use of the *gymnastics-based practices* to explore text, voice, and character development for a rehearsal and performance process.

For six weeks I worked with first year undergraduates of the Exeter University Drama Department; Zoe Ozwell, Carmen Paddock, and Joseph Schofield.³⁶ The number of the participants and the genders of the members of the group fed into the choice of text used for the project. The three participants were cast in their roles prior to the outset of the practical work. This project was realised in two phases. In consideration of the balance between elite-gymnastics and non-elite gymnastics within this final project, I focussed equally on the both forms throughout the process.

| Phase | Role | Time Length | Number of Participants | Development |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|------------------------|---|
| Phase 1: Development | Facilitator Director | 2 weeks | 3 | Using <i>gymnastics-based practices</i> in extra-daily practice and character development |
| Phase 2: Rehearsal/Performance | Director | 4 weeks | 3 | Using <i>gymnastics-based practices</i> in rehearsal for performance |

Figure 14: Phases of Practical Project 3

In the first phase I led the participants in ten three-hour sessions, during which I focussed on the developing work in a rehearsal context and character development using *gymnastics-based practices*. After the completion of the

³⁶ I chose to use the same performers for both Practical Project 2 and Practical Project 3 to understand the effectiveness of the preparatory training over a longer period of time. I discuss this choice in further detail later in the chapter.

first phase, I invited the participants into the rehearsal process, where we focussed for four weeks³⁷ on staging the text and developing the final performance. The aim of this chapter is to reflect on how this process tackled certain key needs of the performer: voice, character development, and performative readiness.

I based the project around the following key research questions:

- How can *gymnastics-based practices* be utilised to activate the actor in a rehearsal process?
- Can *gymnastics-based practices* be used to work on a naturalistic text?
- What elements from Practical Projects 1 and 2 can be implemented?
- What elements of *gymnastics-based practices* can be used towards 'creating a character'?
- What are the potential limitations/challenges of using *gymnastics-based practices* in this context and how can these challenges be addressed?

And I worked towards the following key aims:

- To further develop *gymnastics-based practices*.
- To reveal how *gymnastics-based practices* can be used in the rehearsal process.
- To continue developing gymnastics-based vocabulary through the growth of the work and staging a text.
- To address a distillation process from the physical work towards naturalistic performance.
- To address the languages of the director in relation to rehearsal and performance processes.

³⁷ There was a total of eighteen three-hour sessions during this phase of the exploration.

The impetus for this project began through questioning where the developing work existed currently and what further investigation was needed for understanding its potential. I was also interested in uncovering the possibilities and limitations of using *gymnastics-based practices* with actors in a rehearsal process and a performance of a dramaturgy not inherent to the physical practice. Finally, the most integral part of this project was the participants' relationship to and experience of the practice. How did the use of *gymnastics-based practices* influence the participants' development and performance process? Apart from continuing to develop *gymnastics-based practices*, this project also explored the role of the director and facilitator and the *holistic approach* of drawing on *gymnastics-based practices* towards performance.

Miss Julie

I selected *Miss Julie* for several reasons. Firstly, I chose *this piece* due to its performance history, and indeed, the performance history of August Strindberg. Since its release, *Miss Julie* has been the most performed text of Strindberg with adaptations in several different dramaturgies including Opera (1965, 1973, 1977), Ballet (1950), Film (1912, 1951, 1999) and television (1972, 1987). Similarly it has been adapted and translated across several different cultural contexts. However, *Miss Julie* is most frequently directed and performed through the lens of psychological realism. Indeed, Strindberg's work is often associated with a psychological base. Productions tend to focus on the inner depth of the characters, the relationships between the characters, and the realism of the play — all through psychological based inquiry. According to Ira Hauptman, Strindberg, particularly in *Miss Julie*, 'emphasised

psychology [...] eliminating the outer forms of his drama while complicating the inner dynamics' (1974: 91). In understanding the performance history of *Miss Julie*, I aimed to explore the text through a new lens: the use of *gymnastics-based practices*. I aimed to address this 'psychological'-based text through a physical approach. I questioned whether the complex characters of *Miss Julie* could be accessed through work not directly inherent to the dramaturgy.

Secondly, I chose to work with August Strindberg as he was a key playwright of the modernist era in Europe, working concurrently during the development and rise of non-elite gymnastics systems. *Miss Julie* demonstrates Strindberg's ideas on human nature and the nineteenth century human. I aimed to work with two contrasting movements of the period. Thirdly, I knew the text would challenge the performers and myself, directorially. As the participants were in their first year, two out of the three of them had never performed in, what they described as a 'real play'. Their beginner status allowed me to explore processes with more openness and play, without any prior understanding of how rehearsals were 'meant to work'. Similarly, I was attracted to the play because it features three strongly written characters, Miss Julie (Zoe Ozwell), Jean (Joseph Schofield), and Christine (Carmen Paddock), each with distinct characteristics, statuses, and use of language. This wide divide between characters would allow me to see distinct discoveries in each of the participants. Overall, I selected *Miss Julie* due to its offering of well-developed characters, inviting the participants towards a strong character creation and embodiment.

According to Stanislavski, naturalism is 'the indiscriminate reproduction of the surface of life' (Newey, 2014). Set on Midsummer's Eve, the play witnesses three characters over the course of one evening and the irrevocable life changes that occur. The action takes place in the Count's kitchen while he is away. It opens with the cook (Carmen Paddock) preparing dinner in the kitchen of the estate. When the Valet, Jean (Joseph Schofield) enters, we soon discover he and Christine are engaged. Miss Julie (Zoe Ozwell) enters the kitchen shortly after and we are introduced to an entangled relationship between the three characters. Over the course of the play, the protagonist *Miss Julie*, engages with her father's valet Jean in a claustrophobic battle of wit, power, and tension, which ultimately leads to a sexual tryst half way through the script. This act of discretion quickly causes a power shift within the play and by the end of the text *Miss Julie* is walking out the front door with a knife in her hand, in what appears to be a final journey towards her impending suicide. Vernon Young describes the play as a 'long one-act composition, concentrating almost unbearably on the moral crisis of a young Countess who in an unguardedly suicidal moment [...] gives herself to her father's valet, as a consequence of which she destroys herself' (1955: 124). *Miss Julie* is also considered to emphasise characterisation over plot, with the depth and scope of the characters being the main weight of the narrative. Yet despite this and its 'unbearability', of his sixty works, *Miss Julie* is considered Strindberg's most successful and most performed play.

Phase 1

Phase 1 occurred over the first two weeks of the practical research in May 2013. The first phase was developed according to aspects of *gymnastics-based practices* I explored in the previous practical work and by my approach as a theatre director. It consisted of several different exercises and workshops with the aim of to address work on text, character development, and voice. A number of these exercises were moulded specifically for the work and others were adapted from non-elite gymnastics and the practitioners explored in Part 1 of this thesis. In conjunction with these exercises and workshops, *gymnastics-based visualisation* was a key component of the developmental process. This portion of the chapter will focus directly on how Phase 1 gave space towards understanding how *gymnastics-based practices* might contribute to character development.

During Phase 1 of the process, I focussed on addressing the following research questions:

- What elements from Practical Projects 1 and 2 can be implemented towards this process?
- What elements of *gymnastics-based practices* can be used towards 'creating a character'?

As in the previous performance process, each day began with the *rehearsal extra-daily warm-up*. At the conclusion of the warm-up, I asked the participants to engage in the first *gymnastics-based visualisation* of the daily practice. At this moment, I invited the performers to find harmonic poise somewhere in the space, close their eyes and employ the *retrospective visualisation* learnt in Practical Project 2. I invited them to visualise the

previous rehearsal, from start to finish, re-connecting with any key discoveries or moments of understanding. The main objective of this opening visualisation exercise was to enable the participants to re-engage with the work and also with the visualisation process, bringing their mind and body into a present state. As discussed previously, *gymnastics-based visualisation* became a key structure and framework in the practical exploration of this project. For this individual project, I moved this process forward into deeper integration of everyday practice. On average, I would invite the performers to engage in between five and ten visualisations each rehearsal. In these instances, the actors were asked to either stand in harmonic poise or lay in relaxation pose (dependent on the work), employ *gymnastics-based breathing* down to the body's core, use the *gymnastics-based visualisation* to see their form standing in front of them, and then either visualise the upcoming exercise, workshop, or staging, or use *retrospective visualisation* to re-see the exercise, workshop, or staging. Similarly, they were also asked to carry out visualisation work when working with the script outside of rehearsal. The aim of this was to begin deeply ingraining mental preparation into an inherent everyday practice within the actors. Through continuous repetition, I hoped the practice would become ingrained in the performers' extra daily work. This intensive use of *gymnastics-based visualisation* continued throughout this individual project alongside the extra-daily work.

Character Development

In Practical Projects 1 and 2, the notion of 'character' was absent from exploration. Therefore, in this practical exploration I aimed to investigate the potential of using *gymnastics-based practices* towards the development of character. For character creation and development I drew on *gymnastics-based visualisation*, *gymnastics-based exercises* and the basic elements of elite gymnastics discovered in Practical Project 1. This next section will discuss selected exercises developed during this phase of the process, and how they contributed to character development in the work of *Miss Julie*.

Exercise: *Gymnastics-based visualisation* and Character

I began the process of character creation through inviting the performers towards the use of the *gymnastics-based visualisation*. I used the following exercise to initiate this development:

- Step 1:** Invite the performers to lay on their backs in relaxation pose with their eyes closed.
- Step 2:** Invite the performer to use *gymnastics-based visualisation* to see him/herself standing in front of them.
- Step 3:** Invite the performer to see him/herself clearly in their mind's eye, beginning with the feet all the way up to the head.
 - a. What were they wearing? How did they stand? What was the expression on their face?
- Step 4:** Invite the performer to clear the image from their mind's eye.
- Step 5:** Invite the performer to use *gymnastics-based visualisation* to see their character standing in front of them.
- Step 6:** Invite the performer to see their character clearly in their mind's eye, from their toes to their head.

Step 7: Invite the performer to step out of the visualisation.

Step 8: Invite the performer to draw their character on a sheet of blank paper.

The aim of this was to begin ingraining the image of the character within the performer through the use of *gymnastics-based visualisation*. Up until this moment, the performers had been trained to see themselves (as the performer) in their visualisation exercises. This exercise sought to replace the image of the self with the image of the character. Secondly, in drawing the character, I aimed to draw on 'harmonic gymnastics' use of art as impetus for statues. As discussed previously, statue posing was a staple in Delsartean work. Specifically, Genevieve Stebbins used statue posing within her practice and performances. The 'performers singly or in groups either cop[ied] the bodily positions and spatial arrangements depicted in existing art works or create[d] scenes on various themes' (Ruyter, 1999: 116). Thus, in drawing on 'harmonic gymnastics' in combination with *gymnastics-based visualisation* I developed a second phase of the previous exercise for character development. I invited the performers in the following exploration:

Step 1: Invite the performer to study the image drawn on the paper.

Step 2: Invite the performer to find a space in the studio and take harmonic poise and employ *gymnastics-based breathing*.

Step 3: Invite the performer to use *gymnastics-based visualisation* to see the image of the character standing in front of them.

Step 4: Invite the performer to 'step in' and embody the image, taking a form of a statue.

Step 5: Invite the performer to 'allow the statue to come to life' moving freely from within and without the statue.

Step 6: Invite the performer to explore all the movement possibilities of the statue.

Step 7: Invite the performer to come to a pause and back to harmonic poise.

Step 8: Invite the performer into *retrospective visualisation* of the exercise. (See DVD PPIII 3.1)

The aim of this exercise was to expose the possibility of using visualisation and non-elite gymnastics towards the creation and development of character. It also aimed to ingrain the image of the character within the performer. In post-exercise discussion, the performers reflected on moments of disconnect. They noticed that the image of the character would be clear and then they would lose the image. In response to this, I continually employed the first phase of this exercise throughout the rehearsal process. As the process continued, the performers' image of their character became clearer and deeper ingrained.

Exercise: Human Gesture

As part of the process of character development, I explored another aspect of 'harmonic gymnastics', particularly the work with human gesture. I coached the actors in identifying their own natural human gestures and how they might utilise these in character creation and performance.³⁸ Part of gymnastics-based language is developed through a deeply ingrained understanding of one's own body and specificity of action: 'Specificity remains one of the most important principles involved in [gymnastic] training' (Jemni, 2011: 26). The gymnast is trained to be acutely aware of their entirety at all times. Each

³⁸ As I discuss in Chapter 2, human gesture, according to Delsartean tradition, is physical action connected to an emotional stimulus.

movement or shift is internally recorded and they are able to make the minutest of alignments. During this part of the process I continued working with the performers on developing this acute understanding of their own bodies and combined this with human gesture exercises. I side coached the participants during the process, specifically noting moments for deeper specificity of gesture, deriving from internal support. The exercise worked as follows:

- Step 1:** Invite the performers to read through the entirety of the script.
 - a. Invite them to focus on details of the script, which note physical details or characteristics of their character.
- Step 2:** Invite the performers into the studio space.
- Step 3:** Invite the performers into harmonic poise with eyes closed.
- Step 4:** Invite the performers to use *gymnastics-based visualisation* to see their character standing in front of them.
- Step 5:** Invite the performers to 'step into' their character.
- Step 6:** Invite the performers to open their eyes and begin walking around the space as their character.
- Step 7:** Invite the performer towards attention of specific areas of their body.
- Step 8:** Invite the performers to note internally the natural movements of the body.
- Step 9:** Invite the performers to pause and develop a *starting position* for their character.
- Step 10:** Invite the performers to employ *retrospective visualisation*.

Through this exercise, I aimed to begin accessing the character through the body. By beginning with the *gymnastics-based visualisation* of the character as explored previously, I aimed to further ingrain the 'body' of the character within the performers. As the performers moved through the space as their character, they were able to begin forming the underlying base of the

character through formation of their 'character body'. This base would carry on through the remainder of the work and continue to be developed. Similarly, as I invited the performers to make internal corrections, I was coaching them towards, what David Kirk describes as 'a mastery of one's own body' (2002: 24). At the culmination of the exercise, by inviting the performers to employ *retrospective visualisation*, I aimed to reinforce the character in their corporeal memory. The performers would then be able to draw on this each time they re-engaged with the character. At the culmination of the exercise, I asked the performers to pause their walking movement and focus on a *starting position* for the character, employing *retrospective visualisation* to see their engagement in the exercise clearly. The figure below shows the starting positions chosen by the actors:



Figure 15: Actors' starting positions in *Miss Julie*

In gymnastics, a *starting position* is the first pose the gymnast takes before beginning her routine on any given event. It is comparable to harmonic poise in performance as the gymnast will focus herself and prepare herself for her routine in this position.³⁹ In creating a starting position for each of the characters, I hoped the performers would be able to continuously draw upon this throughout the remainder of the rehearsal process, to drop into character and performative modes. Upon the completion of this, I advanced the exercise. As discussed in 'harmonic gymnastics', all internal human thought and feeling could be outwardly expressed through human gesture. Similarly each human gesture correlates to an internal emotion or feeling. Erica Cartmill states that gesture is 'kinaesthetically close to action and is, at the same time, symbolic' (2011: 1). Therefore, to draw on these notions, I invited the performers to consider their character and develop three habitual gestures for their character that could be used in performance. The gestures they created directly linked to the character they had been creating and their character's status. For instance, Christine's habitual gestures often reflected worry and nervousness (i.e. rubbing her hands together and pushing her hair behind her ears), while Miss Julie's gestures reflected arrogance yet naïveté and a higher-class status. These gestures allowed for a non-verbal communication and energy to form between the characters. When one character drew on their habitual gesture, the others instinctively took notice and drew on the energy created from the action. These gestures, walking patterns and starting positions were continued throughout the process. They became more articulated and specific and each performer formed a relationship to their own

³⁹ This is my own definition of an undefined moment in gymnastics competition.

body through the ingraining of internal notation. For instance, Carmen used her gestures as a strategy to connect to her character. She reflected, 'when I could feel myself losing the connection to Christine, I would do my gestures to feel her again' (2013). She stated this allowed her to re-connect and engage in the moment. Alongside the connection to character, the performers formed relationships to the other performers through deep engagement with their kinaesthetic energies and responses. Zoe noted that she started to formulate non-verbal cues from Joe and Carmen, that 'their gestures let me know how they were feeling in that moment. I guess I started to read them like I would read someone I know really well? And then I could play off their feelings' (2013).

The Voice

Similar to character development, a key framework yet to be acknowledged through gymnastics-based practices is the voice. As mentioned in the conclusion of Chapter 4, I perceived the absence of voice work in the first two practical projects to be a limitation to the work. Therefore, as part of the exploration of this process, I investigated the development of the performer's voice through gymnastics-based practices. Below I outline a specific exercise I developed to grapple with this.

Exercise: Handstands

To begin investigating the use of *gymnastics-based practices* for vocal work, I considered the use of the basic gymnastics elements discovered in Practical Project 1 and how these elements might be used to guide the performer in

vocal work. In considering the basic elements of gymnastics (handstands, cartwheels, turns, leaps, jumps and rolls) I chose to begin with the handstand in this specific exploration due to the principles needed to properly execute the element: core strength, external focus, and *gymnastics-based breathing*. In response to this, I developed the following exercise to begin vocal development of the performer.

I invited the performers to read *Miss Julie* aloud without adding any emphasis or 'acting' to the words. I invited them to purely follow their breath and speak the line from the core of the body. At the end of the reading, I noted the participants displayed signs of exhaustion – tiredness, dehydration, and shortness of breath. They needed water and asked for a break. For the next rehearsal I invited the performers to come prepared with the first three pages of text memorised. I gave them this small task for two reasons; the first, to gauge the level of work I could handover to them and the second, to employ the following exercise devised for this process:

Step 1: Invite the participants to find a space on the wall and take the basic handstand stance.

Step 2: Invite the participants to speak the first three pages of text aloud.

Step 3: Invite the participants to strengthen through the core of the body and employ the gymnastics-based breathing.

Step 4: Invite the performers to repeat the text aloud.

Step 5: Invite the performers to step down from the handstand position.

Step 6: Invite the performers into retrospective visualisation of the exercise.

As the performers had been guided previously, the handstand requires immense core strength, external focus and *gymnastics-based breathing*. When using this to speak the text, I asked them to remain focussed on the original components of the external form and allow the voice to come freely from the form. Carmen naturally has a very breathy tone to her voice and a meek and soft demeanor. When in the handstand her natural tendency was to speak from the throat, thus blocking the voice. I placed one of my palms on her core and asked her to breathe, to and from this point. Zarrilli often did this during the psychophysical training to encourage us to focus on breath down to the 'dantian'. This gentle invitation would allow us to place an internal focus on the breath while simultaneously focussing on the task. In this instance, naturally the tone of her voice began to drop and found a deeper resonance and sustainment. In response to this, I invited the performers to stand in harmonic poise, focussing on the exact same elements as the handstand: strength from the core, eye focus and breath and engage in the beginning three pages of text again. Carmen, and the others alike, were able to sustain the body memory of the previous exercise and use this, absent of the outward movement. I invited the performers to maintain this process throughout the rehearsal period, to continue development of the voice work and text memorisation.

The work done on character development and voice fed directly into Phase 2 where we began staging the text. This preparative work allowed for a more engaged understanding of the characters as we entered the rehearsal process.

Phase 2

Throughout the rehearsal and staging process, I continued to work with the *rehearsal extra-daily warm-up* as an opener for each rehearsal. Alongside this, I used *gymnastics-based practices*, exercises and principles to guide the staging process from a director's perspective. Phase 2 occurred over four weeks and included staging of the text, continued character development, continued vocal development, and full run-throughs. During Phase 2 I focussed on addressing the following research questions:

- How can *gymnastics-based practices* be utilised to activate the actor in a rehearsal process?
- Can *gymnastics-based practices* be used to work on a naturalistic text?
- What elements from Practical Projects 1 and 2 can be implemented towards this process?

This next section of the chapter will focus on key elements of gymnastics-based practices that I found useful for guiding the actor through the rehearsal and performance processes: repetition and starting and paused positions. Each of these was discovered in the practical work and I believe added to the performers' level of preparedness when entering performance.

Repetition

The way I chose to run the staging phase of the process was directly influenced by my understanding of my training as an elite gymnast and backed through my work with past directors, specifically Dr. Terry Converse. Repetition is a key component of gymnastics training. The gymnast is required to perform several repetitions of each individual skill, set of skills, and whole routine to fully ingrain the movements in the gymnast's bodymind. The

gymnast learns a routine in a similar way. They are taught the routine in sections, always returning to sections they have learned before moving forward. Dr. Converse draws upon repetition in his practice as a way to ingrain action and understanding in the performer. He begins by staging the first scene or set of pages and will then return to it the next day and the day after that. Each scene or set of pages that is then added subsequently is rehearsed with the first set. So, each rehearsal always begins with staging that has already been established. I chose to follow this line of structure in the staging process of *Miss Julie*, to work towards deep understanding of the action and text.

To utilise this notion of repetition within the rehearsal process, I employed it within staging the text. This began through staging of the set and inviting the performers to improvise the movement of the first five pages of the script. Once this was complete, we went back and worked through the staging they had improvised and honed it. They then repeated the five pages twice more. At the end of the rehearsal, I invited them to use the *retrospective visualisation* to see clearly the staging in their mind's eye. When they returned to rehearsal on the second day, after the warm-up, we began with the visualisation of the previous day's work. I then invited them to internalise the visualisation and perform the first five pages again. When this was complete, we moved onto the next five pages. I worked this way through the entirety of the script, always returning to the previous work. I employed the use of repetition of action and visualisation to fully integrate the text, staging, and character into the performer's bodymind. The performers reflected that they

felt entirely comfortable with the beginning of the play but as it went on, their confidence and understanding grew weaker and weaker, because they did not spend as much time on the latter half of the text in rehearsal. Indeed, I could see that I did not allow for enough time to fully integrate the latter half of the text. In hindsight, more time in the rehearsal process would have alleviated this. However, I argue that this use of repetition was beneficial for the performers' work and can be seen in the quality of their performance and in their reflections on the process.

Starting/Paused Positions

During the staging process I also drew on earlier work with starting positions and began exploring them as key parts of the performance. In gymnastics training, gymnasts are guided to discover moments of rest within their routine. These brief moments of rest allow the gymnast to pause in preparation for the next large element or set of skills, visualising them before action. Olympic gymnast Imogen Cairns describes these moments as 'the ability to gather my energy. I need all the power I can get; so I take 2-3 seconds in stillness to gather my focus and breath and visualise my next move' (2012). Similarly, David Mackey taught this practice within my own elite training. I drew on these pauses to gather my energy and re-attune my focus to the task. To apply this practice towards performance work I guided the performers towards finding similar 'rest' moments in their performance. These were then referred to as paused positions. Here, I aimed to guide the performers towards access of this re-gathering of energy and to draw on visualisation throughout the performance. To guide the actors towards this, I drew back on statue posing

as discussed previously. The performers had previous experience with the use of statues in relationship to their work between the oppositions of hard and soft, eccentric and concentric movement, and fluidity and rigidity in Practical Project 2 and earlier in this project for character development.

To work towards these moments in performance, I invited the performers to create opening starting positions and paused positions for each time they left stage. So each performer started the performance in their statue starting positions and throughout the performance, instead of having the performers leave the stage completely, they stayed on stage in a statue until their next entrance. They each developed positions that embodied an emotional state for them at that moment within the play.



Figure 16: Example of a paused position in *Miss Julie*

In the above figure, Miss Julie (Zoe) is in a pose with her right arm extended back, open body and head tilted down and away. At this moment in the play, she is jovial and ready to dance; she is in control and feels free and open. Zoe

developed the above statue to embody Miss Julie's internal emotional state within this moment in the play. During this particular moment, I encouraged Zoe to focus her breath back to her core and re-focus her energy towards her next scene through visualisation. Giving her this time, I hoped, would allow her to harness a strong energy upon re-entry and a more embodied performance. I also hoped it would allow her to maintain her connection to her character and emotional state. As Genevieve Stebbins describes, the statues embody poise or equilibrium, 'calm and repose, [...] infinite capacity for expression, but at the same time giving no definite expression except that of capacity and power in reserve' (in Ruyter, 1999: 117). They bring balance while also holding strong oppositions and dichotomies between the softness of the external form of the statue and the inner workings of the performer. Therefore, Zoe was able to externally show a harmonic balance and poise while working internally. In gymnastics this is described as a quality of ease. The gymnast is trained to maintain a soft yet powerful exterior while internalising the effort and work. When in performance, the three drew heavily on their paused position moments. When discussing it with them afterwards they reflected that these moments were extremely important for them during the performance. Zoe stated, 'I began to look forward to reaching the moments of statue. I needed to re-gather and refocus, my nerves were taking over. But every time I got back into a statue, I could go back to my visualisation and focus my energy again' (2013). While I believe this is a strong outcome, I can also see that perhaps the performers relied too heavily on the statues and would not always be given this opportunity. If I were to have a second performance, I would work from the statue positions more

overtly, as impetus for performance. Secondly, I would use a smaller excerpt of text to allow a deeper engagement in rehearsal and performance settings.

During Phase 2 of the process I encountered several discoveries and new gymnastics-based tools to draw on for activating the performer, including starting and pause positions (statues) and repetition towards ingraining of material. In addressing my research questions I was able to understand how and where *gymnastics-based practices* can be used to activate the actor: through repetition, use of *gymnastics-based visualisation*, the *extra-daily warm-up*, and harnessing of energies through *starting and paused positions*. This work directly fed into the culmination of the project, a performance of *Miss Julie* for my peers, supervisors and examiners. Below I discuss the performance and how the work of Phase 2 might be called upon in performance settings to bring the performer to a prepared state. It also explores the notion of the walk-through and how that might facilitate performative readiness.

Performance

I presented a full staging of *Miss Julie* in the seventh week of the process. The performance presented some of the work the participants and myself had been exploring in the studio over the course of the six weeks (See DVD PPIII 3.2). I chose to use the entire text in performance to see how the performers engaged in a full-length performance and if they could maintain engagement and continue drawing upon the tools that had been offered to them. The performance itself offered new discoveries and unforeseen outcomes. During

this phase and through critical reflection after, I focussed on addressing the following research question:

- What are the potential limitations/challenges of using *gymnastics-based practices* in this context and how can these challenges be addressed?

On the day of the performance, I invited the performers to feel freedom in dropping out of the performance. I instructed them that if at any moment they felt they were not engaged within the performance, they could stop, step out, and regain engagement/concentration and step back into the performance. I hoped this would encourage the performers to have a deeper conscious relationship with their performative readiness. Zoe reflected on this opportunity as 'a good option'. However, she stated, 'I never felt comfortable within the performance to actually take advantage of it. I felt nervous that the audience wouldn't understand what was going on' (2013). Both Carmen and Joseph agreed with Zoe, and although felt that perhaps they should have taken advantage of this they never felt fully comfortable in the risk. According to McCutcheon:

The space between the audience and actor is unrehearsed [...] Playing with the 'metaphysics' or 'ethers' that create the unseen energy medium between actor and audience is an area left to the actor to determine on opening night, and often left out of the actor's conscious tool kit (2008: 11).

In retrospect, I understand this as the relationship between audience and performer and the contract created within this. I believe that if I had given a clearer introduction to the audience, and allowed for the relationship to

develop before the performance started, then the actors might have been in a more comfortable state allowing themselves the availability to engage in this opportunity. This could have been done through a pre-performance presentation and discussion with the audience. In this case, I would have made clear the performers' options.

Walk-Through

To further prepare the performers for performance and to encourage readiness and preparedness, I invited the performers to perform a walk-through before the performance. A walk-through is described as a gymnast physically marking out their routine before competition. A walk-through, in gymnastics, is used to conserve physical energy but allows the gymnast to bodily step through their routine. This is most often followed by a mental visualisation of the routine. The walk-through became an integral part of the rehearsal process with the aim of engaging the performers in a fuller integration of their performance. I hoped the walk-through would aid the actors in preparation and readiness. This walk-through exercise was used in our rehearsals after the warm-up each day. The walk-through in rehearsal gave the performers the opportunity to corporeally remember their own physical journey throughout the performance. I also used it as a device for script and blocking memorisation, entering a state of repetition to optimise memory. Joseph reflected that the walk-through allowed him to calm his nerves. He stated, 'when the audience was arriving I could feel I was getting nervous and that I might forget my lines, you know. So, walking it through allowed me to be like "no, I've got this"' (2013) (See DVD PPIII 3.3). After the walk-through, I

invited the performers to use *gymnastics-based visualisation* to see the entirety of the performance in their mind's eye. I hoped both these tasks would guide them towards a state of energetic readiness and preparedness. Upon reflection the performers found these useful tools for 'focus' and 'confidence' (2013). Carmen noted 'the walk-through settled me and the visualisation made me focus. This was really helpful, I think. Especially after the audience entered and I felt my nervousness rise' (2013).

Overall, in reflection on the performance, often the performers' energy dropped, diminishing the kinaesthetic energy between them. This created a ripple effect where they would then draw upon old habits rather than the work we had been developing. When I discussed this with them post-performance, Joe stated, 'I just got so nervous. I was not prepared for that'. When I asked him to elaborate he reflected, 'I would try to reconnect with my core and ground myself through my feet, or focus on my breath, but I was constantly aware of the audience and couldn't separate from that' (2013). This was consistent with the other performers' reflections on the performance as well. When asked if they felt the performance was to the standard they had hoped for, they each admitted that it was not. I agreed that from an outside point of view they were disconnected from parts of the performance and lacked a deep engagement with the work. They fell back on habitual natures, were rushed in delivery of text, and displayed nervousness.

This process and subsequent reflections were especially important for me to interrogate how *gymnastics-based practices* might be utilised in a process that

is not directly explicit to the physical-based work. Dr. Maria Kapsali's PhD project (2010) attempted a similar research project, investigating the use of yoga poses to inform character development and performance. Here, she worked with three actors on Tennessee William's *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* in a rehearsal and performance process. Kapsali's reflections on her investigation were extremely useful in the evaluation of this project. She notes:

The project was inevitably focussed on the deployment and application of yoga practice, but I was also aware that a text and a performance have their own rules and internal logic; 'a performance will be bad research if it is boring, no matter how much theoretical gloss is poured over it' writes Martin Welton (2003: 349). [...] Taking the above into account, my intention was double-faceted; to stage a performance for the purposes of the project but not at the expense of the text (Kapsali, 2010: 161).

Similarly, Kapsali reflects that the 'practice of yoga was not approached as a potential acting *method*' but rather an application to a process (ibid). These reflections allowed me to consider the notion of 'failure', in practical research projects. While the performance itself may have 'failed' (in that it did not meet all the intended outcomes), the process in my opinion did not.

From this project, I would argue the use of a *rehearsal extra-daily warm-up* promoted continued embodied practice amongst the performers. I would also argue that use of *gymnastics-based visualisation* and *retrospective visualisation* was useful in character development and rehearsal and performance processes. Furthermore, gymnastics elements can be used to promote work with the voice. I would argue that the use of starting and pause

positions and walk-throughs can be used to give the actor the opportunity to focus and harness energy. Each of these, I believe, provides the performer with necessary tools.

As mentioned earlier, this process offered several discoveries. Similarly, it offered several challenges that have formed further questions. In the next section of this chapter, I will address some of the key difficulties. Within this I will focus on the following questions:

- What aspects of the process and research 'did not work'?
- What areas of the process would I re-address?
- What processes, workshops and exercises would I use to re-address these moments?

I will also address future practices and if I had the opportunity to continue the exploration, what further work I would explore. I believe addressing these points is an important component of the evaluation process of this project and my future research.

As discussed, this overall PhD project situates itself within the field of practice-as-research. Within this relatively new field (formally established in the UK in 2000), there is always a level of risk, particularly risk in 'failure', according to scientific methodologies. As Robin Nelson suggests, 'qualitative research is still at times mistakenly judged in quantitative terms and the legitimacy of qualitative evaluation techniques continues to be critiqued more than their quantitative counterparts' (Leavy in Nelson, 2013: 51). In response to this, he states 'in making the case for different modes of knowing generated in PaR, I propose to depart from positivism and 'the scientific method' as the only valid

research paradigm' (ibid). Here, he argues qualitative findings of PaR research hold equal weight to the 'quantitative, data-based knowledge and facts about the world [that] continue to underpin most scientific approaches' (2013: 50). While this individual project offered several discoveries in qualitative terms, there was also an element of 'failure' according to 'the scientific method' — i.e. it did not answer all objectives outlined at the outset.

In the evaluation of the rehearsal process and performance through review of video recordings, post-project interviews and questionnaires, and journal entries, I identified key difficulties that arose within the process. Firstly, the rigid time frame of the project provided a number of limitations, which I had not accounted for in the planning process. The six-week development and rehearsal process proved to be too constrained for the performers and myself. This meant that there was insufficient time to fully explore ideas, frameworks, and research questions. An alternative task would have been to highlight key selections of the text to explore, rather than the entirety of the script. However, I specifically chose to explore the full script in performance in attempt to address how the performer could use *gymnastics-based practices* in performance of a naturalistic dramaturgy.

After evaluation of the entire process and performance, if provided with the opportunity to return to the exploration and work again on the process I would re-consider key parts of the process. For instance, I would extend the rehearsal period for a longer period of time to allow for more time and understanding within the process. Secondly, I would work with the performers

more closely on the text. They admitted to being unconfident with parts of the material, which led to a succumbing to preventable nervousness in performance. Alongside this, I would allow for longer rehearsals. Each rehearsal was scheduled and ran at three hours in length. However, with the warm-up, workshop explorations and practical research, some of the rehearsals needed a longer duration for the specific work. I feel, with the allowing of longer rehearsals, the performers may have been able to more deeply engage in the process. Also, I would continue daily discussion with the participants on their engagement and understanding of the process, text, character development, and confidence in performance and I would maintain clearer expectations of the performer within the competition phase of the process. I also would have employed one-on-one rehearsals for character development and progress. Drawing on the notion *private practices*⁴⁰ from elite gymnastics would have allowed for a greater specificity in character development and understanding that could not be found through group work. I believe one-on-one rehearsals would have also allowed for individual development and greater confidence in the material leading to a deeper engagement within performance. Furthermore, I would have opted for more than one performance.

By returning to the process after these evaluations, and using the theories gained, I believe I could have obtained further results. I believe this would

⁴⁰ Private Practices: Here, a coach will work with a gymnast individually, outside of scheduled group trainings. This is to focus more closely on the individual's development. It most often leads to a higher work ethic in the gymnast, greater long-term development, and increased development of the *coach-gymnast relationship*.

have allowed for a deeper level of understanding and given the performers a deeper level of engagement with the material.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this final project offered the opportunity to engage further with the themes that have emerged during this research process. The project specifically investigated *gymnastics-based practices* and processes and explored how they might be used towards a directing process of a naturalistic text. It also experimented with the application of *gymnastics-based practices* towards voice and character development. Furthermore, it investigated the use of *gymnastics-based exercises* and workshops to guide the performer towards embodied performance.

Additionally this project, similar to the prior projects, generated a number of questions, which point towards future research and practice possibilities.

- What other performance dramaturgies might benefit from *gymnastics-based practices*?
- How can understanding the concept of a gymnastics 'routine' be used as a metaphor for performance and used to guide the performer?
- What other *gymnastics-based exercises* could be used towards vocal work and character development in future performance?
-

Separate from these questions, the project also shone light towards routes for future exploration. I will discuss these potential future investigations in the conclusion portion of this thesis.

Conclusion

This thesis has presented the findings of a three-year practical study into the understanding of gymnastics, its lineages, and the potential use of *gymnastics-based practices* towards performer training. This study was based in Exeter, United Kingdom and used historical and practical methodologies to obtain qualitative understanding and form evaluations. Data was gathered through three studio-based explorations, interviews, journal entries, video documentation, participation, discussion, and questionnaires.

This thesis was based on my own personal commitment to performer training, both as a practitioner and performer. While this thesis will be useful for others, this was a personal investigation that reflected on my previous practices within the fields of gymnastics and performer training. During this project I attempted to unpick certain histories and practices towards developing gymnastics-based practices for performer training. I do not propose that I have developed a 'training' for the performer. Rather I argue, I have developed a set of frameworks, exercises, and principles that I believe address certain key needs of the performer.

This thesis argued that, while under-recognised, gymnastics has played a key role in Western socio-cultural, elite sport, and theatre contexts since the late eighteenth century. It also argued that certain *gymnastics-based practices* could be used towards activating the contemporary performer. This final section will highlight and evaluate the outcomes of the research, summarise

key points that have emerged, discuss the limitations of the project, and point out directions for future research and investigation.

Outcomes of the Thesis

An issue raised early in this thesis was the notion of gymnastics as a supplementary practice in theatre training and practices. Researchers and practitioners argued gymnastics was a necessary but secondary practice; that it could only offer the actor certain base tools; that it did not provide the imagination required for the actor. The practical exploration of this thesis conceived and developed exercises that combat these notions. It created exercises and workshops using *gymnastics-based practices* that can activate the actor in extra-daily, rehearsal, and performance modes. This thesis addressed the following aspects of performer training: movement, the bodymind relationship, imagination, ensemble work, and voice:

- **Movement:** this project specifically designed ways to enhance and develop the actors' physical vocabulary through the dissemination of key elite gymnastics elements, such as handstands, leaps, turn, cartwheels, jumps, and rolls. Furthermore, the development of the *extra-daily warm-up* (endurance, strength, flexibility training) enhanced the actors' bodies.
- **Bodymind Relationship:** this project drew on *gymnastics-based visualisation* and *retrospective visualisation*, alongside the learning of gymnastics principles and practices to develop and hone the bodymind relationship in the performer.

- **Imagination:** The use of *gymnastics-based visualisation* to conjure and sustain images of character, movement, scene development, and improvisation.
- **Ensemble work:** Through development of the *coach-gymnast relationship*, the *extra-daily warm-up*, and key exercises the actors are guided towards development of the relationship to a group, partner, and facilitator/director. These also enhance the kinaesthetic energy between the actor and their counterparts.
- **Voice:** The use of *gymnastics-based practices* and elements, particularly the handstand, can activate the performers' connection to the voice in rehearsal settings.

Alongside the development of *gymnastics-based practices* towards performer training, this project worked with different performance dramaturgies. The project explored a variety of performance modes to gain a deep understanding of the demands of the actor and which areas of *gymnastics-based practices* might be useful in each of these scenarios. The emphasis on the final performance varied in each practical project. For instance, in the third project, the performance was at the center of the investigation, whereas in the first project engagement with the performance took place at the end of the process as an experimental performative process.

This thesis also extended the use and practice of gymnastics and developed frameworks through which *gymnastics-based practices* can inform the actor's work. It also explored and discussed preconceptions of the sport that might have previously hindered participants from engaging in the practice. It attempted to transcend these preconceived notions of the sport through

providing an accurate historical account and through problematising some key issues of the sport.

In terms of examining gymnastics terminology, this PhD project explored and applied this terminology in great detail during the practical exploration. I argue the distinctive vocabulary of gymnastics can be used in a variety of different performative and extra-daily modes. For instance, the exploration of the phases of learning of the gymnast: Cognitive, Associative, and Autonomous, under the larger scale of Sampling, Specialising and Investment years, were invaluable to this process. This allowed me to understand the learning process of the performers and to classify them into workable phases. I argue that the learning process of the gymnast can be applied to the learning and development process of the actor across several different contexts and would be entirely useful for other facilitators. Similarly, the *coach-gymnast relationship* served as an outline for the relationship between director/facilitator and performer. I argue the principles of the *coach-gymnast relationship* can be adopted across various training and rehearsal settings. Furthermore, the use of these gymnastics-based tools, and other exercises developed in this process (kinaesthetic energy, body response) can be utilised separate from the overall work, standing on their own as useful exercises in activating the performer. Finally, I argue that the use of these frameworks is helpful for fostering individual development in training and rehearsal processes. Indeed, it can help promote the individual growth of the performer in group and ensemble settings. For example, as I discussed in detail in Chapter 5, the learning process for Zoe was different from the learning

process for Carmen. Whereas I would evaluate that Carmen shifted into the Associative Stage of learning, Zoe remained in the Cognitive Stage. Therefore, when adopting the *coach-gymnast relationship* I adapted my engagement to suit their individual needs at the time.

One area of this research that has become key to the overall project is the discovery and development of *gymnastics-based visualisation*. This was first addressed in Practical Project 1. It began through an examination of my own training as an elite gymnast and the inherent practices gained from this previous training. The three practical projects within the overall project allowed a deep development of this practice and how it can be useful for the actor. I argue that *gymnastics-based visualisation* is a nuanced and unique component developed in this research. Similar to the frameworks mentioned above, *gymnastics-based visualisation* and *retrospective visualisation* can be used by the actor individually or in rehearsal and performance settings. I argue the benefits *gymnastics-based visualisation* can give the actor are clear: individual development, bodymind work, imagination work, character development, and performative readiness. Similarly, it encourages an evaluative process in the performer to allow for greater development in his/her own processes and performances. Similarly, *retrospective visualisation* and *cognitive restructuring* are useful in these instances. I support the performer using these tools in their own time or in rehearsal and performance settings.

In addition, the use of *gymnastics-based practices* can be extended beyond the mode of performance. They can also be used as an ongoing pre-

performative tool to prepare the performer. The performer can utilise the *extra-daily warm-up* as a continuous process to maintain a performance-ready self. The *gymnastics-based exercises* can also be used in workshop settings and monologue preparation. The use of gymnastics as a training model can enhance the performers' confidence, body memory, deep connection with one's own body, and relationship to the other. I believe the work developed in this current study has given rise to the possibilities of these future explorations.

As mentioned above, this thesis does not suggest that this is a fully-formed training for performers, but rather gives the beginning structures of a potential training that would likely take years to develop in full. However, I argue that this work pushes the current boundaries of performer training through *gymnastics-based practices*, which can be utilised across a variety of dramaturgies. It gives the actor a physical vocabulary based in bodymind principles that did not exist prior to this research. Where this work differentiates itself from contemporary trainings is through the learning of an extended physical vocabulary, which can be used in performance. The use of acrobatics and gymnastics skills in performance can be seen in several different contemporary dramaturgies and performance modes. This work not only guides the actor towards a body and mind attunement through a *holistic approach* but also provides them with several gymnastics elements to draw on and/or utilise in performance. Furthermore, *gymnastics-based practices* also hone the actor's body — giving them an articulate body to work from. It

embeds a physical culture in the performer and promotes a deep engagement and communication with the self.

There are certain limitations to this work that should be addressed. For instance, in order for all aspects of the training to be used by another facilitator, they would most likely need to have a gymnastics background. Of course, certain elements can be used extraneously, such as gymnastics-based visualisation. However, I should now note that *gymnastics-based visualisation* is a process best learned through facilitation and each performer's ability and engagement with the process will vary. Similarly, it is a process that takes time and must be carefully attended to. Performers should not expect to be able to automatically engage in deep *gymnastics-based visualisation* when first encountering it. Finally, it should be noted that the efficacy of *gymnastics-based visualisation* is dependent on other factors, particularly the stage of development of the individual performer and distribution of the *gymnastics-based visualisation*. For instance, the facilitator should be conscious not only of the performers' ability to engage in visualisation, but how much visualisation they are able to access at one time. This should be a steady process through which the facilitator and/or director continually increases the amount of visualisation as the development and understanding of the performer increases. Otherwise, the performer might find themselves unable to deeply connect with the visualisations.

This also leads me onto the ethical responsibilities of the facilitator in this practice. During this process I took great care in understanding my ethical

responsibilities to the performer. The development of the coach-gymnast relationship became a key structure in my maintenance of this ethical practice. In understanding the risks in this practice, I paid particular attention to the care of each individual and their practice. One step I took towards this was gaining verbal acknowledgement that all participants understood each task they were being invited to partake in. By inviting and receiving verbal acknowledgement, both the participants and myself were accountable in their learning and safety. Considering this work is physical in nature, alongside firsthand knowledge and practice of gymnastics, I would encourage other facilitators to consider their ethical responsibilities in this practice. For instance, in the teaching of gymnastics skills the facilitator would need to have training in the doing and leading of gymnastics. This is for the safety of the performer and for a deeper understanding of the practice for the facilitator. Without previous experience the facilitator could risk physical injury in the participants and/or themselves. Furthermore, I would encourage the facilitator to understand his/her own limitations in order to more fully serve the performer. For example, some participants might require physical support whilst attempting gymnastics elements. In this case, the facilitator should understand their strength and support limitations. I believe these types of ethical considerations are important to this work.

Summary of Findings

In summation, this research project gave me the opportunity to make several discoveries including⁴¹:

- *Gymnastics-based practices* can be used to guide the performer in pre-performative and performative modes.
- *Gymnastics-based practices* promote a bodymind attunement through physical work.
- *Gymnastics-based practices* promote a mastery of the external and internal of the performer.
- *Gymnastics-based exercises* can be used to activate the performer in rehearsal and workshop settings.
- *Gymnastics-based visualisation* can inform learning, character development, performance creation, and deep understanding of performance.
- *Retrospective visualisation* promotes a critical self-evaluation process in the actor.
- The basic gymnastics elements provide the performer with a wider physical repertoire, vocabulary, and corporeal awareness.
- The use of *gymnastics-based exercises* developed in this research can be used by practitioners who are not extensively familiar with the practice.
- Practitioners, directors, and teachers who are not extensively familiar with the practice can employ *gymnastics-based visualisation*.
- The *extra-daily warm-up* gives the actor more endurance, strength, and flexibility — an articulate body.
- The practice of teaching of *gymnastics-based practices* can foster a strong relationship between the facilitator and participants, which can transition into rehearsal and performance modes. It can also foster a strong ‘team’ relationship between performers and participants.

⁴¹ As stated previously, the practical findings of this thesis were acquired through qualitative research methodologies, Practice-as-Research methods of evaluation, personal and critical reflection, and reflection of the participants.

- The practice and integration of *gymnastics-based visualisation* can inform the actor's process and embodied performance.
- The training through *gymnastics-based practices* can enhance the performer's ability to self-evaluate.
- The understanding of basic elite gymnastics skills can increase the performer's body memory and ingrain physical culture.
- The use of starting positions and paused positions can allow the performer to harness energy, focus, and breath.
- *Gymnastics-based practices* can develop the performer's deep understanding of kinaesthetic energy.
- *Gymnastics-based practices* give a vocabulary for directors and actors to work from, allowing for clearer communication in rehearsal processes.
- The pedagogy of *gymnastics-based practices* offers flexibility, which can be moulded in performance-specific scenarios.
- The elite gymnastics training timeline can be used as a guide for rehearsal and performance in several different dramaturgical modes.
- The elite gymnastics learning structure can be used towards individual development.

Lexicon of Terminology

Alongside the umbrella term *gymnastics-based practices*, (the combination of non-elite gymnastics and elite gymnastics practices, workshops and frameworks towards the training of the contemporary performer) the following terms were developed or expanded through the practical exploration of this project and are included in the key findings.

Coach-Gymnast Relationship: described as the trust-based relationship developed between the gymnast and the coach. Here, the coach/facilitator will

create an individual relationship with the gymnast/performer working closely with them to promote their own personal development.

Cognitive Restructuring: Where the gymnast is invited to use *retrospective visualisation* to review a performance 'up until the point where the sequence broke down, and then a successful ending can be added. The successful performance of the whole sequence is repeated until the gymnast is confident' (Readhead, 2011: 89).

Extra-Daily Warm-up: A physical warm-up that focusses equally on flexibility training, strength training, endurance training, and mental training.

Gymnastics-Based Breathing: The combination of diaphragmatic breathing and dynamic breathing, aimed to guide the performer towards bodymind integration and preparedness.

Gymnastics-Based Visualisation: An exercise where the gymnast/performer closes their eyes, pictures him/herself in front of themselves performing a skill, routine, scene, sequence, or performance and then internalises the image and outwardly performs the visualisation. Over time, this becomes an inherent practice in the gymnast/performer and is a key part of their overall development.

Holistic Approach: Using principles and practices of non-elite and elite gymnastics in preparing the performer with equal emphasis on and practice of physical and mental preparation towards optimal bodymind attunement.

Rehearsal Extra-Daily Warm-up: A condensed version of the *extra-daily warm-up* used during rehearsal and performance periods. It is usually adjusted to suit the daily work.

Retrospective Visualisation: A mental preparation exercise where the gymnast/performer visually remembers their routine/performance in their mind's eye.

Dissemination

It is important to further note the dissemination of the work explored in this project and the current reach and effect it has. During the course of this project, key findings have been disseminated in the traditional academic formats such as conference papers and through practical workshops and university module teaching. In addition, material has been shared with the participants of this study. Samples from this thesis and from conference papers were given to the participants for their approval. Along these lines, copies of video recordings have been available to those who have requested them. The participants were aware that their testimonials, thoughts and feedback within the studio and rehearsal setting would be used for the purposes of this research and that we could request to see these at any time. Finally, the participants were also aware that some of their feedback and thoughts on the process might be shared with other participants in forming a fuller understanding of the group's engagement. This research has also been disseminated in a variety of different contexts, to several different audiences including workshops given to MA/MFA students at Exeter University (2011, 2012, 2013), workshops given to BA students at Exeter University (2011, 2012, 2013) and through teaching on the Research and Performance module (2012, 2013) and Theatrical Interpretations module (2014) at Exeter University. Alongside this, the ideas and findings of this project have been shared through conversation, interview, and email correspondence with colleagues in the field, other researchers, and practicing artists. This dissemination and facilitation of ongoing discussion/work is one way to further develop the future pathways of this research, foster potential shared

narratives of those who have engaged in the experience, and demonstrate the impact of the research.

In consideration that this was a personal investigation, I contacted the past participants to understand whether the work was effective from their point of view.

- Do you consider the *gymnastics-based practices* explored to be relevant and/or useful to your current understanding of performer training?
- What areas, if any, of the gymnastics-based work have you brought forward in your own practice as a performer, director and/or facilitator?
- Would you be interested in partaking in further *gymnastics-based practices*? If so, in what capacity? If no, why not?

I aimed to understand if, how, and where the work was being further explored, utilised or disseminated. I have included some excerpts of responses below:

- 'I run now regularly. It's all because of you, really. I feel so much healthier and able' (Nicole, Year 3, Exeter University).
- 'I never go into a performance now without visualising it first. I couldn't imagine not visualising. I guess that means it's become ingrained' (Joseph, Year 2, Exeter University).
- 'Kelly, you'd be so proud of me! I eat healthy, I work out on a regular basis, and I try to take care of my mind and body as much as possible. It's really helped me in performance, I can feel it. I'm able to connect in ways I hadn't been previously' (Katie, Year 3, Exeter University).
- 'It's so funny you emailed, I just used your body shapes⁴² exercise with my actors the other day in rehearsal. I told them your story about your injury (I hope you do not mind) and they couldn't get over it! They had so many questions about what it would be like not to be able to move

⁴² Here, she is referring to the body response exercise as detailed in Chapter 4.

or talk. It was the most vocal and engaged they'd been!' (Laura, Professional Theatre Director).

From the responses received, I would argue there is further potential in the development and transference of this work. The sharing of practices, key ideas, and workshops is very helpful towards the continuation and expansion of theories formed during this project. It also gives me a deeper understanding of the engagement of the work and material amongst current performers, directors, and facilitators.

Future Research

While this thesis worked towards developing *gymnastics-based* practices towards performer training, a future trajectory of the research is important to note. Over time I aim to develop this work towards a fully formed training for performers. For future purposes and usage, the beginning training might look as follows, in an extra-daily setting:

- Participants arrive in studio
- Participants are led through the *extra daily warm-up*: endurance training, strength training, flexibility training (Chapters 3 and 4)
- Participants engage in opening *gymnastics-based visualisation* sequence (Chapter 4)
- Participants learn basic gymnastics elements through *gymnastics-based visualisation*: scales, leaps, jumps, turns, handstands, cartwheels, rolls. (Chapter 4)
- Participants are guided in workshops and/or exercises that suit the particular day's needs. (Chapters 4 and 5)
- Participants are invited to engage in a closing flexibility training session and cool-down.

I envisage that as the training would continue, and the participants progressed, they would be invited to learn more difficult gymnastics skills and sequences, further enhancing their physical vocabulary. I argue *gymnastics-based practices* can not only enhance the physical vocabulary of the doer but also provide tools distinctive to the performer. The continued repetition of the basic gymnastics elements encourages use of the whole body and can eventually shift the movement beyond the basic external form towards a deep synchronicity with the mind. The gymnastics elements used in this work can also serve as starting points in devising processes or movement improvisations, as they extend the actor's 'toolbox' in rehearsal and performance processes.

There are still a number of questions that remain at the conclusion of this project. One question in particular falls under pedagogical consideration: What happens when the performer reaches the 'end' of the training? For example, if/when a participant reaches the Autonomous Stage of learning of the basic gymnastics elements -- how and where do I further his/her training? At this stage, the work only exists to the point discussed in this thesis. I believe that the next stage of development would be to address the next set of gymnastics elements for learning, i.e. aerials, flips, switch leaps, dive rolls, and jump combinations — all extensions of the basic gymnastics elements. To begin an exploration of this, I would invite participants who have previously engaged in *gymnastics-based visualisation* processes towards the learning of more advanced skills. This extended physical vocabulary would allow the performer

greater physical performative possibilities as well as an opportunity to develop the bodymind continuum.

I would argue that there is also room for further development and research within the fields that this project *did* address. The use of gymnastics-based work in different dramaturgies and performance contexts could give rise to further questions and areas of study. For example:

- How could the use of *gymnastics-based practices* be used to address other key needs of the performer?
- How could gymnastics-based explorations inform the development of participatory performance?
- How could *gymnastics-based practices* be used in circus or aerial performance?

I believe I could also explore further exercises informed by elite gymnastics training and performance. Furthermore, I can unpack my own knowledge and history of gymnastics to uncover further ways of activating the performer; for example, in future, exploring the relationship between teammates towards further work with ensembles and devising processes. While gymnastics is technically an individual sport, the support and unity of the team is an important part of the process. I would be interested in exploring this further in continued development of this research. All of these areas offer potential for future study and exploration.

One area of the project that I have further explored is the use of *gymnastics-based practices* in performance development and delivery. In 2013, I developed a performance project entitled Running | Out of Time, exploring

'freerunning' and 'parkour' with women. In this project I aimed to use these structures towards encouraging women to feel a freedom in their bodies. The performance is a part-audio, part-video individual running experience. To develop this piece, I drew on concepts and ideas drawn from the practical portion of this PhD project. I began through visualising a physical score, as explored with the balance beam routine in Practical Project 1. An internalising of activating images developed from the movement score then followed this. From these images, I wrote a fictional story that incorporated the physical score within the narrative. In the experience a woman downloads an audio file of the story to their Mp3 player. Afterwards they go to any place, at any time with a partner of their choosing. They each press play simultaneously on their respective Mp3 players and are taken through a free-running journey. The woman is invited to 'become' the character in the story she hears, while her partner videotapes her journey. At the end of the experience the woman sends me back the video and I upload it to a global platform where the videos of women from all over are played simultaneously. The aim of this project was to understand how *gymnastics-based practices* might be used towards an audio-based performance. Here, I was able to draw on principles and practices of this research towards creation of a performative experience not explicit to the work.

It should be stated that this thesis does not argue *gymnastics-based practices* could be a systematic training and rather aligns itself with many twentieth and twenty-first century practitioners' views on 'training'. The *gymnastics-based practices* have a deeper concern in identifying chief principles, tools,

exercises and structures for the contemporary actor, director, and facilitator. On a wider scale, and one not explored in this thesis, I would argue that because elite gymnastics is currently practiced and competed worldwide, a cross-cultural language and space for this type of practice is already in existence and provides a wider landscape for this training to exist within, reaching beyond Western performers.

Overall, I would argue that this project has offered unique contributions to the field. It situated itself between the fields of sport science and performer training, and moved beyond the scope of previous projects. It gave unique insight into the role of gymnastics in Western culture, elite sport, and theatre practices and trainings and developed *gymnastics-based practices* towards performer training.

Based on the above discoveries and conclusions, it is my hope that this thesis has demonstrated the potential of the area and has paved the way for future development and investigation.

Appendix 1.0 – Glossary of Terms

The following terms are used throughout Part 2 of the thesis. These terms are from the existing vocabulary of gymnastics training and competition and psychophysical actor training. Unlike the terms listed in the lexicon, these terms were existent prior to this research and were used, moulded and adapted towards work on this research project.

Acrobatic elements: Gymnastics movements, which include somersaults, back flips and handsprings.

Aerobic Exercise: Exercise that requires oxygen to release the energy stored in the muscles and liver.

Anaerobic Exercise: Exercise that does not require oxygen to release the stored energy.

Associative Stage: In this stage of learning the gymnast/performer will begin to refine the movements as they have more understanding of the skill.

Autonomous Stage: In this stage of learning the movements will eventually become automatic and the skill is said to have become 'overlearned'. The skill will continue to improve and be consolidated with just very fine changes being made.

Body Tension: Holding the mid-body tight to control the shape of the body.

Cartwheel: A sideways acrobatic roll with the arms and legs extended.

Centring: Where the performer/gymnast finds an internal balance.

Choreography: The arrangement of body movements and dance elements in a floor or beam routine.

Cognitive Stage: In the early stages of the learning the gymnast will be concerned with which movements are required in order to understand the skill.

Competition Phase: 30 percent physical preparation and 70 percent technical training. The normally high workload is reduced in this phase to enable the gymnast to focus on the quality of routines and mental preparation.

Consistency: Being able to repeat a movement or skill accurately over and over again.

Element: An individual gymnastics skill or movement.

Endurance: The ability to repeatedly perform physical exercises for some time before tiring.

External Focus: The focus of the eyes on a particular point or set of points.

Execution: 1. The performance of a routine. 2. The form, style and technique used to complete the skills included in a routine.

Flexibility: The range of movement in a joint complex and muscular form.

Handstand: Supporting the body in an inverted vertical position.

Internal focus: The mind's engagement with a task or experience.

Investment Years: Characterised as the period where the gymnast/performer commits themselves to training towards the highest level of their own development.

Jump: Elevating off the ground from one or both feet in a vertical line.

Kinaesthetic Energy: The energy the gymnast/performer possesses when in motion. Also, a movement exercise developed as outlined in detail in Chapter 4.

Leap: A forward leap from one foot, landing on the opposite foot and assuming a split position in mid-air.

Maintaining Years: In which the gymnast/performer continues their training but on an extra-daily level without expectation of increasing ability

Mental Preparation: The use of *gymnastics-based visualisation*, *retrospective visualisation*, and *cognitive restructuring* as an equal part of the preparation of the gymnast/performer.

Momentum: The degree of motion gained as a result of movement.

Paused Position: A moment during the gymnast's routine where they gather energy and focus before moving forward to the next element or sequence.

Pike: A body shape in which the body is folded forward at the hips with legs extended straight.

Proprioceptive Imagery: Feeling a movement within the body.

Pre-competition Phase: Usually 40 percent physical preparation and 60 percent technical training. The content includes general and specific physical preparation, perfection of skills and combinations and practicing part and full routines.

Psychophysical: The active relationship between body and mind.

Roll: An acrobatic movement where the body makes a complete revolution, heels over head.

Routine: A sequence of gymnastics skills performed in a competition.

Sampling Years: Characterised as the experimentation of several avenues of their chosen field, i.e. painting, sculpture and photography for an artist.

Scale: A balance on one leg, with the other leg raised backwards, sideways or forwards and the upper body lowered slightly.

Self-evaluation: A continuous process through which the gymnast/performer is invited by their coach/facilitator to critically reflect on their own development and performance.

Side Coaching: The act of the director, facilitator or coach giving instruction, comment or suggestion on the side to heighten the performance of the gymnast/performer.

Spatial Awareness: The ability to orientate oneself while performing physical movement.

Specialising Years: A period where the gymnast/performer becomes autonomous and there is a 'mental changing of gears' where they hone in on their craft (Salmela in Jemni, 2011:116).

Starting Position: The stance of the gymnast/performer before they begin their routine/performance. Here, they visualise and gather focus and energy immediately before performing.

Straddle: A position in which the legs are wide apart and extended.

Strength: The quality of state of being strong.

Tapering: The gradual reduction of the extra-daily training just prior to performance in order to maximise performance energy.

Tuck: A position in which the legs are bent and the knees are pulled up to the chest.

Turn: A rotation on the body's axis supported by one or both feet.

Walk-through: Described as an exercise where the gymnast/performer physical marks-out the journey of their routine/performance. This is done at reduced outward energy and without the major skills, elements, or text.

Warm-up: Performing a series of exercises to warm up the body and mind prior to a training session.

Appendix 1.1 -- PP1 Example of Full-Day's Workout Schedule

Competition Season

3:00pm Practice begins

3:00 – 3:30 Endurance training - outdoor run

3:30 – 4:00 Strength and flexibility training – conditioning and stretching

4:00 – 5:00 Vault workout

5:00 – 6:00 Uneven parallel bars workout

6:00 – 6:15 Dinner break

6:15 – 7:15 Balance beam workout

7:15 – 8:15 Floor exercise workout

8:15 – 8:30 Cool down and stretching

Summer/Off-Season Schedule

8:00am Practice begins

8:00 – 8:45 Endurance training – outdoor run

8:45 – 9:45 Strength and flexibility training – conditioning and stretching

9:45 – 10:45 Vault work-out

10:45 – 12:15 Uneven parallel bars workout

12:15 – 12:30 Lunch break

12:30 – 2:00 Balance beam workout

2:00 – 3:30 Floor workout

3:30 – 4:00 Cool down and stretching

Appendix 1.2 – PP1 Journal Entry

11 November 2011

Today in the studio I worked again with gymnastics as the main source. Except today I tried skipping the warm-up to test its effectiveness. In return, my focus, flexibility, strength and stamina suffered. My body seemed to need this warm-up in order to function optimally. I'm curious if this is just today or a pattern. I wonder what would happen if I condensed the warm-up. Or cut out something? Like no running? Instead of the warm-up, I moved directly into the basic gymnastics elements. I'm beginning to understand what it takes to perform the scale movement: strength, energy through the feet, focus (internal and external) and balance. It's difficult to work backwards – I feel like it's already in my body, so how can I really 'know' what it takes to do a skill? Maybe that's what I will find out in the next project? Or if I look at the COP, I can see the technical aspects?

Appendix 1.3 – Full Journal Entry

5 December 2011

While it was useful to uncover the basic elements of gymnastics and visualisation, I'm wondering how I'm going to bridge gymnastics with performance. Is it just a process of trial and error? It seems as though I'll need some sort of adaptation process to connect the two practices. Just for fun today I played around with some potential work. I'm pretty sure it was all crap. But eh, that's what this is for, right? I started by trying to create a movement piece out the basic scale. It was interesting at first but I think I was pushing for something. I also think I spent way too long on that.

Appendix 1.4 – PP1 Journal Entry

30 January 2012

Today I worked with Delsartean statues in the studio. I took the idea of statues and used scales instead. I wanted to see if scales were like statues and free movement could be formed out of them. So far, all I'm finding is the pre-performative use of the gymnastics. I was hoping this would change that. I started with the breath and visualisation and entered the scale. It was very strange. It felt surreal. I had seen my body do things I did not know it could and then felt my body do things I did not know it could. Like my visualisation predicted my body. The exercise seemed to work for me. I loved the fluidity that came out of the rigidity. It felt natural and weightless.

Appendix 1.5 – PP1 Journal Entry

5 February 2012

Today I began with the *extra-daily warm-up*. I feel like it's really forming. I started with a run and then moved into push-ups, planks, sit-ups and squats for strength. I then stretched, using splits (ouch) ← am I getting old or just need more flexibility training? I used yogic stretches from Zarrilli's training and from Maria's Iyengar yoga. I chose to use their stretches today to see how the breath works in yogic stretching. It felt similar to the breath in gymnastics stretching. The inhalation and exhalations to release the tension to get a deeper stretch. After the warm-up I worked with Delsartean gymnastics again for improvisation and play. I cannot seem to move freely out of the cartwheel or roll. My body becomes stuck and the organic energy is lost. It's strange it doesn't work like the scale did. Perhaps because the scale and handstand are static and the roll/cartwheel are in motion? I can feel that there's potential there – the kinetic potential for more movement, more play.

Appendix 1.6 – PP1 Journal Entry

1 March 2012

I continued the warm-up today. I'm finding it equally important in the performance development process as it was in the training phase. I do not think I would be able to do the daily work without it. After the warm-up I visualised a beam routine. After I had it set in my mind, I went to attempt the routine. I felt nervous, as if I wouldn't be able to actually perform the moves. I felt as though my body would fail me. A body that has grown older; a body that is no longer what it was when I was competing. That makes me simultaneously sad and determined. I went back to the visualisation and breath and then went to attempt the routine again. I worked with ridding the external thought like Zarrilli taught me. I trusted my body and went for it. Although some of the moves hurt slightly on impact, I was able to make it through. Unharmmed.

Appendix 1.7 – PP1 Full Balance Beam Routine

Stand face the beam

- Back to judges
- Focus on beam
- Lift hands
- Place on beam
- Lift feet off ground
- Hips towards beam
- Hips touch surface
- Lift left leg
- Swing body around
- Left leg stretched out on beam
- Focus ahead
- Turn torso towards left
- Outstretch left arm
- Turn torso towards right
- Slide arm and body along beam
- Slide back to seated position
- Shift body to the right
- Lay down on beam in parallel
- Arch back
- Place head on beam
- Lift right arm
- Lift left arm
- Slide left hand down right arm
- Release head
- Sit up
- Place hands
- Stand
- Focus ahead
- Shift onto toes
- Pivot turn
- Dance step
- Pivot turn

- Focus ahead
- Lift left foot off beam
- Raise left leg backwards
- Lever body
- Bring arms out front
- Hold position
- Lever body
- Place left foot back on beam
- Step backward
- Open out arms
- Bring arms back to side
- Tap foot behind feeling edge of the beam
- Focus ahead
- Place feet in position
- Round-off
- Back-handspring
- Bring arms up in salute
- Step forward with left foot bending knees
- Step with right foot bending knees
- Arms move left then right
- Place right foot in front
- Focus on beam
- Full turn
- Place left foot
- Lift hands in salute
- Lift onto toes
- Pivot turn
- Step back
- Tap foot to feel the edge of the beam
- Place feet in position
- Focus ahead
- Step right foot

- Step left foot
- Switch wolf leap
- Straddle jump
- Lift hands in salute
- Lift onto toes
- Pivot turn
- Step left foot
- Swing right leg in swivel motion
- Step forward
- Bring feet together
- $\frac{3}{4}$ split jump
- Raise arms in salute
- Slide right foot along beam
- Arms position in angle downward
- Pivot left foot
- Place right knee on beam
- Bring torso forward
- Place hands
- Rise to standing position
- Pivot turn
- Place feet
- Cartwheel
- Split jump on one foot
- Pivot turn
- Dance step
- Pivot turn
- Step backward
- Tap foot to feel edge of beam
- Focus ahead
- Place feet
- Run towards end of beam
- Hurdle
- Jump off beam
- Land with both feet.
- Focus ahead
- Raise hand in salute

Appendix 1.8 – Full Journal Entry

6 March 2012

I was working with my beam routine today and moved forward into using impulses instead of movement. Rebecca gave me this suggestion the last time we met. It was really interesting to only follow the impulses and not the whole movement. I tried it a few times and images kept cropping up for me. Not like the outer thoughts but images of balloons and whirlwinds and a lion. My body felt as though it wanted to follow some of the images arising, it wanted to move with them. I started to follow the images and saw where that took me. It reminded me of in my MFA when I was working on the Bridge and I was using Butoh to connect the psychophysical with realistic text. I started feeling my body embody some of the stronger images. Tomorrow I'm going to work with this again and see what else comes up.

Appendix 1.9 -- PP1 Performance Full Text

I have a recurring dream. In it, there are two young girls with long brown hair floating over my bed. They wear gauzy, white nightgowns that fall loosely around pale legs and delicately pointed bare feet. I lie on my back beneath the covers watching them hover. They are lovely creatures, and I am not afraid; I am mesmerised, and I long to join them because they are cloaked by soft lips, graceful and pure. Their lips, pale rosebuds, curve into smiles; their brown eyes are wise; their delicate fingers cup together, holding a hidden promise.

And then the dream changes. The girls hover closer and their mouths open into cavernous, yawning black holes. Suddenly, all I can see is darkness. All I can hear is the roar of a vast ocean. I am cold; I am afraid; I am alone. I know that the blackness will swallow me whole, but my bones are leaden and I cannot move from my bed. I try to call out for help, but the scream catches in my throat. The terror tastes like salt and blood.

And then the dream shifts. I see tiny burst of colour flutter out of the darkness. The girls drift overhead; I am still shrouded by the void, but sapphire, ruby, and amber-coloured butterflies with transparent wings dart at the edge of vision...first one, then two, then many more. They look like stained glass – delicate, fragile, and breathtaking. The black begins to recede.

I peer into the girls' cupped hands. They are empty, and yet, they hold everything...promises, opportunities, desperation, love, angry words, delight, Romania, deception, rag dolls, fairy dust, clarity, applause, my grandmother's smile, tears, fear, red ribbons, barbed wire, practices, curses, surprises, my mother's touch, elation, America, music, the scent of vanilla, refusal, a first kiss, dances, whispers, apple trees, my brother's laugh, the scrape of chalk against my palms, airplanes, sunsets, disappointment, skin and wind and waves, rivals, survival, upheaval, broken words, magic, the feel of my father's hugs, chocolate, passports, fishing trips, funerals, birthdays, proposals.

Sometimes in my dream, fear paralyses me, and I cannot reach for the girls' hands. The darkness grows again and I am swallowed and wake gasping for air, my hair drenched with sweat, my heart skipping and racing and grasping. I feel lost then and lonely in my failure. I feel like a child, a teenager, a young woman who never had the opportunity to control her destiny and learned nothing from the years of frustration, confusion, and desolation. I see the ghostlike girls fade from my vision and their almond-shaped eyes fill with regret.

Appendix 2.1 -- Template for Participant Consent

Research and Performance Waiver

I understand that a significant part of this process is for Kelly Miller's PhD research. I agree to allow Kelly Miller to use any and all documentation taken during this course (Dram1012) as part of her final PhD Thesis and DVD Portfolio, if she so chooses. I also agree that Kelly may use any of my words (spoken or written) in her thesis.

| Name | Student Number | Date | Signature |
|------|----------------|------|-----------|
|------|----------------|------|-----------|

Appendix 2.2 – PP2 Module Handout and Reading List

RESEARCH AND PERFORMANCE DRA1012

Pre-performative actor training: Gymnastics-based-practices

“An untrained body is like an untuned musical instrument – it’s a sounding box filled with a confusing and ugly jangle of useless noise that prevents the true melody from being heard.” (Peter Brook)

Tutor: Kelly Miller

Contact Info: kmm209@exeter.ac.uk

07534914803

Module Convenor: Emily Kreider

Email: E.Kreider@exeter.ac.uk

Term 2 2012/13

PERFORMANCES: 7 March 2012

Times of Sessions: Monday 9:30 – 12:30 (RS2), Thursday 12:30-3:30 (RS1)

Friday 12:30-3:30 (RS1)

Overall module description:

Research and Performance aims to introduce students to the principles and practice of performance making/theatrical production and convention drawn from a particular area of research. The research includes studio and library-based enquiry, seminars, workshops and presentations in order for the students to understand and analyse the social, historic and political contexts surrounding the given area of research. This allows students to develop research through practice towards a production which will be developed through devising, original scripting or a published text. The students will also be introduced to some basic elements of stagecraft. Each student will follow studio-based sessions focussed on a particular area of performance.

Module Description Subject Specific:

Using the idea of the trained body as a vector for unlimited access to creative individuality, this specific module is centred on the pre-performative training of the performer through the lens of sport training: gymnastics. The student will undergo extra-daily training in gymnastics-based practices that will aid in corporeal awareness and a bodymind continuum towards embodied performance. Alongside the extra-daily training the student will be introduced, in reading and practice to different practitioners and performance modes that utilise or investigate gymnastics-based practices and how these forms can be accentuated through the pedagogical training.

Module Aims:

- To introduce students to plural modes of performance.
- To enable students to gain an understanding of principles of stagecraft, including technical aspects of production.

- To develop students' awareness of praxis in theatre.
- To enable skills-based learning through practice.
- To explore the relationship between individual exploration and creativity and group-led performance.
- To experiment with different modes of performance.
- To develop an understanding of research-based practice.

Module Learning Outcomes:

- Demonstrate critical engagement with the principles of the chosen field of enquiry through independent and group research with specific tasks.
- Demonstrate embodied engagement with the principles of the chosen field of enquiry through independent and group practice.
- Develop a basic knowledge of, and skills in, theatrical stagecraft.
- Demonstrate an ability to understand, analyse and embody a specific theoretical praxis and translate that knowledge into performance.
- Work as an ensemble member, initiate and sustain creative, analytic and interpretative work within strict time limits.
- Develop the ability to relate to others in theatrical processes and performances; to work effectively with others in small task-orientated groups and to initiate and sustain straightforward creative, analytic and interpretative work and basic technical competence.
- Develop basic library and IT skills.
- Develop confidence in the ability to contribute research to small groups in effective presentations and to evaluate visual evidence.
- Engage critically and analytically with physical discipline and develop a basic understanding of physicalisation in performance.
- Explore theoretical concerns through practice and vice versa. Synthesise these findings in simple practical and written tasks.
- Develop basic personal research skills; to identify and evaluate at a basic level personal learning strategies.
- Develop group cooperation skills, including the ability to give and receive constructive critical feedback and to develop confidence in communication skills and simple analytic abilities in discussions.
- Develop confidence in basic performance skills and public presentation, both of dramatic practice and researched material.
- Express and communicate straightforward creative ideas and images; develop the ability to initiate and sustain creative work, both group and solo.
- Collaborate in various groups and group sizes; develop confidence in aspects of teamwork and presentation.
- Develop the ability to balance between self-direction and collaborative work.
- Demonstrate basic self-management and collaborative working skills; undertake basic problem solving and critical analysis. Learn to value own and others' ideas and beliefs.

Teaching/Learning Methods:

- Interactive practical studio classes, seminar presentations (staff and student-led), production preparation and performance all prefaced and supported by reading and research assignments.
- Periodic small grouping in-class performance/presentations based on the underlying principles of the chosen field of enquiry as part of the continuous assessment mark. Performances/presentations will receive in-class oral feedback.
- Final whole group performance based on the chosen field of enquiry (approximately 40 minutes). These performances will receive oral feedback through group tutorials.
- Individual written research and process critical analyses of the final performance piece. This assignment will receive written feedback.

To ensure parity across groups, there will be no further tutor-led sessions after week 8.

Student Led Work:

Each week, one of your three sessions will be self-directed (**Thursday 12:30 – 3:30**). These sessions may require you to undertake private research and group rehearsal work. Attendance at these sessions is compulsory. Each tutor will devise a system for recording and monitoring attendance at these sessions.

Additional Hours:

In addition to the above studio sessions, you will be expected to devote time to personal and library-based research, writing your log books, regularly seeing live and recorded performances, meeting in groups to prepare and rehearse presentations, as well as extra rehearsals in the latter stages of the process. From week six you will also be encouraged to book extra rehearsal time as you move towards your final performance.

As a group you will be expected to oversee the management and promotion of the following online accounts/sites:

Email: gymnasticsrandp@gmail.com
Password: student2013

Website: www.GymRandP.blogspot.com
Username: gymnasticsranp@gmail.com
Password: student2013

You are expected to make a minimum contribution of 2 postings PER WEEK on the blog and to manage and communicate through the email account. These contributions will be counted toward the continuous assessment aspect of your final mark.

ASSESSMENT

30% Continuous assessment

The continuous assessment mark is holistic in approach. Students will be marked on attendance, punctuality, small-group and whole-group participation, preparation and effort in the reading, seminar and rehearsal processes, the research presentation in week five, and in overall comprehension of the module material. The log book is also a component of the continuous assessment mark.

The Log Book allows one to reflect critically on his/her progress in the studio sessions, seminar presentations, the essay, the rehearsal process and the performance. Use the log book as a way of documenting information, critically reflecting on your learning, building bridges between your research and practice, noting bibliographical references and recording quotations. This will help you to develop as a reflective practitioner. Log books are an invaluable reference source especially later in the course when you will need to refer to earlier work as an aid to performance, as well as being of great value for future learning and practice beyond the University. The log book must be brought to every session in order for you to take notes and must be brought to the mid-semester tutorial with your tutor.

****There will be a short period at the end of each session for students to write in their log books****

The Research Seminar forms part of the continuous assessment mark. Students will be set a research task to facilitate their understanding of the field of enquiry and to contribute towards the production. Students will present research outcomes in small seminar groups. Students will present in week 5.

Self-Directed Sessions:

Starting in week 3, the self-directed sessions will be used as an opportunity to begin work as devisors and explore practical knowledge of the subject matter. The class will be split into 4 groups of 5 students and each group will be expected to accomplish the following on their selected week:

1. On Monday of their selected week the group will present a concept for a performance, and a detailed plan to me at the end of class.
 - a. Note: The performance and/or devising process should demonstrate understanding and application of the training and weekly research topic.
2. On Thursday of their selected week the group will lead the rest of the students in the training warm-up.
 - a. They will then direct the rest of the students in a devised 5-minute performance that will be presented after the warm-up on Friday.
3. On Friday of their selected week the group will have the opportunity to have a small dress rehearsal
 - a. After the performance there will be a verbal feedback session/discussion and workshop of the devised material.

4. On the following Monday of their selected week each student will submit a critically reflective write-up of the process and performance, not to exceed 2 pages double-spaced.

- a. The rest of the students will hand in peer feedback on the group's work on Monday's session to Kelly. The criteria for this will be discussed in class.

- b. **NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

*The students in the group are expected take attendance for the rest of the group that will be given to Kelly on Friday. (Note: it will be obvious who missed because you will not be in the performance on Friday)

*The students should give a specific task to each person in the group. I.e. Warm-up leader, Stage-manager, Choreographer, Director, etc.

* The groups and weeks will be decided in the first week of term.

Continuous Assessment Criteria:

1. Punctuality, attendance and professional conduct;
2. Practical and theoretical research;
3. Evidence of collaboration and teamwork;
4. Engagement with module material and tasks set

****Students will NOT be marked on the level of gymnastics ability they reach in the process. It is about the embodied engagement, NOT the athletic ability.****

Peer Evaluation

Peer evaluation of each others' work is a valuable form of reflection. Each tutor will therefore devise formal peer evaluation sessions where you will have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss others' work. This will take the form of both ongoing continuous assessment reflection and on a group-led discussion of the other groups' pieces. Advice on this will be given in advance. Peer evaluation is not about criticising each others' attitudes and approaches, but a supportive mechanism to sustain and encourage progress and celebrate individual achievement and endeavour. It is a requirement of the course that you participate fully in peer evaluation.

35% Written Portfolio

The portfolio comprises of **two essays**.

Both essays should be submitted together to the Queen's Building by **4pm on 2nd May 2013**. You will receive your feedback and marks back by: **23 May 2013**

Tutors will give a mini-lecture at the end of term on addressing the written component of this module.

Essay 1: (Research Essay 2,000 words)

Essay one is a 'Research Analysis' in which students will critically analyse ideas, theories, practices, production histories, or another relevant topic of critical inquiry that has been an intriguing, challenging, or illuminating discovery relevant to the course from within the assigned reading. At least four outside sources must be used within the essay. **Your tutor will advise on essay titles/questions.**

Criteria for the Research Essay:

1. In-depth knowledge of material and range of examples;
2. Level of critical analysis and independent thinking;
3. Structure of argument/thesis;
4. Writing style and presentation.

Essay 2 (Reflective Essay 1,000 words):

Essay two is a 'Performance Analysis' in which students will respond to the processes and practical training leading to the final performance. This paper must detail the student's own process but must be framed within the overarching concerns of the course and supported by research, and should primarily allow the student to explore her/his own process, both successes and failures within a critical context. At least two outside sources must be used within the essay.

The title for the reflective essay (for all groups) is as follows:

Discuss and analyse how

- a) Your individual contribution to your group performance developed and enhanced the overall process and presentation, and b) participation in this performance has assisted your development as a theatre-maker.

Criteria for the Reflective Essay:

1. Clarity of discussion/argument;
2. Ability to apply research and/or theory to personal development as a theatre practitioner;
3. Analysis and insight into own contribution and role within overall process;
4. Writing style and presentation.

*Guidance on reflective writing may be found at

<http://services.exeter.ac.uk/cas/employability/students/reflective.htm>

*Please also see Christopher McCullough's General Introduction from *Theatre Praxis* that deals with the relationship between theory and practice, available from:

http://spa.exeter.ac.uk/drama/info/exeter/dra3020_excerpt.pdf

*Guidance on essay writing may be found at:

<http://spa.exeter.ac.uk/drama/info/exeter/essaynotes.html>

35% Performance

This is to be devised and performed by the group and will form part of the festival of first year work at the end of term two. Your tutor will serve as a sounding board and outside eye at critical moments in the rehearsal process, but s/he is not the director of the piece. The mark one receives is based on this as well as effort, and ability (in equal parts). The performances will take

place during **March 6th-15th 2013**. Each group will perform three times in one day: an open dress rehearsal, which other first year students should attend, and two public performances.

Assessment criteria for the performance:

- 1. Engagement with content of style/area worked within;**
- 2. Demonstration of principles of performance;**
- 3. Dramaturgical structuring;**
- 4. Effectiveness of communication in performance.**

The duration of the piece should aim to be around 40 minutes. You will have the chance to invite family/friends to view it.

You are also expected to view your peers' performances in order for you to have some experience of their chosen field of enquiry as well as supporting your fellow students. This is normally the open dress rehearsal, although you will be notified of the date and venue nearer the time.

****For further information on Assessment Criteria at the school, please refer to the Drama Guide Online at www.spa.ex.ac.uk/drama/info/exeter/guide**

Technical Support

You will have a minimum of one session with the technical team to introduce you to technical requirements and frameworks for working within this module. This session will take place during weeks 5 or 6, on a date to be confirmed. There will be further advice and support by arrangement with the technical team after this date.

Each group is expected to arrange publicity. (We will discuss this in further detail)

Each group will do an open dress rehearsal and two performances in one day. This will require a great deal of focus, preparation and attention to detail for each performance to run smoothly. It will be a full day. One to look forward to!

****For further information on Assessment Criteria at the school, please refer to the Drama Guide Online at: www.spa.ex.ac.uk/drama/info/exeter/guide**

Tutorials:

You will have a total of **two** tutorials with your tutor, one mid-term, to discuss the research seminar and the essay; also your continuous assessment; and one at the end of term in which you will receive feedback on your performance and continuous assessment, and to discuss any issues relating to your essay. You must take your log book to tutorials. Tutorials are your chance to raise any questions and concerns as well as receive feedback on your progress.

Stagecraft:

All students will be involved as creators/performers and therefore will be involved in devising, shaping, directing/systems of rehearsal and dramaturgy as appropriate. Additionally students will be involved in research, discussions and decision-making regarding the different aspects of stagecraft relevant to the production. This may include; lighting, sound, design (set, props and costumes), and stage management. You will also be responsible for publicity and all related production roles.

Clothing:

You are expected to arrive dressed in 'blacks' for every studio session. **Optimally the students will either wear leggings or shorts and a tight top** because of the nature of the work. You are not required to buy a set text for this module but will be required to purchase set equipment. Equipment which should be purchased includes:

- 1 x running shoes
- 1 x socks
- 1 x water bottle (water only.)

This equipment must be brought to every class without fail. Jewellery **MUST** be removed and hair **MUST** be tied back away from your face. Due to the nature of our work no exceptions will be made.

NOTE: Nutrition is an important factor in sport training and the cultivation of the body. Please do not bring Sweets, Crisps, Chocolate, etc. into the training space. If you would like to bring a snack for the daily break, please avoid bringing these types of food.

Attendance

Consistent attendance and being on time is crucial to personal development and in the development of group work and contributes to the continuous assessment mark. It is a major part of your responsibility to yourself and others to treat this seriously. Any unavoidable absence (including self directed sessions) must be notified in advance to both:

Humanities-absence@exeter.ac.uk

Kmm209@exeter.ac.uk

- **If a student misses two or more classes, and has not explained their absences they will be reported to the college office, with dates and times of classes missed.**

Please also refer to the College Handbook with regards to illness and absence. This is available online via the Drama Department homepage.

Visual Uploads- Each student is also required to upload material (at least one upload) to a visual archive. This will be a visual repository of material developed during the performance and may include videos of practical work, images, annotated articles or other material. Each group will organise separately their own visual archive, which should serve as a valuable resource when writing the essay(s).

WEEKLY READING/CLICKING/VIEWING

Week 1: What do we mean when we say 'training'?

Barker, C. (1995) "What Training – for What Theatre?" *NTQ*, 9, 42:99-108.

Logie, L. (1995) "Developing a Physical Vocabulary for the Contemporary Actor" *New Theatre Quarterly*, 9, 43:230-239

Zarrilli, Phillip. (2009) Foreword and Chapter 1 in *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski*. Routledge: London.

Week 2: Gymnastics: Little Girls in Pretty Boxes

Chisholm, Ann. (2002) "Acrobats, Contortionists and Cute Children: The Promise and Perversity of US Women's Gymnastics." *Signs*. Vol.27, No. 2 pp. 415-450.

(1999) "Defending the Nation: National Bodies, US Borders, and the 1996 US Olympic Women's Gymnastics Team" *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 126-139

Comaneci, Nadia. (2011) *Letters to a Young Gymnast*. Basic Books.

Eichberg, Henning. (1996) "The Enclosure of the Body – On the Historical Relativity of 'Health', 'Nature' and the Environment of Sport." *The Journal of Contemporary History*. Vo. 21, No. 1, pp. 99-121.

GutsMuths, J.C.F. (1800) *Gymnastics for Youth*. Harvard University Press: Boston.

Jahn, F. L. (1828) *A Treatise on Gymnastics*. Kessinger Publishing: Legacy Reprints.

Jemni, Monem ed. (2011) *The Science of Gymnastics*. Routledge: London.

Karolyi, Bela. (1996) *Feel no Fear*. Hyperion Books.

Video: 2012 Women's Gymnastics London Olympics All-Around.
www.youtube.com.

Search: 2012 Olympic Women's All-Around Finals Parts 1 – 11.

Week 3: The Athlete/Actor: Bodies in Space

Callery, Dymphna. (2001) *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*. Nick Hern Books: London

Dyck, Noel and Eduardo P. Archetti. Ed. (2003) *Sport, Dance and Embodied Identities*. Oxford: Berg,

Hardy, Lew. (1996) *Understanding Psychological Preparation for sport: Theory and Practice of Elite Performers*. Chichester: Wiley.

Magdalinski, Tara. (2009) *Sport, Technology and the Body: the nature of performance*. London: Routledge.

Marshall, Lorna. (2001) *The Body Speaks*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

Week 4: Independent Study (Reading week and Research Presentation Prep)

Tutorials

Week 5: Delsarte, Who? – François Delsarte and American Delsartism

Research Presentations this week

Kirby, E.T. (1972) "The Delsarte Method: 3 Frontiers of Actor Training." *The Drama Review*. Vol. 16, No. 1 pp. 55-69

Ruyter, N.L.C. (1996) "The Delsarte Heritage"

Ruyter, N.L.C. (1973) "American Delsartism: Precursor of an American Dance Art" *Educational Theatre Journal*. Vol. 25, No. 4 (Dec. 1973), pp. 420-435.

Shawn, Ted. (1976) *Every Little Movement: A book about Delsarte*. Princeton Book Company: United States.

Stebbins, Genevieve. (2010) *The Delsarte System of Expression (1902)* General Books.

Week 6: Dance monkey, Dance! – Rudolph von Laban and Dance Theatre

Benson, Melissa and Manning, Susan Allene. (1986) "Interrupted Continuities: Modern Dance in Germany" *The Drama Review*. Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 30-45

Bradley, Karen K. (2009) *Rudolph Laban*. Routledge: London.

Dorr, Evelyn and Lantz, Lori. "Rudolf von Laban: The "Founding Father of Expressionist Dance" *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 26, No. 1 pp. 1-29.

Hodgson, J. (2001) *Mastering Movement: The Life and Work of Rudolf Laban*. Methuen: London.

Week 7: Start Clowning Around – Jacques Lecoq and the Contemporary Clown

Lecoq, Jacques. (1997) *The Moving Body*. Methuen: London.

(2006) *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*. Routledge: London.

Murray, Simon. (2003) *Jacques Lecoq*. Routledge: London.

Peacock, Louise. (2009) *Serious Play: Modern Clown Performance*. Intellect Books: Bristol.

Rolfe, Bari. (1972) "The Mime of Jacques Lecoq" *The Drama Review: TDR* , Vol. 16, No. 1(Mar., 1972), pp. 34-38

Simon, Eli. (2009) *The Art of Clowning*. Palgrave MacMillan: New York.

Tait, Peta. (2005) *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance*. Routledge: London and New York.

(1996) "Feminine Free Fall: A Fantasy of Freefall" *Theatre Journal*. Vol. 48, No. 1, pp. 27-34

Wright, John (2006) *Why is that so funny?* Nick Hern books: New York.

Week 7: Who else, what else? – Parkour and Free Running

Browne, Neill. (2007) "The Art of Displacement: Parkour as a challenge to social Perception of body and space." *Park Generations – Training, Resources Community*.

Feireiss, Lukas. (2007) "Urban Free Flow: The Individual as an Active Performer" *Space, Time, Play. Level 3*, pp. 280-281

Gerling, Illona E and Pach, Alexa. (2010) *The Ultimate Parkour and Free Running: Discover your Possibilities*. Meyer and Meyer Sport: Auckland.

Geyh, P. (Jul. 2006) "Urban Free Flow: A Poetics of Parkour," *M/C Journal*, 9(3) Retrieved 28 Nov. 2011 from <<http://journal.mediaculture.org.au/0607/06-geyh.php>>.

Saville, Stephen John. (2008) "Playing with fear: Parkour and the mobility of emotion" *Social and Cultural Geography Journal*. Vol. 9, No. 8, pp. 891-914

Weeks 8 and 9: Devise This, Devise That – Performance Preparation

Govan, Emma et al. (2007) *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*. Routledge: London.

Heddon, Deirdre and Milling, Jane. (2005) *Devising Performance: A Critical History*. Palgrave MacMillan: London.

Oddey, Allison. (1996) *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*. Routledge: London.

Schirle, Joan. (2005) "Potholes in the Road to Devising." *Theatre Topics*. Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 91-102.

Weeks 10 and 11: Analyze that. – Performance Analysis

Rebellato, Dan. (2010) "When we talk of Horses: Or, what do we see when we see a play" *Performance Research*. Vol. 14, No. 1 pp. 17-28.

Woof, Laurie. (2001) *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook*. Routledge: London.

Week 12: That's a Wrap!

***Tutorials**

***Feedback sessions**

***Essay writing session**

Exeter Digital Archives is an extensive and rich resource covering a wide range of national and international performance practice. Click on 'Exeter Digital Archives' on the departmental website home page www.exeter.ac.uk/drama

***Additionally students are encouraged to build their own bibliography to support their personal research.**

****If you have any questions, concerns or comments, please feel free to contact me at any time.****

Appendix 2.3 -- PP2 and PP3 Questionnaire for Participants

PP2 – Pre-participation

Name:

Age:

Sex:

Weight (Optional):

Height:

Nationality:

In your personal opinion, what would you consider is your level of sport or athletic experience?

Have you ever undergone serious long-term sport training? If yes, please explain.

Please make a list of all sports you've ever taken part in and consider yourself knowledgeable.

Have you ever undergone long-term theatre/actor training? If yes, please explain.

Have you ever undergone any other intensive trainings/extra-daily activities? If yes, please explain.

Have you ever worked with a sports psychologist? If yes, please explain when, under what circumstances and for how long.

Have you ever worked with psychophysical technique? If yes, please explain under what circumstances and for how long.

What would you consider is your extent of knowledge of psychophysical acting?

Have you ever participated in any sort of gymnastics training or exercise? If yes, please explain in detail.

Have you ever participated in any sort of yoga class or course? If yes, please explain in under what circumstances and for how long.

Have you ever participated in any sort of dance training, class or course? If yes, please explain in detail.

What would you say is your extent of knowledge in the sport of gymnastics?

Please rate your level of flexibility on a scale of 1 – 10.

Can you do any of the following?

- a.: handstand for 5 seconds: yes / no
- b: cartwheel: yes / no
- c: back handspring: yes / no
- d: back flip yes / no
- e: full splits right/left/middle: yes / no

How often would you say you go running per calendar month?

How many alcoholic beverages do you consume per week?

How many cups of coffee/soda do you consume per week?

Are you a vegetarian/vegan or do you have any special dietary requirements?

Would you consider yourself to live a healthy lifestyle? (ie. food, exercise, sleep)

Do you have any current or past injuries that will limit your mobility? If yes, please explain in detail.

Do you get frequent migraines, muscle cramps, joint pain, etc? If yes, please explain in detail.

Do you have any other outstanding issues that may inhibit you in the training?

Describe your emotional state when you perform on stage.

How often, if ever, do you find your mind wandering while on stage? I.e. Do you think about the audience, drop out of character? etc.

Have you ever found yourself out of breath on stage in performance? If yes, please explain when and why.

Do you consider performer training important to you personally and/or professionally? Yes or No, please explain why.

Do you consider athletic or sport training important to you, personally and/or professionally? Yes or No, please explain why.

What, if any, potential benefits for yourself can you foresee in undergoing the training this term?

What, if any, do you believe could be the negative effects of undergoing the training this term?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

PP2: Post-Participation

What was your experience of the project?

What areas or aspects of the process did you find most useful and/or appealing?

What areas or aspects of the process did you find least useful and/or appealing?

Did you find *gymnastics-based practices* relevant and/or useful to the development of performance?

Did you find the *gymnastics-based practices* and/or languages relevant or useful in rehearsal?

What areas of the *gymnastics-based practices* did you draw on for performance creation and development?

Did you make any discoveries during this process about your own work as a performer?

Are there any areas of the training you feel confused or unclear about? If so, what?

Is there anything you would have like to explored within this process but did not get the chance to?

If given the chance, would you like to explore this training further? If not, why not?

Is there anything you would like to add?

PP3: Post Participation

What was your experience of the project?

What areas of the process did you find most appealing and/or useful?

What areas of the process did you find most appealing and/or useful?

Are there any areas of the training you feel confused or unclear about? If so, what?

Did you find the continued *extra-daily warm-up* relevant during the rehearsal and performance process? If so, how? If not, why not?

Did you find the *gymnastics-based visualisation* a useful tool in rehearsal and performance? If so, how? If not, why not?

Did you find the walk-through and paused positions useful tools in performance? If so, how? If not, why not?

Do you think the exercises and workshops we explored were relevant to your character development?

Did you make any discoveries about your own process as a performer through this project?

Do you think you might use any of the exercises, workshops or training explored in future practices or projects?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Bibliography

- Allegue, L. (2009) *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen*. Palgrave: Macmillan: Basingstoke.
- Allen, J.E. (1969) *Sense and Sensitivity in Gymnastics: A teacher's guide to educational gymnastics*. Heinemann: London.
- Arrighi, G. (2003) *The Neutral Mask: its position in western actor training, and its application to the creative processes of the actor*. Unpublished Masters Thesis: University of Newcastle.
- Aykroyd, P. (1980) *Skills and Tactics of Gymnastics*. Marshall Cavendish: London.
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