

Momentum

By Rob Drummond

Author's Note: The actor should feel free to experiment with/ignore/alter the stage directions and pacing of the text in order to find a rhythm that works with the physicality of the piece. The aim is to find a balance between the words and the exercises and build towards a fluid piece that exists somewhere between movement and monologue.

The room is filled with exercise mats. Beside each mat is a bottle of water.

A cross-legged, track-suited man is sitting on the hillside. He looks over his shoulder, sees a crowd has gathered, stands up and enters the room shutting the glass door behind him.

Hi, thanks for coming. I'm Grant MacKenzie and today I'm going to be demonstrating Pulse, a simple fifteen-minute five-step cardio based exercise programme that any busy city professional can do on their lunch break and still have enough time for a healthy veggie shake and a quick read of the Financial Times. Now, you can watch for just now or join in, whatever you like, but remember to pay attention.

The first thing about Pulse is to remember to stay hydrated. We are made mostly of water but we need to drink it to survive. You'd think we could just draw on our reserves wouldn't you? But no.

I don't need any water just now but you might. Go on. Have some.

He encourages the audience to drink.

And it's also a good idea to invest in a watch like this one that can monitor your heart rate, or your *pulse*, ha ha, because we don't want to overdo it, do we?

When I was young I didn't like my heart.

It used to creep me out.

The fact that it could just stop at any moment.

I asked my mother. How does it know to keep beating?

She said. Drink your water.

My dad said. It's electricity. From your brain.

When will it stop?

When your momentum runs out. He said.

Now drink your fucking water.

Silence.

Working out isn't only good for the heart, it's good for the mind. Releases endorphins which stimulate the brain. Keeps it busy. Keeps it from dwelling on things we'd rather not dwell upon. We all have something in our lives we'd rather not think about don't we? Well, exercise is a good way to keep the negativity at bay.

Ok. So. Pulse. Step One. A gentle warm up to get our heart rates going.

Grant swings his arms back and forth.

Your arms should be completely loose when you do this. Just let gravity do its job. Allow your arms to swing backwards and forwards together.

Let's get a bit of momentum going shall we?

Allow your arms to swing further each time until you are ready to bring them past your ears and complete the circle.

He builds momentum until he is rotating his arms over his head, past his ears in big circles.

Life is all about momentum.

You're born you're looking for it; seeking it out.

It can be physical. Your first few faltering steps, each one owing its existence to the last. Or the slow but steady progress of a mountain stream as it carves a path into the rock over millions of years.

Or more abstract. The momentum you get from learning a sound, then a letter, then a word, then a sentence, then a ... story.

Or luminous even. The momentum you get from an amazing succession of perfect summer days; the sort of momentum that just fills you to the brim with hope for the future and sets you up for the weeks and months and years ahead.

His arms are travelling fast now.

And now we gradually give in. We allow the momentum to fade until your arms are at rest.

His arms slow down as he speaks the following.

Because where there is momentum there is also inertia.

You trip up.

The stream runs dry.

Those amazing summer days were always followed by a deep depression.

Momentum never lasts.

He looks at his watch. Holds his heart.

Silence.

And now we'll continue step one by moving into a gentle jog.

He starts to jog on the spot.

You can call me Mako by the way. That's a nick name. From my trading days. I used to deal in stocks and bonds. Now? I invest in something a little more ... tangible. I invest in people.

He picks up the pace a little.

It's a type of shark. The Mako. Famed for its diversity. Found in warm water, cold water, deep water, shallow water, all over the world. It's small so people underestimate how dangerous it is. It's not a fussy eater. And it's the fastest of all sharks.

You know that thing about sharks having to keep moving or they'll die? That's not true of the Mako. It's developed a way to keep the water flowing through its gills even when it's stationary. It's worked out a strategy to defeat the demands of momentum. Trouble is,

when you stay still you're more vulnerable. It's a risk reward thing. Conserve energy, leave yourself open to attack. It's a gamble.

And I'm not adverse to a gamble.

It's what I do.

It's what I did.

He is running way too fast by now. This is not a gentle warm up any more.

He stops and looks at his watch.

He takes a towel and wipes the sweat from his head.

Congratulations. Step one of Pulse is complete. Our bodies are now warm and loose and our hearts are beating.

Step two concentrates on the upper body.

I want everybody to take a wide stance with your arms straight out so that our limbs make up a large letter X. Then we bend at the waist, making sure to tuck in those abs, and bring the left arm towards the right foot. Don't worry if you can't get all the way there. As close as possible is all we ask. Then we come back to our X position and repeat on the other side.

Ok?

Two minutes. Here we go.

He begins.

You know, I turn forty this year.

This in medical terms is apparently the beginning of the end. From the age of forty, human beings start to lose ten thousand brain cells every day.

Ten thousand.

Every day.

It's the downturn. You reach the brow of the hill. And once you get there and go over the top, momentum's going to carry you right to the bottom. Fast. It's quicker on the way down than it is on the way up.

Ok, lets speed it up and really get those hearts working!

He speeds up and continues to talk.

The thing is ...

When you reach forty you may well begin to deteriorate physically and mentally ...

But in terms of life experience, the ability to adapt, learn, chase your goals, understand your terrain, you've never been in a better position.

The moment you peak is simultaneously the moment you *have* peaked. That's the cruelty of it.

Keep going. Twenty seconds. Don't give up.

He speeds up for twenty seconds and then stops.

He picks up the towel. Wipes his face.

You may take in some water if you like.

He doesn't drink.

And now let's take twenty seconds to breathe.

In through the nose, out through the mouth.

Control your breathing. Control your heart.

As he breathes he talks.

In Indonesia there is a monastery of monks who live high up in the Barisian Mountains where oxygen is scarce and thirty-five active volcanoes threaten to erupt at any time.

They spend their entire lives in the pursuit of one goal. Stopping their own heart. And in doing so achieving complete control of the body God gave them and thus becoming one with the creator.

They train by alternating between devastatingly long periods of extreme physical exertion and completely sedentary week-long deep meditative states. They eat once a month and drink on only those rare occasions when it rains, allowing the rainwater to wash over their faces and drop into their mouths. Eventually they have such control and understanding of their own bodies that they are actually able to raise and lower their heart rate at will.

And then, when they feel ready, they wander out onto the hillside, kneel cross-legged and simply tell their heart to stop.

And it does.

What an amazing way to go. To be in that much control of your own heart that you can just ... tell it to stop. Eh?

Pause.

But we're not interested in that, are we?! No. Everyone take in some water and let's get moving!

Step three of Pulse is all about the lower body. We're going to do some knee smashes. These are amazing. They get all the aggression out. I love these.

We start with our arms by our sides but then we imagine we are grabbing an assailant – or just someone we're not very fond of, someone who's wronged us in the past – by the lapels and then we bring our knee up into their stomach. First the left knee to the right hand side and then the right knee to the left.

Left leg first. Ready? You fucking better be! One minute each side. Go!

He starts the knee smashes.

Who hates their job?

Anyone hate their job? Quit it! Go on. Just quit it!

Why spend the one life you've got doing something you don't like?

Really. I'm really asking. Why?

You only get one life.

Heaven. You kidding me?

You're adults.

Stop believing in fairy stories and start living in reality.

It's not as nice but it's all we've got.

And switch sides.

He switches legs.

One minute. Keep the momentum going. Really lay into the son of a bitch – whoever it is.

I was good at my job.

Really good.

But I was sick of making money for other people.

Sure I got a healthy wage and good bonuses but it was nothing compared to what the guys upstairs were raking in. Off my genius.

I did all the work and they saw all the cash.

And a nick name that, truth be told, I couldn't stand.

I'm not a shark.

Sharks are evil soulless black-eyed bastards. I have a soul. I do. I fucking do.

No matter what people tell you. I do.

He smashes his knee forwards violently over and over again. He stops suddenly.

How was I meant to know what was going to happen?

You see, I developed a strategy. A strategy so powerful that I knew it would change my life forever. And I wasn't willing to share it with those pricks so I quit. Used the money I had saved and went it on my own.

It was so simple. So groundbreaking.

I called it Human Momentum.

He looks at his watch.

Get some water.

He watches them drink but doesn't drink himself.

Ok. So we've warmed up and then worked separately on our upper and lower bodies. Can anyone guess what we do on step four?

That's right! In step four of Pulse we work both the upper and lower body ... together!

Do you think you're up for it?

Course you're up for it.

Now, this is going to be tough so control your breathing and don't give in to the inertia.

We start in a standing position then squat down and place our hands shoulder length apart and kick our legs backwards. We then reverse the motion and bring our legs forwards and thrust upwards into a standing jump with a fist pump into the sky.

Let's really get those heart rates up. Let's really release those endorphins. Keep the negative thoughts ... Keep everything ... Just ... Ok?

Ready? Go!

He speaks as he works.

Human Momentum works like this.

Every year I compile a list of the top teenagers in Scotland based on the momentum of their grades throughout high school. The ones on the upwards curve.

I contact the ten students with the most momentum and I send them a cheque for twenty thousand pounds to do with as they please.

The only proviso is that they tattoo a picture of my face with my name below it on their inner forearm, right here.

And then I wait. Wait for them to flourish.

Of course some were bad investments but most flourished.

And today. I have developed an ever growing network of the best and brightest in every level of government, big business, commerce, constabulary, media.

All of them with something in common. My face on their arm. A constant reminder of whose money put them on the ladder to success in the first place.

Eventually momentum will take over and there will be nothing I cannot have. No favour too big. I will pay for nothing. Want for nothing.

Power, love, respect ... sex. They will take care of me. Like I took care of them. My people are on the rise.

He falls to the ground exhausted.

God, I'm so hungry. I haven't eaten in a week.

There is one flaw and one flaw only in the Human Momentum strategy.

You see I never meet the people I invest in. I go only on their academic achievement. I ignore anything to do with personality. I concentrate on the statistics. I don't need to know who I am investing in. Only that they have momentum.

He sits up. Looks at his heart monitor.

His name was Anthony Jennings. You might have heard of him. He's ... been in the news.

In first year at school he was flunking every exam. In third year he was hitting C's and B's. He left school two years ago with ten A's at higher level and unconditional offers from Oxbridge. I didn't know what caused his upswing. I didn't check his medical background. His psychiatric evaluations. I didn't care. The strategy didn't care. I sent him the letter. He sent

me back a picture of himself with his tattoo. I released the funds. He cashed the cheque. I couldn't predict what he was going to do with the money.

I didn't check his psychiatric evaluations. It wasn't part of the strategy.

I couldn't have known what he would do. How could I have known?

It wasn't my fault what happened.

He did that of his own free will.

Of his own momentum.

Silence.

Step five of Pulse is called Active Resting. We've had a tough session so we deserve a rest but we're going to work *while* we rest. Like the Mako. We're going to stay completely still but keep the momentum going.

This is called the plank. And it hurts. But it works out every muscle in your body. Including the heart.

Everyone lie on their front in a press up position. And now lift your bodies up, straight as a plank while resting on your forearms and toes.

And see how long you can hold it.

Don't give in. Fight through the pain. This is the final step.

He 'planks' on the floor. His forearms and toes holding the rest of his body up in a straight line. He tries to get through this entire next passage while in this position.

I shouldn't feel guilty.

I know that.

Thanks for saying that.

Anthony Jennings was a bad investment.

It can happen to anyone. It doesn't mean the system is wrong.

It just means people are flawed.

Think how much good my investments have done over the years.

Way more good than bad.

Way more.

One fuck up does not negate all the good I have done. All the people I have helped.

And yes, I get something out of it. So what?

So what?

There is no such thing as an altruistic act.

I'll say that again.

No such thing.

As an altruistic act.

They don't exist.

We *only* do things that benefit ourselves in the long run.

And there's nothing wrong with that.

Ideally what we do benefits others too but let's face it, we're all just animals scrapping our way through this life trying to keep the momentum going, trying our fucking best to ward off the inertia.

And I am NOT going to apologise for that.

I couldn't have known what he was going to do with the money.

If I knew would I have acted differently?

Silence.

Why has the perpetrator got your face on his arm?

What the fuck is your face doing on his arm?

I just gave him some money.

That's all.

I just ...

I made an investment.

I didn't know ...

You are responsible for what happened.

I'm not.

You are the reason it happened.

No.

No. I am fucking not!

He holds the plank for as long as he can.

It begins to rain.

He falls to the ground and turns over. He allows the rainwater to fall onto his face and into his open mouth. He smiles.

The rain stops.

He opens the glass door and walks out onto the hillside. He sits cross-legged and looks out over the hillside. He looks at his wrist watch.

He stays there and meditates.