



**STYLISATION, MASK,  
GROTESQUE, MONTAGE,  
BIOMECHANICS**

**Meyerhold's philosophy about stylisation and  
biomechanics in performance.**

# WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

1. Define **stylisation** and **explain** how Meyerhold used this both in terms of actor training and in his directing;
2. Explain how Meyerhold used the term '**mask**' and what is meant by '**set roles**'
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of **the grotesque** style in which Meyerhold worked and trained actors;
4. Explain how Meyerhold used **montage**;
5. Explain how **biomechanics** trained actors for performance, and what role the **etudes** played in performance;
6. Explain how an actor developed the **key skills** taught in biomechanics and why they are important.

# STYLISATION

- A type of performance that **suggests clear meaning and relationships** through **expressive** movement, gesture, costume, set and props that, while not realistic, convey **precise meaning** to an audience.
- E.g. → the actress playing “Trantella in *The Doll’s House* [written by Ibsen, highly ‘realistic play] was no more than a series of poses during which the feet simply tapped out a nervous rhythm.” (Pitches, p.52)

# STYLISATION

- Steps towards stylisation:
  1. Reduce something down to find its 'essence'
  2. Extend the range of expression used (call on biomechanical training)
  3. Pay particular attention to the question of rhythm in making, changing and shifting meaning
- Engages audience in clear visual and auditory meaning without becoming 'too real' – it is highly theatrical and requires in-depth training of the actor and efficient and meaningful movement on stage.

# STYLISATION

- Meyerhold liked stylised theatre because:
  1. The emphasis is on the **actor** working with minimal sets and props;
  2. Audience is compelled to use their **imagination** – they engage with the work;
  3. The actor **relies on physical expression** and the ability to manipulate this to suit character and “**set roles**”
  4. Words of the playwright may be **transformed** by the director
  5. **Rhythm** becomes uppermost in the director’s and the spectators’ minds
  6. The ‘**look**’ of the work is carefully constructed like a painting on a canvas;
  7. Stylised theatre can produce **any type of play**.

## MASK & SET ROLE

- Traditionally a mask is worn on the face to communicate character;
- Meyerhold viewed the idea of mask as **anything that altered the actor's appearance**;
- “Masks can be created by make-up, by hairstyle, by facial expressions or by any technique which defines a character in terms of its external characteristics” (Pitches, p.58);
- Therefore, by altering the ‘mask’ the actor can change ‘**set roles**’ in order to show the full range of their character – ‘the lover’, ‘the husband’, ‘the brother’, ‘the worker’, etc.

# GROTESQUE

- “The genre of surprise” (Pitches, p.61);
- A theatrical style which plays with sharp contradictions and produces a constant shift in planes of perception (remember Meyerhold loved contradictions!)
- Mixes opposites
- Challenges perceptions
- Naturally mischievous and satirical
- Very stylised

# GROTESQUE - EXAMPLE

## ○ Example (p.62)

- *One of the clowns plays a prank. He runs up to the LOVER and sticks out a long tongue at him. The LOVER brings his heavy wooden sword down on the CLOWN's head with all his might. The CLOWN is doubled over the footlights, where he remains hanging. A stream of cranberry juice gushes from his head.*
- *CLOWN [in a piercing yell]. Help! I'm bleeding cranberry juice!*
- *Having dangled there for w while, he gets up and goes out.*



## GROTESQUE - EXAMPLE

- Mixing of opposites should be very clear here;
- Clown breaks up a pair of lovers with a mischievous prank, sticking a large tongue out at the pair;
- What was a romantic exchange is this transformed by the interruption of comedy;
- The scene then shifts almost immediately to what looks to be a tragic murder;
- The blood is cranberry juice and, though he should be dead, he exits the stage;
- The audience is left in a confused atmospheric mixture of glee and anger.

# MONTAGE

- A way of showing contrasting ideas in a sequence to communicate meaning;
- “Put two different things together, one after the other, and our *psychological* response to those things is to create a third ‘representation’, a higher level of meaning produced by our own skills of association. (Pitches, p.74).
  - Eye + Water = Crying
  - Door + Ear = Eavesdropping

# MONTAGE IN THE THEATRE

- An episodic structure to the overall production;
- Carefully directed juxtaposing of the episodes to maximise the 'explosive' effect;
- Surprises, collisions, incongruities;
- Varying rhythms;
- A *thinking* audience who puts together meaning for themselves;
- A clear sense of theatricality!

# BIOMECHANICS IN PERFORMANCE

- The actor trains by developing and perfecting the etudes ('the slap', 'throwing the stone', etc.)
- These etudes broaden the range of physical plasticity and expression of the actor
- This creates a larger scope of poses the actor and director can call upon in rehearsal and performance
- Biomechanics training ensures all movement is meaningful and rids the stage of superfluous action – the efficiency of movement is essential!

# BIOMECHANICS - INFLUENCES

- Meyerhold was influenced by the movement of actors in Commedia dell'Arte and musical reading;
- After the Russian Revolution, focus on more efficient industry was created; Meyerhold was influenced heavily by this!
  - New buzzwords: 'efficiency', 'productivity'
  - Taylorism → The use 'time and motion' studies in the workplace. Paring down the actions of workers into a series of connected tasks with a time limit → inspired biomechanics and the etudes.

# THE KEY SKILLS

- You **MUST** refer to how the key skills are developed through Meyerhold's approach to actor training and how they serve in performance:
  - Precision
  - Coordination
  - Rhythm
  - Discipline
  - Responsiveness
  - Playfulness
  - Balance