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Glossary

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We have included this glossary for reference, you are not expected to remember all the new terms.

You can refer to the glossary throughout the course by returning to this step or by downloading the PDF version which is available from the Downloads section below.

If you come across any other words that you would like us to add to the glossary, please add them to the comments.

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A

active

- the state of the leading partner in any pair étude (including the slap). The active partner dictates the rhythm of the étude until halfway through (in the example of the slap). After that, active and passive swap.

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B

biomechanics

- collective term for Meyerhold's training exercises after the Revolution. Can encompass the simplest tricks, right the way through to the most complex of improvisations.

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C

Commedia dell'arte

- playful and improvisational popular theatre form emerging from Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. Used stock characters, masks and knockabout antics known as lazzi. An important influence for Meyerhold and the études.

constructivism

- artistic movement at its peak between 1917 and 1922. Dedicated to the use of industrial materials and strongly opposed to representational painting on canvas. Key artists in the movement were Stepanova and Popova, with whom Meyerhold collaborated on *Death of Tarelkin* (1922) and *Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922) respectively.

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documentation

- the medium for recording performance and training. Can be divided up into three main types: written, photographic, and filmic. Any form of documentation is bound to be a reduction of the actual live event.

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efficiency

- a buzz-word after the revolution, drawing inspiration from American theories of Scientific Management and Frederick Winslow Taylor. Recognised by Meyerhold in his interest in smooth, precise gestures. But by no means his guiding light. Many of the études extend rather than reduced the complexity of action.

embodied knowledge

- knowledge that is retained, often unconsciously, in the muscles and bones of the participant, rather than as rationalised thought processes.

etude

- literally: study. In both music and in theatre, used as a term to describe a repeatable and challenging exercise task. Should never be shown as part of a performance.

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formalism

- in its Russian manifestation, a literary (and partly theatrical) movement, dedicated to a focus on external forms, rather than on content or social context. Formalists were persecuted under Stalin and the term was used as an often-deadly criticism of artists in the 1930s.

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grotesque

- Uncanny combination of opposites – for instance of the tragic and comic. Literary term often used to describe Meyerhold's production record, particularly his Government Inspector (1926).

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montage

- the conscious orchestration and juxtaposition of sometimes jarring images, or 'attractions', to create meaning. More common in film, particularly in the work of Sergei Eisenstein, it has its roots in Meyerhold's practice, for instance in *Teacher Bubus* (1925) or *Death of Tarelkin*.

musicality

- both a literal and metaphoric use of music in Meyerhold's theatre – literally when he structured his productions to meet an exacting musical score (e.g in *Lady of the Camellias*, 1934) and metaphorically when he demanded the smooth flowing, rhythmically-exact quality of music in his actors' work.

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Otkaz

- biomechanics terminology for the first action in the tripartite (three-fold) rhythm of each action in the études. Otkaz is the preparation before the action itself, often signalling a small movement in the opposite direction.

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passive

- the state of the following partner in any pair étude (including the slap). The passive partner follows closely the rhythms of the active partner until a point in the étude where they swap.

playfulness

- the sense of lightness, fun and irreverence needed in the biomechanical actor to keep the actions from being simply mechanical. Related to some of Meyerhold's influences, for instance circus and *commedia dell'arte*.

posil

- biomechanics terminology for the second action in the tripartite (three-fold) rhythm of each action in the études. Posil, literally meaning ‘to send’, is the action itself – of throwing, slapping, shaking etc

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R

responsiveness/reflexivity

- key term in biomechanics training and related to ideas of Objective Psychology. Identified in Meyerhold’s Programme of Biomechanics (1922), reflexivity is the ability of the actor consciously to respond to an outside stimulus as if it were a reflex – that is as immediately as your leg twitches when tapped with a soft hammer when the doctor is checking your reflexes. This volitional reflex, as Meyerhold called it, is an ideal and not actually possible.

rhythm

- in biomechanics, this is the three-fold structure of otkaz, posil and tochka. More generally it is the conscious, musically-inspired composition of an action, a scene, or a whole production. Rhythm is everything in Meyerhold’s theatre.

Russian Revolution

- a moment (or in fact several moments) of massive political, social and cultural change and upheaval between the years of 1917 and 1921. The Revolution marked a transition from government by one individual - Tsar Nicholas the 2nd - to government led by a party –the Bolsheviks. Two major events were the February and October revolutions of 1917.

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S

stylisation

- Meyerhold’s term for a theatre that rebelled against the style of naturalism. Stylised theatre celebrated its own theatricality, and did not try to conceal it. Biomechanics was a training devised to deliver Meyerhold’s model of stylisation: rhythmically exact, consciously choreographed and exploiting a direct and playful relationship to the audience.

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taylorism

- the phenomenon of time and motion study and research initiated by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the early C20th. Underpinned by the principle of breaking complex actions down to their component parts and reducing the time available for their completion, Taylorism was popular in the early years of the Revolution and was often cited by Meyerhold in his theoretical papers at the time. The études echo this concept of breaking actions down into their component parts, creating an 'acting cycle', (as opposed to Taylor's 'work cycle').

tochka/stoika

- biomechanics terminology for the third action in the tripartite (three-fold) rhythm of each action in the études. Tochka, is the moment of settling and pause after the action itself. Never to be thought of as a final point, it always anticipates further action. Some practitioners use the term stoika, literally 'stance', instead.

tradition

- a discernible history of actor training ideas, passed on from teacher to student, and constantly undergoing change. A tradition is defined by its opposite term – innovation.

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