

From ‘methods’ to ‘approaches’: Integrative practices and physiovocality in the digital landscape

Robert Lewis¹

Abstract

Interdisciplinary and integrative practices have become international buzzwords in recent years; however, separation of voice and movement in actor training is still evident. Many studies exist examining the significance of physiovocal approaches, but as technologies develop, actors need to draw from a wide variety of sources to be able to deal with the ever-changing digital landscape. Voice and movement teachers have agreed in principle for some time that more integrated methods of training are essential, but in practice, little progress has been made, especially when incorporating digital technologies. Every actor’s training is unique, particularly when working with Motion Capture (MoCap); therefore, rigid ‘methods’ as opposed to ‘approaches’ may inhibit the actor in developing their own individual way of working in this context. Actors training in MoCap need to be provided with interdisciplinary and integrated, diverse approaches in order to be fully rounded artists as opposed to training in theatre contexts, where the parameters such as architecture and audience/actor relationship, are set. This article outlines several original exercises that have been designed for MoCap contexts inspired by Butoh. This forms a solid basis to unlock the physiovocal potential, and imagination, for the MoCap actor.

Keywords

Motion Capture; Voice; Movement; Butoh; Laban

Introduction

This article demonstrates several examples of original physiovocal exercises which has been deeply inspired by Butoh for MoCap and digital performance situations, which have been implemented in collaborative workshop sessions with Animation and Acting students at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW. It is imperative that actor trainers look into building multi-skilled actors who have a 360° awareness of body, voice and space, using various *approaches* as opposed to rigid *methods*. With the

✉ Robert Lewis: robelewis@csu.edu.au

¹ Charles Sturt University, Australia

integration of acting and performance for new and emergent media such as VR, 360 film, MoCap, Performance Capture and animation, it is important now more than ever to exercise the actors' imagination in performance training. Being aware of the 360° space in performance training allows the actor to connect with the entire body including being aware of the sonorous capabilities in the space around, between and beyond the physical body.

The core essence of any form of performance is the ability to transform: transform from one image to the next, one thought to the next, and to physically transform from one imagined space to another. What is 'not there' in the context of the performance is also crucial, e.g. the 'fourth wall' concept established by Constantin Stanislavski; an imaginary concept to ensure the actors main focus is to remain on the performance space and not anywhere else in the theatre. By understanding the notion of a Zero Wall concept in MoCap and Performance Capture (i.e., the abolishment of the concept of the 'fourth wall') the actor has an infinite amount of possibilities in terms of transformations. The absence of any form of 'wall' or physical restraint allows the actor to have ultimate freedom to transform in a void.

The Zero Wall concept demands imaginations to physically and vocally communicate the narrative of the performance. This means maintaining a 'character', or the 'essence of a character', and clearly transitioning between images through an awareness of their physio-vocal range in a new performance and performance training environment. It is important, therefore, for actors to train in these spaces in order to prepare them for the capture itself, and to expose them to alternate performance spaces.

Methods and approaches

Due to the inherent variables or space and contexts, methods may be restricting and sometimes relevant to specific performances. Joan Melton stated in an interview that:

With a solid technique, the actor is free to respond to environment and other changes [and further recommends] not doing away with methods [altogether, but suggests that] no method has it all, and that [acting teachers] should strive to understand and teach the simplest possible routes to healthy and efficient performance. (Melton, Joan. Email interview. 3 September 2017)

MoCap is an ideal platform for visualising objects and people moving in a 3D space with lifelike weight, space, flow, velocity and acceleration. The MoCap truss, and its Volume provide an effective space for actors to experience performance training without the awareness of the fourth wall, or camera lens. Actors, therefore, need to be flexible in their approach and have a hyper-awareness of their physio-vocal connections to their space and place.

MoCap frees an actor from their current physical state and allows them to change age, sex, height, colour and even species with complete creative control. In addition to the physical state, the actor needs to connect the voice to all of these changes. Spatial

awareness, alongside more exploratory physio-vocal exercises inspired by Butoh, is necessary to move from the pragmatic to the experimental. This dichotomy heightens the awareness of space and shape while encouraging abstract imagery.

The Training

The following exercises are inspired by Laban's Shape Qualities: Pin, Wall, Ball, Twist and Pyramid. Actors are encouraged to go through each shape quality and physio-vocally explore an unlimited amount of possibilities in a 360° environment, not allowing any corners, walls, angles or audience perspectives hinder the creative potential. The exercises began by focusing on the self in relation to the actors' own kinesphere before gradually shifting awareness to the wider space and volume. Some Laban Movement System (LMS) exercises were used to connect the actor to self and the environment for this project. Laban, one of the most influential choreographers and movement teachers, who 'came into the field of dance from the visual arts, where he had studied anatomy and proportion' (Moore, p.126) developed an interest in the relationships between the body and the surrounding space. The body and all its movements were viewed by Laban as 'a kind of "living architecture"' (Laban, p.94). This architecture is depicted in several layers: firstly, the practical nature of the human body and how this relates to the concept and nature of architecture, meaning the human body must be balanced; secondly, the performer must acknowledge that the form and shape of their bodies follow a coherent pattern that is evident in architectural forms; lastly, the body must acknowledge that the architecture around them works as a continuum within (and from) their own bodies.

Two categories of the LMS were explored throughout the digital training process: Shape and Space. Shape is often an integrating factor for combining the categories into meaningful movement. There are several elements for Shape, however, for this investigation, Shape Forms (static shapes the actor makes in their immediate space) and Shape Qualities (describing the way the body changes in an active way, e.g., Opening, Closing, Advancing, Retreating and so on, which refer to specific dimensions of spatial orientations) were explored. Although not common, vocal exploration was also implemented throughout the training in order to increase their vocal awareness and allow the subsequent sound to be affected by the physical shapes. This original way of incorporating body, space and shape was an integrative approach designed to connect imagination and the actors' physio-vocal instrument. The Space category of the LMS is referred to as revealing the body's approach to kinesphere.

Shape forms: Pin, Wall, Ball, Twist and Pyramid

Actors were asked to explore individual Pin, Wall, Ball, Twist and Pyramid shapes as well as transforming from one shape to the next. For the Pin (see Figure 1), actors imagine that their entire body was made of straight, rigid lines and while standing in one spot, they would transition from one line shape to another, for example, having arms by the side, up above or directly in front of them, including legs.

As they were moving through variations of the ‘pin’ shape while standing, they explored various vowel sounds, consonants, and aspirant sounds; allowing the sound to imagine it was initiated from the ground and moved up through the feet and spread across the body while having a 360 awareness.



Figure 1. Charles Sturt University Acting students practicing the Pin exercise. Left to right: Geraldine Cutler, Laura Flanagan, Francis Kamara. (Photo by Robert Lewis)

When the actors explored various versions of a ‘pin’ shape physically and vocally, they were asked to move around the space while maintaining the quality of the shape, allowing the shape and movements to affect the sound, whether it was smooth, jarring, percussive, angular or rigid. It’s not only *what* they were doing with the body that determined the sound, but also *how* they were moving their way through space that affected the sound. Finally, they were asked to speak some text while maintaining the quality of the ‘pin’ sound. Immediately after the actors explored the Pin Shape, actors were asked to investigate the Wall (Figure 2). They were asked to stand comfortably in one area and explore various wide and block-like shapes with the body, either imagining that they were trapped inside two layers of plaster in a wall, or that the entire body forms a strong, solid wall.



Figure 2. Charles Sturt University Acting students practicing the Wall exercise. Left to right: Geraldine Cutler, Laura Flanagan, Francis Kamara. (Photo by Robert Lewis)

The Ball Shape (Figure 3) allowed the actors to extend the body, forwards, backwards and sideways, with each option creating different emotional, and intellectual responses. For example, when they were curled over (which restricted the abdomen), the actors felt defeated, unconfident and unhappy which had an effect on the breath and resultant sound. When they were curled the opposite way, leaning backwards and exposing their abdomen, they felt overwhelmed and exhilarated.

The actors were asked to imagine that they were either a ball, or leaning on, or beside a large inflatable ball that is the size of their body. They explored three forms of Ball Shape, that is either rolling forwards, backwards, or sideways. Although they were essentially physicalising a 'ball' shape through the entire body, it was still important not to lose sight of their curvature of the spine and the natural breathing pattern.



Figure 3. Charles Sturt University Acting students practicing the Ball exercise. Left to right: Geraldine Cutler, Laura Flanagan, Francis Kamara. (Photo by Robert Lewis)

Like the Pin and Wall shapes, it was important to sense what areas of the body were open and what areas responded to the breath. Contrary to the Wall Shape where the torso was exposed and breath can be felt simultaneously at the front, sides and back, the Ball Shape exposed one area of the body while restricting the opposing side. For example, when bending forward, they restricted the breath in the belly area and exposed the back allowing the breath to flow freely in that area.

The Twist (Figure 4), a curved shape that turns around an axis at a constant or continuously varying distance while moving parallel to the axis, further extends the body in the three-dimensional realm as performers explored spiralling shapes, turning the body and moving around in a circular direction. There were two possibilities here, twisting in the same direction (clockwise or anticlockwise), or twist the legs in one direction, the hips in another, shoulders in another, and head in another (alternate twist).



Figure 4. Charles Sturt University Acting students practicing the Twist exercise. Left to right: Geraldine Cutler, Laura Flanagan, Francis Kamara. (Photo by Robert Lewis)

The Pyramid (Figure 5) was by far the most complex out of all the other shapes practised as it can be seen as a combination of a Wall (legs/feet), a Twist (torso) and Pin (arms). In this exercise, the actors were exploring physio-vocal dichotomies: torso and arms were unstable, but they are supported by a stable foundation formed by the legs. When undertaking this exercise, the participants felt confused in terms of what emotion the pose evoked, as it was a combination of the confident Wall, the unconfident Twist, and the reserved notion of the Pin. This complex emotional feeling ultimately had an effect on the voice and revealed the subtext of the lines. The weight of the legs, resembling the grounded Wall, assisted in breath centring and allowed the actors to feel grounded overall which resulted in a centred, weighted voice.



Figure 5. Charles Sturt University Acting students practicing the Pyramid exercise.
 Left to right: Geraldine Cutler, Laura Flanagan, Francis Kamara.
 (Photo by Robert Lewis)

When the actors explored various versions of these shapes physically and vocally, they were asked to move through the studio while maintaining the quality and essence of the shape, allowing not only the shape to affect the sound, but the movements as well, whether they were smooth, jarring, percussive, angular and rigid.

Space: The Physiovocal Vowel Chart

One of Laban's major contributions to the LMS are his theories of Space. In this category, actors moved and vocalised in connection with the digital/MoCap studio environment. The aims of the following exercises were to amalgamate the pharyngeal space (i.e., the various sounds created as a result of the altering of the space within the mouth) and the physical external space. The exercises seemed very prescriptive, however, actors were encouraged to explore variants of the exercise once the basics were practised.

Space should not be restricted to just the area outside the actors; space also exists internally. Actors, in order to fully understand the synergy between the space outside and inside, must be aware the correlation between the space in their mouths, and the kinesphere that surrounds them. By manipulating the pharynx (i.e., changing the position of the tongue in the mouth, altering the shape by opening and closing the jaw, and narrowing and widening the lips), actors can 'place' the sound in various parts of

the mouth. This ‘placement of sound’ alters the tone and timbre of the voice. The following exercises demonstrated below, describes how in this investigation, these synergies were practiced. A means of creative visualisation was used by which the actors imagined that they were standing in the middle of their mouths, on the centre of their tongue, and that the walls of the mouth corresponded to the walls of the room. At the same time, they were fully present in the room itself; having an awareness of physical and spatial duality.

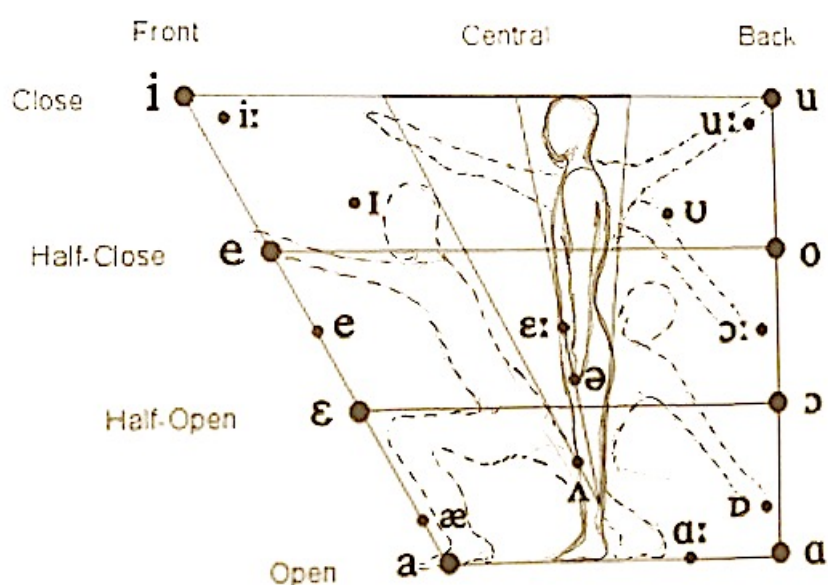


Figure 6. Physiovoical Vowel Chart. (Drawing by Robert Lewis)

Most trained actors are familiar with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and the IPA chart. The image above is an adapted standard IPA vowel chart with only a selected number of vowels. The vowels represented on the chart above are vowels that are formed with the articulators in extreme positions. The vowel symbols in the chart represent the areas in the human mouth where these sounds are formed. If a person is facing towards the left-hand side of the image and the head is dissected in half, what is seen is a visual representation of the space in the mouth. The Front to Back (top) represents the sounds made by shifting the space in the mouth through lip and tongue movements and Close to Open (left) represents the opening and closing of the mouth and flattening of the tongue.

In order to explore the physiovoical connection between the physical space of the mouth and the surrounding space of the actor, the performers needed to imagine that they were standing in the middle of their own mouth; in the centre of the cavity on the

middle of their tongue. The sketch of the figure in the image above stands approximately in the middle of that space with the /ɛ:/ and /ə/ vowels being around the middle of the body. If participants stood comfortably in the space, they should sense these centre vowels around their belly, or between their groin and belly button. Slightly above the eye line, they should imagine where the /i/ vowel would be, and directly behind them is where the /u:/ and /ʊ/ is located. Both /a/ and /æ/ are on the ground in front of them and /ɑ:/, /ɒ/ and /ɑ/ are on the ground behind them. In between are all the other vowels running vertically in front going up and down, and also behind.

The actors were asked to explore the /ɜ:/ and /ə/ vowels as they bounced comfortably on the spot, then starting with the /i/ at the top front corner, they swept through the vowels starting from closed front, down through to the open front vowel /a/, back towards the /ɑ/ vowel and right up to the closed back /u/ vowel covering all the vowels in between with one arm, or both. It was important to sweep through these vowels in a smooth motion and allow the body to experience the openness and closeness as it moved through those areas. They allowed the sound and the quality of the vowel to affect the body, for example, having an awareness of how an /i/ would look like if it were expressed through the body when vocalising it, or what a /u/ looked like as the arms reached out above and behind them. Various other combinations of sound placement were explored as well.

Shape Form Qualities: The Cube

When the actors were familiar with both the IPA and the various physiovoical sequences of the vowel chart, they explored Shape Form Qualities. Physiovoicality progressed out into the immediate (MoCap/digital performance studio) and internal (pharyngeal) space and created physical shapes within the body. The resultant sound was also shaped by the changing space of the mouth. The other form of inner space is the breath; the body shrinks and expands with each inhalation and exhalation and the voice.

The baseline of Shape Qualities (demonstrated by Figure 7), which is an indication toward where the body is changing shape, is Opening/Closing (which in the figure is not listed, but is practised by staying in the centre at the /ɜ/ and /ə/ and expanding arms and energies outwards to the sides of the external space while vocalising those vowels), Rising/Sinking, Advancing and retreating. These exercises were oriented towards process, which is, in a sense, a process of growing toward, as opposed to exploring space in the IPA chart which is destination oriented. This was practised in order to familiarise the actors with the volume they inhabited in the MoCap studio, for example, the corners of the room, the walls that surrounded them, and the space in between themselves at the parameters of the space itself.

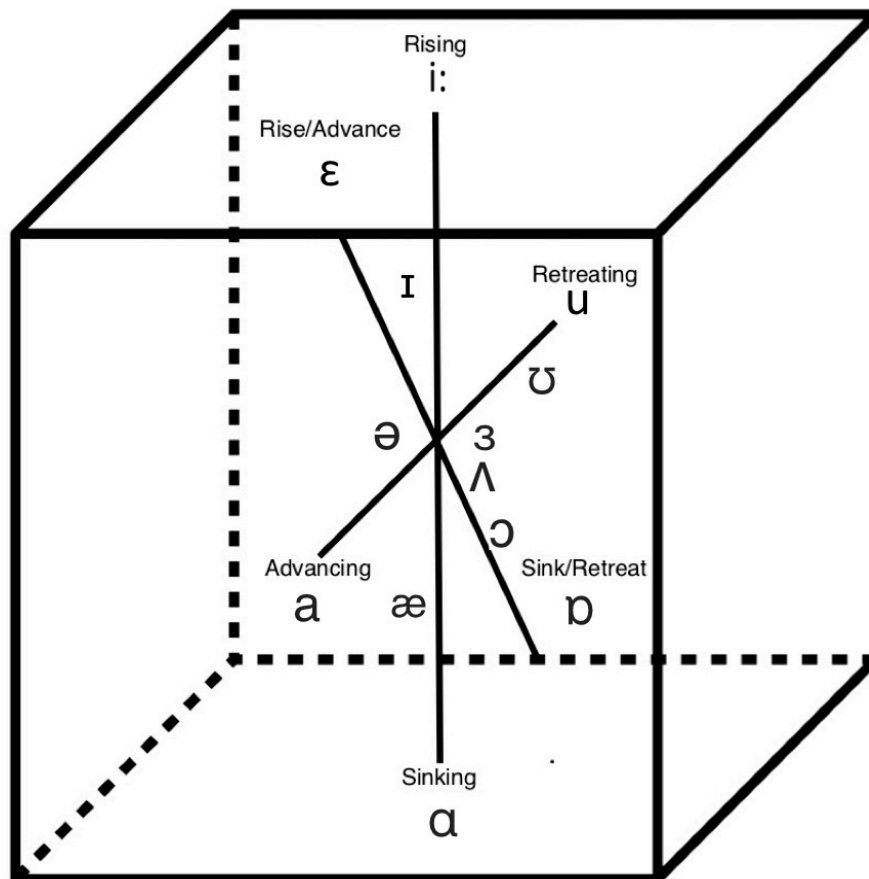


Figure 7. The Physiovoical Cube. (Drawing by Robert Lewis)

Figure 7 demonstrates these Shape Qualities and their relationship within the IPA chart, which are contained within a cube in order to give it context. The actors were asked to stand centred in the middle of a cube (physically established by the MoCap truss in the studio obtaining a cube shape in itself). The studio itself was the imagined cube and actors positioned themselves in the middle of the space. As the actors moved through the sagittal and horizontal planes, they were asked to shift vowels based on the positioning of the vowels and corresponding plane.

Although the Laban inspired exercises are physiovoical in nature and prepare the actor for digital performances, it is important to note that Performance Capture, as opposed to MoCap, utilises the entire performance aspects including the voice during the rehearsal and capturing process. Voice is captured alongside movement to increase synergy and performance quality. While the environment is very different to a conventional theatre or screen environment, the actors instrument remains the same. All voice training methods fundamentally have similar aims and objectives; they are to a) free the voice from any unnecessary tensions that inhibit breath, sound and communication; b) to uncover and develop the 'natural' voice of the performer (natural referring to a voice that is free from the tension mentioned above); c) to exercise the voice so that it is flexible; d) to develop the connection between breath, thought, feeling

and the word, and; e) allow the voice to be adaptable to deal with multiple environments, situations and contexts. These points are vast generalisations and there are many variants of these objectives depending on method, approach and pedagogy.

Two additional points have come to the foreground in recent years, these: f) to be able to connect the voice with the body in a deeper, dynamic sense so that the performer can move and speak/sing/vocalise in any position at any time, g) to allow the voice to further adapt to the ever increasing demands of technology in performance; and h) to be flexible in exploring various perspectives, or approaches rather than rigid training methods due to the ever-changing nature of performance and technologies.

Butoh

Once the pragmatic mapping and framing of the body and the space is established through Laban inspired exercises, a more explorative and freeform approach was explored to free the actor from the inherent psychological and physical boundaries. The physio-vocal exploration of internal and external imagery inspired by Butoh, form a solid basis to unlock the physio-vocal potential and imagination for actor training for digital contexts. By adapting selected philosophies and practices of Butoh with voice work through training for current and emergent technologies, the performer connects with their deeper impulses, trains and develops interiority while at the same time develop awareness of their bodies and voices in a 360° environment. Defining and categorising the core elements of Butoh dance can be as ambiguous and arbitrary as the style itself. I have identified two main elements of Butoh that assist with this investigation: Space Between, and Imagery.

Imagery

In the early days of physio-vocal training development for MoCap and Performance Capture, aspects of Butoh and voice integration, particularly image-based work was explored. Some elements of Butoh are largely based around the continuum of internal and external abstract or concrete imagery; an internal image can be inspired from external sources such as a picture, painting, symbol or any object. The most influential in terms of this research is Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh-Fu (or Butoh score) practice, which he used extensively in his choreography. Hijikata used words to unlock something from within his dancers, and the image can be drawn from more than just visual sources. I am influenced by the way Hijikata, in his choreography and direction, would stream off abstract words and the dancer would move these images, which culminated in a final performance piece. In training, performers begin to slowly add various images through the body, layering them one by one while integrating voice.

Hijikata's imagery was drawn from a wide variety of sources, especially words. A student of Hijikata, Yukio Waguri documented his words and claimed that 'Hijikata's attempted to "awaken and embody physical images through words" is considered a kind of 'method" (Barbe, p.10). Images are multi layered in Butoh dance: from the choreography (as in Butoh-Fu) to the dancer moving the images and transforming from

one image to the other, and the audiences' perception of these danced images. The danced image is not, after all, a physical (or in this research a physio-vocal) representation or imitation of that object, word or image, it is the 'essence' of that specific image. It does not matter if the audience does not understand the dancers' image; the audience cannot usually discern what this internal image expressed is, nor should it. Like a Rorschach test, Butoh audiences read their own narratives in the actions.

An example of Hijikata's Butoh-Fu choreography 'You Live Because Insects Eat You', was documented by Waguri:

*A person is buried in a wall.
S/he becomes an insect.
The internal organs are parched and dry.
The insect is dancing on a thin sheet of paper.
The insect tries to hold falling particles from its own body,
And dances, making rustling noises.
The insect becomes a person, who is wandering around,
So fragile, s/he could crumble at the slightest touch.
(Fraleigh, p. 135)*

In the training DVD, 'The Third Space' (Artfilms 2013), Voice Theatre Lab participants demonstrated solo and group imagery. These exercises influenced further MoCap/Performance Capture work. In relation to theatrical performance training, Chris Jackson, a core member of the company, utilised a piece of text from an adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* called *Profuge* (2011). The text was as follows:

*Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin
To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess:
Having commenc'd, be a divine in shew,
Yet level at the end of every art,
And live and die in Aristotle's works.*

Jackson observed at the given text, and developed his own Butoh-Fu score based on the imagery behind the words. This would manifest itself as words, pictures or symbols written alongside the performance text. Jackson then *moved* the image, and then *voiced* the image through movement, then somewhat *spoke* the dialogue. Logic or pragmatism was abandoned; the subconscious and initial impulse from the word is encouraged. Jackson's image for each line, in bold italics:

*Settle thy studies, **Kettle coming to boil**
Faustus, **Mouse in maze**
and begin to sound the depth of that thou wilt profess: **Gathering string/Burping swamp**
Having commenc'd, **Coin into slot machine**
be a divine in shew, **Shadow disappearing when light arrives**
Yet level at the end of every art, **Waveform: Radio being tuned***

*And live and die in Aristotle's works. **Tectonic plate collapsing under the weight of the Himalayas***

An example of imagery (omni-central) used in training for digital performance was as follows: Left arm moves like a snake: vocalise that image; Right arm is molten lava: vocalise that image (both arms are moving); Legs are like a stick insect: vocalise that image (arms and legs are moving); The face is pulled in all different directions by hooks: vocalise that image (arms, legs and face are moving). At any point in time, actors were asked to speak a line of text allowing the images to affect the quality of the voice. At times, it was best to take an image to the extreme so actors had a deeper sense of understanding and connection to the images.

Although these exploratory exercises demonstrated was implemented in a certain sequence for the purpose of training for MoCap, it is purely a guide. The important factor is to develop the performers' imagination and physio-vocal potential in the training process.

Imagery feedback

Participants encountered two main issues throughout the process of undertaking these exercises. Surprisingly, they were not content related, rather, imposed elements such as the technical limitations (which in itself is rather contradictory, considering technology has limitless potential) and attire. Physical freedom was somewhat compromised due to the MoCap suits worn by the actors. The skin-tight outfits, although flexible and durable, had MoCap markers (or 'dots') attached to certain parts of the body. This awareness contributed to the somewhat tentative commitment of the actors when asked to execute dynamic movements in fear that these markers, adhered to the suits with Velcro, could come off. In addition to this limitation, the actors also had difficulty training in a space with no clear audience, or focus point, however, the 'zero wall' awareness provided them with a certain amount of freedom. In terms of the overall concept of the physio-vocal concept of the exercises, participants, to begin with, struggled to grasp the abstract concept and physio-vocal application. Butoh is a style that has infinite possibilities, much like MoCap performance; its style and aesthetic is too broad to define.

Physio-vocal transformations

As the MoCap system defines a specific volume, giving actors a set boundary to work with, certain training, which challenges the actor/audience relationships of conventional forms of camera/stage perspectives, is necessary to exercise various forms of transformation. The space between the actor and the MoCap truss is paramount in understanding the transformative potential the actor has on their bodies and spaces. The initial inspiration to create this exercise came from the spirit of Butoh in order to explore the 'Space Between', almost a decade before adapting it to MoCap contexts. According to Tadashi Endo, a Butoh dancer and longtime collaborator with Kazuo Ohno, 'Ma' means "emptiness" and "the space between things", and 'is the moment just

at the end of a movement and before the beginning of the next one' (Tadashi Endo 2006). According to Tamah Nakamura, the co-author of 'Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo', 'Ma in communication and in movement, is not an empty space but one filled with energy and meaning' (Nakamura, Nakamura. Email interview. 5 April 2007).

Transformations play an important role in imagery as '[t]he skill [Butoh] values most highly is the ability of the dancer to transform' (Barbe, p.3). They allow the performer to experience diverse images and indulge in the centre point – the midway point between one image to another. Transformations from a beautiful image to an ugly image is very typical in Butoh, and these 'occur as disquieting transmogrifications and might also take place between animal and human bodies, or imagined as thousands of bugs attacking the body' (Frleigh, p.29) therefore having no boundaries in terms of image choices.

The 'Ma' therefore lies in the space between the inhalation and exhalation, the action and reaction, two words, the thoughts, the impulses and physical actions. In terms of the actors' relationship to the environment, the 'Ma' refers to the space between the performer and the periphery of the performance space, or the MoCap/Performance Capture truss and cameras. The voice in training and performance fills the space in between in a sonorous sense; this is the only place in performance or training where the voice and imagination have an opportunity to fill the 'Ma'.

In Butoh dance, transitions, transformations and metamorphosis play an integral role in depicting the environment through the human form, which is in a constant state of flux. It is very common to see a Butoh dancer physically transform from one image to the next, and for some dancers, the half-way point between the two (often opposing) images is where the 'Ma' lies. A synergy with the body and voice in expression is always evident as thought, emotion body and voice work as one entity. Of course, in all drama, there is a physio-vocal connection instigated by the organic urge to communicate thoughts and emotions through the given text which are implemented through action. These physio-vocal actions are expressed through gesture, vocal tone, speech pattern and dynamics. Nonetheless, this physio-vocal unity is abstract in nature and moves beyond the conventional means of physio-vocal actions, and the images expressed are far beyond the conventional representations.

The physio-vocal actions are dictated initially by the opening image, and both voice and body, in unison, reach the final. Both body and voice go on a journey exploring the minute detail of transformation from one image to the other whilst speaking the line of dialogue. All conventional textual interpretation is abandoned and intonation and operative words are ignored. The important details, however, is the opening and closing images located at the polar opposites of the chosen line or phrase, and the physio-vocal journey the performer experiences. The centre point balances the two discrete images, and this is indicated by the star symbol in the above image. No transition is complete without the performer experiencing and momentarily immersing in the centre-point.

These exercises were used in the training and rehearsal process of Voice Theatre Lab's early productions of *Dr Faustus/5* (2008), *Alchemy* (2010) and *Iam Nocte* (2010), *Profuge* (2011) to name a few. A vocal exercise, developed by core members of Persona

Collective (formerly Voice Theatre Lab) has in recent years been implemented in physio-vocal training for MoCap/Performance Capture, is called 'Transformations and the Internal Image'. Actors must be in a neutral state to begin with and then explore physical transformations from one internal image to another. The image, conceived by the actor, should come from an inner place, without the leader or director calling out the images. Actors must start the physicalisation on the first image, hold the image, then slowly transform into the next image. They would freeze half way between the first and second image, hold it, then slowly transition to the final image, hold it, then return to a neutral state letting the images go.

As voice is a crucial aspect of the transformation, it should be integrated from the very beginning. Actors must start the physicalisation on the first image, hold and vocalise, allowing the shape and the physical space to influence the sound, then slowly transform into the next image, and so on, vocalising throughout the entire exercise. The body, overall physical dynamics, the placement of limbs, curvature of the spine and breath all have an effect on the voice.

Transition exercise

Actors were encouraged to read a text, then find pivotal images in the given text. Images should be written in accordance with the structure of the text, for example, a strong image at the start and end of each line, verse, or paragraph. A line/text goes on a journey, so the idea is to find the start and end point of that journey. Images could be as simple as possible, and can be one object; it can also be a colour or shape, it can be literal or abstract. Actors practiced by moving from one image to the other; the idea is to slowly transform from one image to the next, then focusing on the mid-point (halfway between the two images), and indulge in it for a while before moving to the final image. Actors need to experience each image transition evident in the entire text.

Voice was integrated as actors moved through each transition in various ways by initially sending *only air* across the different places of the vocal terrain: the larynx, uvula, soft palate, tongue, hard palate, allowing the speech organs (lips, teeth, tongue) effect the outgoing and ingoing breath, varying force by inhaling or exhaling, continuous or stuttered. The main idea was to try one way of channelling the air and then listen for the place where the aspirate sounds change: gasps, changes in pitch, creaks, vibrations, gurgles and stutters. Actors were encouraged to discover more ways in which the air can be changed through the vocal terrain and to feel how very small changes in the anatomy begin to affect sound, for example, the lifting of the uvula, narrowing of the hard palate, movement of the tongue. Actors were asked to perform the physical aspect of the transition exercise incorporating the voice in all its nuances, colours, textures and dynamics, predominantly focusing on the mid-way point.

Transitions feedback

There were little or no practical alterations made transferring this exercise, which was predominantly designed for stage, to digital performance contexts, apart from the

kinaesthetic and spatial awareness. In conventional theatre training or rehearsals, the actor is aware of the audience and the theatrical performance space. In digital performance, there may be no 'audience', or fixed focus point, therefore the actor must be aware of the total space around them. The elimination of the 'fourth wall' calls for a new term coined 'zero wall' performance training; a physio-vocal awareness of a 360° vacuum. This awareness allows the actor to imagine that they have 'eyes' all around their body and focus on using their entire body as an instrument: their backs, front, top and bottom are a sonorous soundboard. Actors would 'send' the sound to certain parts of the body, including the back.

The actors agreed that this experimental physio-vocal work complemented previous conventional physical and vocal work undertaken in their undergraduate studies. Aspects such as relaxation, imagery and awareness are extremely common throughout most conventional voice practices, but the added element of physio-vocality contributed to the freedom and holistic experience. Changes in kinaesthetic awareness were also discovered throughout the process. The exercises increased awareness of unconscious movements and sound and their effect on the overall performance. The complexity and involvement in the physio-vocal action allowed the actors to bring their focus away from the technologically heavy MoCap environment and back to their bodies. However, some felt conscious of the space around, and above them and found that they felt some form of organic element in their awareness, while still maintaining pre-emptive cerebral connection to the action and image.

Conclusion

Although the physio-vocal exercises demonstrated throughout this exploratory process were performed in a certain sequence, in a specific space, utilising particular technologies, it is purely designed as a guide. Imagery is subjective and also specific to the context. Fundamentally, it is designed to develop the performers' imagination through body, voice and space and the 'zero wall' environment demands imaginations to depict and communicate the internal image held by the performer. In order for actors to successfully achieve a physio-vocal unity, they must be able to immerse themselves fully in the action, and the training/performance space at all times. This means clarity in terms of imagery, and transitioning between images through an awareness of their physio-vocal range in a digital capture environment.

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About the author

Dr Robert Lewis is a Course Director of Creative Industries and Lecturer in Acting at Charles Sturt University. He previously lectured in the Theatre Program at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) from 2004–2016. He has studied theatre at UTAS, Honours at Monash University, Education at RMIT and Voice Studies at NIDA. His PhD focused on integrative practices and intercultural performance training aesthetics. Robert recently completed a Certification in Integrative Studies at the One Voice Centre, New York. He is a director, writer, theatre maker and voice and movement teacher who trained with Cicely Berry, Frankie Armstrong, Rowena Balos, Mike Alfreds, OzFrank Theatre, as well as Butoh with Yoshito Ohno in Japan, and is a Nobbs Suzuki Praxis member. Robert has published theatre performances and training films through Contemporary Arts Media (Artfilms) and has also published various academic articles on the subject of voice and movement integration. He is the director of Persona Collective, a performance group focusing on integrative practice and research, in which he directed and adapted productions including *Iam Nocte* (adapted from Seneca's *Oedipus*), *Profuge* (adapted from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*) and directed the site-specific performances *Two Houses*, *Savages* and *Norm and Ahmed* including the original play *Lines and Boxes*.