

I like the way you move

The manner in which you enter a room can change everything that happens next. Daniel Pembrey reveals how you could become the next Sean Connery

Illustrations by Ben Hasler

WE know it when we see it: an exquisitely timed cover drive sending the cricket ball hurtling towards the boundary; Michael Jordan, airborne, spinning with the basketball; Roger Federer, on or off the tennis court. We know it equally on the big screen. 'One of the chief qualities that made Sean [Connery] such a big star in those early James Bonds was his movement,' said TV director Philip Saville. 'His hand movement, his agility; he was an altogether organic man. It's a very important quality if you're making action movies. Steve McQueen had it, he had the natural sense of forward movement and all his body co-ordinated. Sean had it in spades.'

Beautiful movement is easier to admire than to achieve. As we mature, the rigours of professional life tend to favour our intellects. Although many of us may claim to incorporate physical exploits into our weekly routines, the realities of a political work environment, not to mention wider social mores, mean that much of our physical expression is suppressed. Indeed, in most corporate settings, we're more likely to be rewarded for a 'poker face'. All of which is a shame, because expressive movement can be a blessing at any age.

Sir Sean was an unlikely initial match for Bond. He auditioned wearing a lumber jacket, yet he was observed leaving the producers' Mayfair office, crossing South Audley Street, 'like a big jungle cat,' remarked one of them, Harry Saltzman. The actor was light on his feet, given his 6ft 2in frame. 'The difference with this

guy is the difference between a still photo and film,' said co-producer Cubby Broccoli. 'When he starts to move, he comes alive.'

Herein lies hope for us all, for what studying these men blessed with elegant movement typically reveals is a backstory of focused training and personal transformation. Gene Kelly's dance routines look delightfully improvised and effortless, but he was a workaholic when it came to rehearsals. Jordan's basketball game was barely even recognised when he was in high school. In Sir Sean's case, between working as a milkman and playing Bond, he studied in London under the Swedish acting coach Yat Malmgren.

Malmgren's approach (often known simply as YAT) is a potent cocktail of ingredients and an inscrutable-sounding one at that. At its base is the objectives-focused method of Russian theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski (as found in the actor's question: 'What's my motivation in this scene?'). Next comes the personality-typing of Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung (introvert, extrovert, feeling, sensing and so on, which separately underpin the Myers-Briggs test used in corporate recruitment). Then, there is an admixture of movement psychology and movement classification, courtesy of choreographer Rudolf von Laban, who was run out of Nazi Germany by Joseph Goebbels. Finally, there's a set of 'inner attitudes' that describe the psychological nature of character. Crucial is the relationship between psychological drives and externalised movement.

'It all sounds terribly alienating and full of shit,' said Colin >



Firth, who was also schooled in the technique. 'I found that after a couple of years of it, it started to make an enormous amount of sense... I still use it.' The system can be understood through studying examples, through experience (taking classes) and through key 'takeaways'.

A fine example is how we meet Bond on screen for the first time in *Dr No*. The scene is deservedly famous for the seminal line 'Bond, James Bond', but, in fact, we first meet the character through his hands, playing cards. Those hand movements are quick, light and intentional. There's an alertness and a wariness, too. 'Looks like you're out to get me,' he quips with proto-Bond girl Sylvia Trench. The scene can be understood without sound. The action conveys its own narrative, suggesting motivation, as well as possible consequences. When Bond gets up from the card table to cash in his chips, we get to see exactly why Sir Sean was cast as Bond; he appears to gather and carry the entire film with him.

'Connery is famous for that masculine confidence,' says Vladimir Mirodan, who has literally written the book on YAT technique. 'Given his background as a bodybuilder, no one doubted he could play violence persuasively. Yet his power in those early Bond films came from a certain quivering balance between quite

‘Connery was observed leaving the office “like a big jungle cat”’

different traits. Working with Yat, he became lighter, more agile, more graceful; we talk about a “mobile” inner attitude. He opened up to his feelings, as well as to the sensual—he was enlivened. It's an inspired match for the character because of Bond's sybaritic tendencies, but also because it makes him a plausible on-screen lover. After all, what is a lover, if not somebody who loves?'

YAT technique may have been designed for actors to analyse and develop character for stage and screen, but, as the famous line goes, 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players'. How can it help us to express ourselves in day-to-day life?

I visit Prof Mirodan near his north London home for a class. Advance homework requires me to consider my life (upbringing, family, professional history) and put myself up on an imaginary blank screen as a character whose traits I can objectively infer. Alas, they fall somewhat short of the heroic Bondian killer/lover ideal. The good news is that I don't need to become more of a man of action. Rather, I need heightened emotion.

Prof Mirodan encourages me to play a game. Rather than becoming frustrated by other joggers in the park, I am to avoid them by entering a state of playful flow. It turns out that, after fighting with the Israeli army, Prof Mirodan discovered ballet and, four decades on, he's no slouch on his feet. 'Think of Connery ➤

Five easy ways to improve your moves

Not everyone can invest months or even days in movement training, so here are some quick and simple solutions

Hold your head high

We're familiar with the exhortation, 'Head up, shoulders back,' but it's not only about improving posture or carriage. A straight posture is in itself a characteristic of optimistic, confident people. It's how they carry themselves in the world—rarely are they caught in a literal slump—and is one of the single best ways to enter a room or to make a good first impression.

Breathe

Conscious, deep breathing is a sure-fire way to facilitate relaxation, both mental and physical. It increases the supply of oxygen to body and brain and helps stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, inducing a general state of calm—indispensable for delivering a speech or helping defuse a tense situation. Yoga classes are often built around these breathing techniques and can prove an excellent way of encouraging the habit.

Do Pilates

For a more focused approach to agility, coordination and balance, consider booking onto a Pilates course. Rosanna Staveley has seen more and more men discover the benefits in her London-based classes (www.posiepilates.com). 'A classic area on which we might work is range of hip movement, linked to lower-back issues, plus various other factors influencing flexibility,' she says. 'The trick is to isolate specific muscles, ligaments and tendons and work on those.'

Hit the (medi) spa

If something goes awry in our musculoskeletal systems, the advice we typically receive is to see a physiotherapist or a chiropractor, but tracking down the right one can prove tricky. Consider visiting a good medispas such as Buchinger

Wilhelmi in Germany or VivaMayr in Austria. These holistic centres offer an array of specialists under one roof and a week to 10 days invested in such havens can deliver all the referrals required.

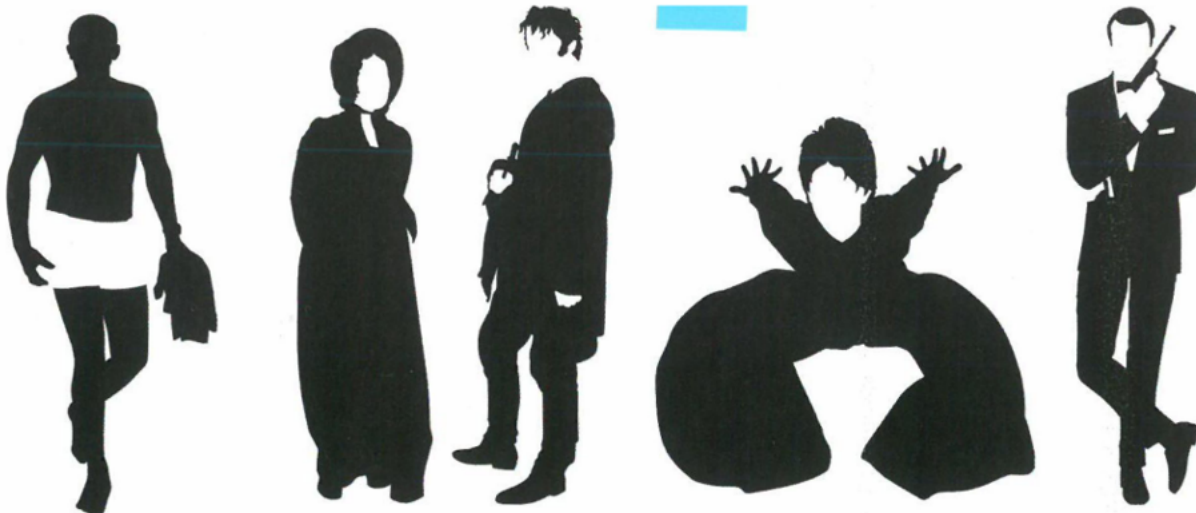
Dance

Perhaps the simplest way of increasing mobility and finding authentic, fluid movement is expressive dance—in whatever form feels comfortable. You only need to look at Sir Mick Jagger, who made a startlingly quick return to the stage following heart surgery. His dance moves would impress at any age; at 77, they're an inspiration. If it all brings back too many bad wedding-reception memories, 'flowing' martial arts, such as tai chi, are a good substitute.









walking through the casino and the director choreographing actors to pass him, in order to make it more visually interesting. He *glides* through them all,' he says, elongating the vowel in glide and physically gliding, too. 'It becomes a dance to be *enjoyed*.'

The technique applies to other daily tasks. When I shave in the morning, I am to avoid 'dabbing' (I wet shave). Rather, I should *glide* the razor over my chin, keeping in mind how Sir Sean opens his cigarette case or hands Sylvia Trench his card; there is a smoothness, an effortless-ness to be found in even the smallest movement patterns. Prof Mirodan also suggests Pilates or yoga classes to facilitate the requisite mobility (*see box*). 'It's about enhancing flexibility, slowing down gestures, *yielding*, adapting—opening up. Think about *flow*.'

It may all seem frivolous to the uninitiated, but, 'just as our thoughts affect our movements, so our movements affect our thoughts,' notes Prof Mirodan. 'In fact, there's a continuous feedback loop operating at the subconscious level. It is from here that transformation can occur.'

It's not dissimilar to the recently fashionable concept of 'enclothed cognition', which posits that the clothes we wear influence how we perceive ourselves and, therefore, how we are. Yet this is far more fundamental. Proprioception (or awareness of the body) describes self-perception and how we negotiate our environment, specifically the feedback mechanism by which skeletal muscles, tendons and joints inform the brain. As we may experience

a mood lift by reminding ourselves to smile, so good character actors can become genuinely distressed by the action of crying. Changes in the neocortical circuits of the brain occur as we alter our behaviours. Suddenly, I'm relaxed about the joggers panting and wheezing past with their earphones in. They're easily, enjoyably avoided.



‘As our thoughts are affected by our movements, so our movements affect our thoughts’

This harmony between characters' outer and inner states can prove powerful. As viewers of the BBC's 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* recognised (arguably better than Mr Darcy himself), a cool exterior can't always hide, say, an irritation with a heroine's uncouth family, a welling frustration with her absurd suitors or a deeper, slow-burning love for her. When Mr Firth's Darcy dives headlong into the lake at Pemberley, we witness him accessing and aligning with the fluid underworld of this inner life—his true feelings. He transforms; he starts to flow. Water

is a symbol of this fluidity, but so is his physique. To paraphrase New York dance therapist Miriam Roskin Berger, the body becomes both working instrument and symbol.

When I rewatch the scene with Prof Mirodan, he points out Darcy's easy gait and swinging hip movement upon leaving the lake. Even after Darcy bumps into Elizabeth Bennet, with all the comedic awkwardness this entails, he retains a lovely levity in the questions he puts to her. 'There is a flicking quality to the way Firth delivers the

lines,' explains Prof Mirodan.

'Flicking gestures are seen in Connery's hands at the casino, too. They reveal lightness and feeling, in contradistinction to, say, dabbing or thumping gestures.'

Other techniques dispense with words altogether, focusing entirely on movement and emotion. A good example is mime, as practised by the late performer Lindsay Kemp, who taught David Bowie during the musician's Ziggy Stardust phase. Wordless and pure, mime is a study in raw emotion and its physical expression.

It is this telescoping together of movement and emotion that enables memorable men to transform, yet still retain, even amplify, their authenticity. The proof is there in great 'personality' sports or pop stars and, especially, in actors, who grant unfettered access to camera or audience member. Every facial gesture, postural change, shift in gait or micro action is put on display. And as in the movies, so in real life: movement maketh the man. 🐉

Vladimir Mirodan's new book, *'YAT: An Introduction to Movement Psychology'*, will be out in 2021