“The body knows things that the mind is ignorant about”
Jacques Lecoq 1921-1999

An introduction to Physical theatre...

“So what is physical theatre? I mean, to some extent all theatre is physical. In a traditional play for example there exists movement, and of course the act of speaking is itself a physical act.

“But generally when we talk about physical theatre we are focusing on the role of the body. This is a world where language and text still exist and are very welcome, but simply are one of many forms or dimensions of expression...”

“Perhaps another way to say this is that one of the aims of physical theatre is not to replace words through movement, but to express through movement what words cannot....in the same way that metaphors exist in language, the physical body can also become a space to express metaphors...”

“And the inspiration for this is centred on the dynamics of the world around us. This is the stuff that we have to work with.”
Chapter 1: The living breathing world

(NARRATOR)

“Take animals for example. We begin with observation and mimicry – reproducing and embodying aspects of the particular animal we’ve chosen”

“each animal offers us a different quality and state and some will be easier to reproduce then others”

“inspiration can come from how they stand, or their locomotion, their relationship with the ground, what they eat... in general from their interaction with the world around them”

“the objective is to capture certain dynamics which will later become valuable material for entering into character space”

“but for now the focus is on the full expression this includes capturing the movement from relaxation to being fully alert, so present in many animal dynamics”

“eventually the stage transforms into the most peculiar of zoological gardens”

“When the zoo is firmly established, we begin to transform our animal into a more human-like prototype...keeping of course a few of each animal’s particularities as suggestions or inspirations”

“in this way we invite the animal to take its place in the world of human characters...”
VIKTOR ALVES (Interview; spoken in Portuguese, subtitles in English)

And the turtle came to me because I think it is friendly
its an animal which is slow, patient .... and friendly!
the slowness of the head...the way it opens the mouth
and how it eats

“perhaps these are the movements that most identify this animal
the process of humanisation was to take my hands off the ground
but keep, or try to keep, as best as possible, the shell
because the shell of the turtle immediately gives us the image
as well as the way it looks around and the way it moves its head...
this gesture also remained.”

“because this is a person that looks at things slowly
hum...and very shy...very shy thinking about what is around him
and always withdrawing – this thing of withdrawing
stayed immediately in the body... and then in the human form”

“After I left there two things happened
Firstly I saw turtles in people
a person would pass ... I would see – look!
that person walks like ... or is similar to ... how a turtle walks
or how it places the leg ...or the back as it walks
so its funny ... how you begin to understand ...
that the street is full of animals”

(NARRATOR)

“so its not just animals – we can also inspire ourselves with movement from
non-living things. Inanimate objects can be manipulated in a way that leads
us to particular qualities and references”

“for example consider cardboard or paper
How do these materials bend, how do they return?
where is the resistance and what traces are left afterwards on its surface?
Most importantly, how can we embody and capture some of its qualities?”
MAFALDA GONÇALVES (Interview; spoken in Portuguese, subtitles in English)

“It is interesting that we have never thought of this before
how do you put in the body the movement of cardboard?
Wow! Exactly! How can I put this in the body?
the first time that your sitting there
and the teacher tells you that...”
just that thought makes something grow

“how do you place in the body the movement of cardboard?
just that thought makes something grow. Wow! How do I do that?
And suddenly you see the cardboard...doing that...how beautiful!
How is possible to look at that and have almost the same feeling as when you
observe a contemporary dance piece?”

“or something that moves me and makes me feel...that transforms me
the same thing as when cardboard is unfolding
wow! I can do that and that causes an emotion in me
therefore I can also create an emotion in someone else
when I am doing this”

(NARRATOR)

“Eventually we can take the traces left in a crumbled piece of paper, or in
discarded portion of ripped cardboard, and absorb them into the human
body... combining them with a text and a human drama”

“and just like how animals brought us into a space of comedy, certain
materials have this ability to allow us to enter themes like tragedy and the
human chorus.”

“So ultimately we can try to embody all the dynamics of nature – from
inanimate objects to classical elements to even light and colour....
for example what is the movement of water... in all its forms... from the most
gentle to the most violent? How can we create the image of water, and not
the human that is moved in water?”
“And we consider this as an active investigation... knowing of course that what we are trying to do is almost impossible”

“approaching the colours is not easy - since they do not move themselves, our analysis is necessarily forced to become more subjective. For example, how can we describe yellow? What is its height, length, and density relative to other colours? What emotions can it give us?”

“Eventually this work can bring us to paintings...for example there exists red, and then there exists Caravaggio’s red – his suggestion of violence, the tricks with light and dark, known as chiaroscuro. How can we capture these phenomenon through human movement?”

“What about a Pollock? Where do individual colours stop and where do they begin, what sort of depth does it suggest? is it better to approach his work on the wall or on the floor? How can we take different painters and use their work as inspiration - placing their creations into movement?”

(Title)

Chapter 2: Masks to shape the body

(NARRATOR)

“There are many categories of masks - some we place on the wall, or use for rituals, some are for a particular occupation. Then there are theatre masks.”

“a good mask manages to somehow protect us, and yet at the same time, reveal something fundamentally human – the paradox is that the particular constraints of each mask can provide a huge amount of freedom for the actor.”

“One category which we use a lot are larval masks – these are plain white masks, which are speechless, and that suggest a face whose features are not fully formed”
“the objective becomes to discover a congruent corporeal impression derived from the non-figurative shape...and through play and observation and exploration we discover what works and what doesn’t”

“later we’ll add dramaturgical elements - the almost cartoon aspect of the larval masks allows us to create credible characters which escape the restrictions of realism”

**Beatriz Silva (Interview; spoken in Portuguese, subtitles in English)**

“The larval masks...I felt...that they were a little bit...weird that they were a little bit weird yes...because...well...they were little bit weird so...I don’t know but they were very cool....very cool”

“when I put them on for the first time...I felt very...tall...somehow I felt very tall...behind that mask I could do stupid things I could explore things that I normally can’t...just looking at the mask I understood that it was big...I could do many movements I could explore loads of things”

“I’m not saying that you can’t do that with the neutral mask but with the larval mask...it needs to come out!”

(NARRATOR)

“From a cognitive perspective, masks are fascinating – after all we are extremely social animals, and faces and bodies carry a lot of social information. We are constantly looking at faces to understand the social dynamics of our environment.”

“the accurate perception of human movement, which can help us to read the intentions or understand behaviour in another individual, is a highly adaptive trait in evolutionary terms.”
“so therefore it should not be surprising to find that we have many specialised neural areas for processing and recognising the face and body.”

“interestingly neuroscientific studies have shown that the distortion of faces and bodies can create a strong visual shock, which is why some neuroesthetic researchers have argued that artists such as Francis Bacon, whose paintings often involved faces, preferred to distort faces and bodies, but leave objects in the background intact.”

“The argument is that the paintings subvert the brain’s inherited concept of what faces and bodies should look like – which sparks a re-interpretation on the part of the observer.”

“in a similar fashion, the masks we use and make, are a distortion, to varying degrees of our habitual or normal representation of face – so it would not be surprising to discover that physical theatre is somehow hijacking this phenomenon of face preference in the brain.”

(Title)

Chapter 3: (re)interpretation

(NARRATOR)

“the contribution, or the interpretation, that an observer supplies to the meaning of an image has traditionally been called the “Beholder’s Share” when artists provide a space of interpretation it allows the observer to actively participate in the construction of meaning.”

“For example, consider Picasso’s fascination with the bull and his creation of the bull series – Picasso starts with a perfect, realistic representation of a bull. But then he begins to deconstruct this representation, reducing it until only its essential elements remain.”

“Eventually what remains is the presence of a bull, enough to suggest and imagine it based on our own experiences of what is a bull.”
“Our process on stage is not dissimilar to this – first we isolate, as best we can, the essential elements of the bull ... and then we take this raw material and manipulate the specific movement sequences – until what is left is a human character with suggestions of a bull – or at least the particular suggestions that that actor choose.”

“In the words of Etienne Decroux, often considered one of the father's of modern mime: “for art to be, the idea of one thing must be given by another thing. Hence this paradox; an art is only complete if it is partial.”

“so while the process of isolating key features of a stimulus invites the beholder’s share into completing our images, the manipulation of these features simultaneously encourages a re-interpretation on the part of the observer. Hopefully what follows will be an aesthetic experience!”

“and eventually we can apply these forces, or dynamics, to the most unlikely of places...”

(Title)

Chapter 4: The pleasure

(NARRATOR; spoken in English, subtitles in Portuguese)

“So physical theatre is a very broad discipline – it tries to remain loyal to the impulses and expressions of the body
And it involves a process of observing, analysing, isolating, embodying and finally manipulating.”

“But the indispensable ingredient, the driving force, be it working with masks, or films, or indeed any theme..... has to be play.
Without a certain playfulness and pleasure in our movement, technique is lifeless, it remains an uninhabited space.”
“so even more important then moving like the perfect animal is the enjoyment of pretending to move like one...Theatre should always be a game. so on some level, independent of whether it is true or not, we should believe that we are the best and most beautiful human turtle that ever existed.”

“We see this all the time in children – when they create their imaginative realities they very rarely question their technique – if they are an aeroplane, they are an aeroplane and that is it - you don’t see them stop to consider if the angle of their wings are perfectly parallel...or if the nose is perpendicular to the tail and such forth.”

“I guess what I am trying to say is that we must believe in the world we create and this belief is driven through play...play transforms us - it allows for spontaneity, it suspends disbelief, it is highly contagious, and finally it weakens the fear of failure.“

“and when we add technique and metaphor, the combination can give us something very powerful....”

(Title)

_The End._

_Credits_