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# **Writing 'the Body': reconsidering physicality through 'French' theatre discourse**

Submitted by Eve Wedderburn to the University of Exeter as a dissertation of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Drama March 2009 (July 2008)

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## Abstract

Against the backdrop of a “uniquely literary” (Harvie, 2006: 113 heritage of theatre in Britain, in the last quarter century, “physical theatre has become embedded in the language of educationalists, actor trainers and their students” (Murray and Keefe, 2007b: 2) However, in the context of the Western analytic tradition ‘the body’ has been positioned in binary opposition to thought, text, rationale and language (Leder, 1990: 1-5). This study considers the entrenchment of a dualist structure of the body and the reification of this by embodiment itself, in order to formulate the question: in what way can the/my/a body enter discourses? In order to explore this question, I consider in detail the work of Jacques Copeau, Jacques Lecoq and Ariane Mnouchkine; practitioners whose work is consistently associated with and cited by contemporary British practitioners of ‘physical theatre’. Arguing for a specific lineage of theatrical practice, I trace the ways in which their work foregrounds and manages notions of the embodiment of theatre practice and suggest that the shared practices of those three practitioners resist the dualistic conceptual structuring that would place ‘the body’ in opposition to text, rationale and thought and by extension the ‘literary’ theatre of Britain. In a context in which the body has been “relegated to a mere supporting role to the word, [...] regarded as vulgar or simply a means to an end” (Murray and Keefe, 2007a: 3), I consider the implications and contingencies of the attempt to bring ‘the body’ into the discourse of UK theatre practice.

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# Introduction

## Impetus

*The new paradigm is 'performance,' not theatre... Performance is about more than the enactment of Eurocentric drama. Performance engages intellectual, social, cultural and artistic life in a broad sense. Performance combines theory and practice.... That is because performed acts, whether actual or virtual, more than the written word negotiate the many personal, group, regional, and world systems comprising today's realities*  
Schechner 1992: 9

In a provocation to the (American) academy in 1992, Richard Schechner argued for a radical rethink of the way that Universities teach theatre and performance studies. Observing the proliferation of non-dramatic performance, his statement argued for an education that responded to reflect the widening field of performance practice as increasingly it moves beyond the constructs of drama and its concordant ideologies of representation, unity and coherence of action. "The fact is," he asserted, "that theatre as we have known and practiced it – the staging of written dramas – will be the string quartet of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – a beloved but extremely limited genre, a subdivision of performance"(ibid).

Performers working in contexts no longer rooted in the unities of drama, then, must find ways of conceptualising their work that both encompasses and transcends the limitations of dramatic texts. In *Acting (Re)Considered*, Phillip Zarrilli argues the need for "a more complex way of thinking and talking about acting" (Zarrilli 1995: 16) as a response to these changing demands made upon the actor by the disruption of the drama's logical unities of time, space, action and theme. Of greatest concern to Zarrilli is the reinterpretation of the performing/ed presence, whose foundation in dramatic performances has been in the notion of character. The "destabilization of the realistic, psychologically "whole" character" (Zarrilli, 1995: 19) both generates and is a consequence of the new, post-dramatic paradigm which "regards performativity, not rootedness in a dramatic text as the main constituent" (Wessendorf, 2003: 2). As a result, then, the actor can no longer ground their performance in the ideologies of character and identity nor rely on logical unities of time, space, action or theme to either contextualise or "make sense" of their actions – either to an audience or to themselves. Zarrilli describes this as a renegotiation of the performers' task and suggests that an understanding of semiotic theory might replace the logocentric, psychologically reasoned approach to performance, dependant as it was on the dramatic construct of character:

From a semiotic perspective, in the moment of performance the actor makes meanings (impressions, images) available through the complex network of signs which he or she produces (along with the costumes the actor wears, the space/setting within which he or she acts, etc.). The actor's task is *creating* signs (images, etc.) through voice and body. If meanings are created, they are created in the play of signification between the signs produced by the actors and interpretations of those signs made by the spectators.

Since meanings are made collaboratively by the performers and spectators, the actor does not *have* to produce logical, behaviourally motivated, psychological signs for an action to have "meaning" for an audience. (Zarrilli 1995: 17)

Running parallel to this shifting practice has been a changing relationship for the practice of theorising. That Schechner could even address *Performance* - as distinct from *Literature* - departments in the academy has been a development of the late twentieth century (Schechner 2006:2-4) which, though now well established *within* the academic community, still requires careful assertion and even argument [for CUT] in wider contexts. [1] Nevertheless, a consequence of this uncoupling of literature from drama has been an explosion of performance theory and theorising that is distinct from the theories of literature even as it borrows some of literature's critical methodologies.[2] Notable in the distinction is insistent

attention to the lived moment of performance rather than the structure of the written text: “whatever is being studied is regarded as practices, events and behaviours, not as ‘objects’ or ‘things.’ This quality of ‘liveness’ ... is at the heart of performance studies.” (Schechner 2006: 2) Of course, the traditional academic methodology of producing written accounts can overlook the very liveness that Schechner speaks of as well as effacing from view complex theoretical underpinning of practical (though unwritten-about) work. The discipline’s valuation of practice-as-research within the context of an academic environment has therefore led to particular tension between notions of practice and theory which at times inspire and at others frustrate:

Printed texts are too important and powerful for us to cede that form of scholarship. But it is not enough. We also engage in creative work that stands alongside and in metonymic tension with conventional scholarship. We think of performance and practical work as a supplement to – not a substitute for – written scholarship.

[...]

The ongoing challenge of our collaborative agenda is to refuse and supersede the deeply entrenched division of labor, the apartheid of knowledges, that plays out inside the academy as the difference between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualization and creativity. The division of labor between theory and practice, abstraction and embodiment, is an arbitrary and rigged choice...

(Dwight Conquergood, q. Schechner 2006: 24)

This paradigmatic shift of performance from the drama to the postdramatic and its implications for the actor is emblematic of my own journey through performance practice during the course of my undergraduate studies in theatre. My experience of this shifting performative focus, in which I gradually came to conceptualise my presence on the stage as a phenomenal point in the semiotic field, initially left me bereft of any means of accounting for the mode of embodiment the performance task engendered. As I sought a framework in which to understand my work, I increasingly became interested in tracing the conceptual shift. That interest – in creating an abstracted account of my experience as a performer – was the impetus for this enquiry.

Although it is now possible for me retrospectively to contextualise my experience of the ‘destabilisation’ of certain modes of performance as a function of a wider paradigmatic shift in theatre practices and theories, it is important to recognise that the conceptual framing of my work in these terms has been done in reflection. That is to say, I did not note the emergence of the post-dramatic and adapt my approach to work accordingly. Though the reflection upon this process can be constructed as a coherent narrative, the orderliness of the expression is not intended to suggest an orderly experience. This rupture – between the account of experience and the experience itself – is a theme that impacts not only my own experience of performance and the subsequent accounts I make for it, but also the whole project of theatrical discourse in important ways that I return to throughout this work.

My first experience of the discontinuity between practice and its account, however, arose in regard to the relationship of my own body to theatre practice, in which I began to experience a disjuncture between my (incarnated) experiences of performance and the discursive framework through which I attempted to account for them. Though the paradigmatic shift had its foundation within the framework of performance, the experiential consequences were located beyond the bounds of an abstract sense of performance theory or even of ‘the’ performer’s relationship to theory. Instead my experience was a lived and disorderly process in which I questioned my own relationships to performance, theory and - most significantly - my experience of corporeality.

It is perhaps a remark upon the significance of the change in my thinking to note that when first I embarked upon this reflection, the thought that my engagement in theatre practice could lead to my reconsideration of embodiment (either in the abstract or in relationship to my own flesh) was genuinely surprising. Before undertaking degree level studies, my understanding about performance and the (my) body was characterised, first of all, by a notional separation of those two issues – performance/ body – in the terms of my engagement. Inasmuch as I reflected upon my experience of embodiment *at all*, I considered such issues as of a different order of things from the problems of performance. The intellectual positions that I had adopted in relation to these notionally separate categories of problem nevertheless

shared a commonality of approach, which was distinguished by my commonsensical attitude. Insofar as I was aware of having adopted intellectual positions, they appeared to me as given and immutable; self-evident apprehensions of a material reality that I assumed was not only knowable but *known*. The notion that one's own experience of embodiment could be problematised (rather than simply problematic) or its governing assumptions questioned had not occurred to me.

I did, however, begin to consider my embodied relationship to performance as an increasingly difficult and unsolvable problem within the terms of the practice in which I was accustomed to working. These practices were loosely based on a particular apprehension of Stanislavski's Method that foregrounded a logical, psychologically motivated approach to performance that was conceived of - and presented to me - as primarily a cognitive practice. Those with whom I had worked on performance--high school directors, peers, and practitioners in the cultural mainstream reflecting on their own work - discussed and framed performance in a way that *seemed to me* to suggest that acting was a process of adopting certain intellectual positions. Interviews in the popular media spoke by and large of an actor's performance as being oriented by a 'character's' behaviour/ psychology, rather than of the construction of semiotic ideograms of which Zarrilli has spoken. During rehearsals, I observed and was asked to participate in the development of a rationale *for* a text; and as performers we would attempt to *explain* (to ourselves and one another) *why* the text appeared in the way that it did, with the director at times initiating/ chairing/ leading these negotiations. Throughout this process, there was an assumption of a single, logical, bounded identity – sometimes conceived of as the playwright, at others conceived of as the character, or even at times ascribed to our own collective 'we...' – which was attempting to set out a particular position in relation to the themes and 'meanings' of the performance: 'Shakespeare is telling us...'/ 'Hamlet means to say...'/ 'We are trying to establish ...' and so forth. These assumptions were grounded in a supposition first of all that such identities existed; second, that they were stable, rational, discreet and coherent; third, and most pertinent to the practice of acting, that these rationales would be communicated to the audience by reason of the clarity of our own apprehension and/ or the accuracy of our interpretation.

As my practical and theoretical studies of performance progressed, however, I found this framework increasingly inadequate a means of engaging with the problems of performance. My difficulties arose both in the moment of practice and in the reflective framing of work in the rehearsal room. Conceptually, I found it more and more difficult to reconcile the notionally ascribed logic of the approach with what I experienced as the *illogical* demands that it made upon me as a performer/ person. This approach, for example, often required both the audience and actor collectively to 'believe' in the performance as 'real' or 'truthful' and 'suspend their disbelief' in the 'theatrical' or 'unreal' nature of the action. This theatrical 'truth' was conceived of as distinct from the physical 'reality' of the performer for whom, in a physical sense at least, all performance is 'real' inasmuch as it is *embodied* – i.e. I would 'actually' walk onto the stage, pick up my props, say my words. However, the 'truth' of this 'reality' was effaced from the discussions we endlessly engaged in, and replaced by a 'truth' which had its foundations in linguistic construction within whose frame the actuality of my walk across the stage could nevertheless be 'untruthful':

The request for "believability" collapses the character as a fictive construct and sign system into the actor-as-person. The teacher seems to ask the actor to *be* "believable." The actor is not asked to create those psychophysiological relationships to specific actions that might be *read by* the director/ spectator/ teacher as signs of honesty... The implicit "truth" claim in the proposition, "you must believe in order to make me believe," is mistaken by both the teacher and the student alike as an apt description for "the thing described" – acting. (Zarrilli 1995: 10)

As a student invested in the 'truth claims' of this 'problematic language of believability' I developed growing ontological confusions about the role of 'character' in the construction of performance, finding it awkward and nonsensical to speak of and refer to 'characters' as if 'they' had an autonomous existence outside of the enactment of the gestures and words indicated in the performance text. Rather than recognise the notion of character as a linguistic short-hand used to refer to the collection of actions/ utterances ascribed to a performer, (which may then be read as an 'identity' of a 'character'), I was expected to refer to my own directions in a performance as if they were the actions of an Other, whom I

was supposed to mimic in movement and speech, as well as seeming to share certain (culturally prescribed) categories of identity – for example gender, race, age and appearance.

The politics of this mimicry of fictive identities was an issue that I found fraught with difficulty. For example, if this notional alter ego was supposed by spectators to be markedly different from me in categories of race, gender, age or appearance, I found myself liable to criticism levelled not at my performance, but at their conception of my embodiment – *I am too female to be a believable Hamlet, I am too young to be a believable Gertrude, I am too old to be a believable Ophelia, I am too white to be a believable Othello.* Contrary to the prevailing ideology that a performer's belief in their character was *the* requisite for affective performance, all of these criticisms remained resolutely in place regardless of the intensity of my inner 'belief in' the character. Zarrilli notes the problematics of this ideology in relation to the lived experience of the performer: "[t]he request for "believability" collapses the character as a fictive construct and sign system into the actor-as-person. [...] It also masks its ideology of identity – the collapse of the "person" of the performer into the role." (Zarrilli 1995: 10)

My engagement with the problems of these clashing and collapsing identities was the moment at which my practice demanded that I re-think my conceptions of embodiment. In the first place the relational meaning derived from my bodily appearance in the context of other bodies destabilised my sense of my own embodiment as somehow 'fixed' in its materiality and meanings - it was not my appearance for itself that changed those readings of Ophelia. At the same time, however, certain aspects of it seemed 'fixed' in its significance, howsoever I might appear – I remain resolutely, unacceptably 'white' in the case of Othello even if – especially if - I cover my appearance as white with make-up and emotionally invest in the character's experience. Through this, the practice of theatre demonstrated to me that the appearance of both my 'truthful' inner sense of the character and my outward surface are superseded by my relational embodiment to my cultural context. In this way, the cultural platitude that 'it is not what is outside, but inside that counts' became not so much hollow-sounding as hopelessly based on a confusing dichotomy of outside/ inside, object/ subject that was no longer a simplistic opposition but overlap of appearance-for-others and embodiment at temporally and contextually shifting points:

Put simply, there is no such thing as "the" body or even "the" body image. Instead, whenever we are referring to an individual's body, that body is always responded to in a particularised fashion, that is, as a woman's body, a Latina's body, a mother's body, a daughter's body, an aging body, a Jewish body. Moreover, these images of the body are not discrete but form a series of overlapping identities whereby one or more aspects of that body appear to be especially salient at any given point in time. [...] There are] a multiplicity of body images, body images that are copresent in any given individual, and which are themselves constructed through a series of corporeal exchanges that take place both within and outside of specific bodies. (Weiss: 1999: 2)

As a result, it became clear to me that no matter how thoroughly I was versed in the languages of character, truth and belief nothing about this approach could offer me solutions to my performance problems in their relationship to my notion of myself as a body and my bodily appearance to others. Furthermore, the alternating clash and overlap of my understandings/ appearance brought with it problems of performance practice that the constructs of character could not begin to address. In a general sense, I encountered awkwardness, embarrassment and a sense of mystification regarding much used but undefined concepts regarding presence and appearance on stage. I was frequently at a loss to explain the dis(/con)cordance between those cognitive attitudes that I had adopted – the 'beliefs' that Zarrilli has described - and my (bodied) appearance as 'truthful', 'believable' or otherwise to my directors and co-performers.

As the sometimes problematic nature of my organic presence continued to demand my reluctant attention, I similarly began to recognise the lack of reference to and from my materiality in the rehearsal room. This meant when approaching the representation of character, I had no means of translating my sometimes encyclopaedic understanding of a role on to the stage; no language by which I might ask for direction and conceive of a way to make an interpretation appear in the performance space. For example, the 'theatre' exercises I encountered often offered me detailed 'information' about the characters that I was



asked to play, but no means of contextualising that knowledge into a performance. I had often been 'hot-seated' as a character and asked to suppose what the character's favourite colour might be, or even imaginatively invent a relationship with another character, such as a sibling, which did not necessarily appear in the text. Bereft of a notion of bodily appearance, such discussions could not offer a tool of practice that could describe how these (imaginary) knowledges were to be embodied, given materiality - *played*. As a result, I found it difficult to relate the outcomes of such exercises with what actually I should *do* on the stage. I found being told to 'be Ophelia (favourite colour purple)' no more helpful or less vague than being told to 'be Ophelia'

Further, this 'psychologically motivated' approach to performance is particularly suited to that 'well loved but outmoded' form of performance, the dramatic script, whose unities are in part derived from the psychological coherence of players as characters. My undergraduate experience exposed me to scripts such as The Living Theatre's *Terminal* and performances such as Forced Entertainment's *Speak Bitterness*, both performance 'texts' which can not be read with any kind of fullness by ascribing psychological coherence to the players on the stage. In this new set up, there was no character construct to which one might attend, and instead I found myself being asked to bring my entire attention to specifically the actions and movements (including vocal acts) being made in the performance space. As both a reader and a performer, I found this approach opened up new possibilities for signification that were liberated from the limitations of dramatic logic and character, - and most pertinently to this enquiry - allowed me to bring direct attention to what I had experienced as the corporeal problem of performance.

The trajectory of this study on a personal level, then, has constituted a means by which I have sought to bring my/the/a body to discourses 'of' and 'about' theatre practice. It therefore follows what Murray and Keefe might term a route/root (2007a: 34) to contemporary practice in which the body emerges as both the focus of practices directed toward theatre making and preparation, as well as a conceptual lynchpin of the discourse surrounding that practice. Such an undertaking, however, is not a value neutral act. Zarrilli reminds us:

Although the actor's body has always been 'there' as the actor's sole means of expression in live performance, the degree to which the body and/or a self-consciously constructed system of training toward performance is foregrounded, is variable *since both are culturally, socio-economically, and historically specific*. (Zarrilli 1996: 72, emphasis mine).

Indeed, Murray and Keefe, in their twin volumes investigating and considering the notion of a 'physical' theatre, introduce the idea of physical theatre as a necessity in the discourse because '[t]oo often... physicality is relegated to a mere supporting role to the word, is regarded as vulgar or simply a means to an end - at its worst being the vehicle by which the words are delivered or moved around the stage; or reduced to... routine gestures and mannerisms...' (2007a: 3). Murray and Keefe are here articulating the consequences of what Jen Harvie has described as "the emphasis of British theatre as literary - as words written by a writer and spoken by an actor." Following Foucault, Harvie contextualises this conception as part of a wider "reassuring narrative of genealogy lead[ing] to its representation as immobile and consistent with itself, rather than its recognition as heterogeneous" and specifically accuses "British theatre historiography of describ[ing] and so produc[ing] its object as uniquely British and autonomous from other traditions and histories through a narrative which constructs British drama and theatre as uniquely and consistently literary." (2005: 113-114) In offering an historiography that accounts for the companies whose work has been influenced by the European tradition that I explore below, Harvie sites contemporary British physical theatres as in-resistance to conservative ideologies of UK identity. A key part of the conceptualisation of this dominance-resistance is in the notional *body* of physical theatre, which she situates in a relational conceptual structure that is dualistic and hierarchical:

In crucial ways, the emphasis on British theatre as literary [...] diminishes attention to the

ways in which British theatre is material – movements performed, scenographies designed, sounds produced, work done. At heart, it is symptomatic of an anti-theatrical – if not an anti-dramatic – prejudice, neglecting aspects of theatre that are material, embodied, physically expressive and produced through the work of a group. It does not necessarily produce a cliché of British theatre and identities as cerebral and only verbally expressive, but it risks doing so. Furthermore, it conveniently corresponds with opposing clichés of European theatre and identities as more emotional and expressive, reinforcing those clichés. (Ibid:114)

## **Bodies and discourses or Practice/ and its account**

*Must you choose between doing, and know what others have done? To evade that costly choice, you must know that the synthesis you seek is unnatural, and that its reality is no more and no less than a convincing performance; and you must know that the role is a double one. Behind the scenes... you will dash from one farcical door to another, dressing on the run. The scholar/artist flops like a stranded fish between two intimately antagonistic roles that, if the dance is nimble enough, appear to be their own and each other's causes. (Huston 2003:127-129)*

*Being speaks always and everywhere throughout language*  
- Heidegger

In the context of an academic discipline that is in the first place engaged with the 'liveness' of its subject and in the second place enjoys the creative tension of the resistance of bodies to the reduction of texts, it seems impossible to ignore the concordant resistance of the/my/all bodies to *this* account. Such a consideration is not an uncommon practice in the field of performance studies; languages and the structures of signification are routinely considered in performance contexts[3]. Further, language is discussed by cultural theorists in the terms of the failure of *words* wholly to represent experience, and perhaps more importantly *acknowledge* or signal that failure.[4] In the face of this, Zarrilli suggests that we remember that '*all* languages of acting are highly metaphorical [...] necessarily inadequate and therefore provisional. [...] Thus] we can celebrate the freedom of not having to find a 'universal' language once and for all. Rather we can spend our energy on the continuing challenge of searching for languages of acting which best allow one to actualize a particular paradigm of performance in a particular context for a particular purpose.' (1996: 16). However, in the context of this study, even the terms of a *particular* language addressed to a *particular* paradigm of performance, there remain problems of discourse and language that require consideration *alongside* the paradigm because of their role in constituting the paradigm. Or, given that my purpose has been to bring together discourse and the body, that specific relationship is necessarily a point of departure and reflection for this work. In the first place, the impulse to assert that "the body has always been 'there'" is not limited to discourses of theatre. Western analytic philosophy has consistently distrusted the body and its associations[5]; it is not only in the context of theatre that 'physicality is relegated to a mere supporting role to the word, is regarded as vulgar or simply a means to an end – at its worst being the vehicle by which the words are delivered or moved around...'. The word in this construction is associated with the activities of mind, reason and thought; situated in opposition to the material body it is immaterial, transcendent and uniquely capable of knowledge. The mind constructs logic and order, and is the means by which the disorderly, passionate, emotional experience of body is made comprehensible. This particular association between mind and rationality has been particularly powerful:

The dominant view throughout the history of Western philosophy is that there is an essence that makes us human beings and that essence is rationality. Reason has traditionally been defined as our human capacity to think logically, to set ends for ourselves, and to deliberate about the best means for achieving those ends. (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 413)

The body/ mind are then subject to an onto-valuational structure based on a particular valorisation of reason and rational thought, the conceptualisation of which overlooks, and then constructs the body in opposition to, these product(ions) of mind. In the face of this tradition, Drew Leder, following Merleau-Ponty, is moved to remind us:

Human experience is incarnated. I receive the surrounding world through my eyes, my ears, my hands. The structure of my perceptual organs shapes that which I apprehend. And it is via bodily means that I am capable of responding. ... My actions are motivated by emotions, needs, desires, that well up from a corporeal self. Relations with others are based upon our mutuality of gaze and touch, our speech, our resonances of feeling and perspective. From the most visceral of cravings to the loftiest of artistic achievements, the body plays its formative role.

... the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives... (1990: 1)

Recognising the body as an 'abiding and inescapable presence' however, has specific implications for the two activities of discourse about and practices of theatre, because such a recognition necessarily entails an encounter with existing conceptual structurings of the mind and its (notionally) transcendent activities (including the construction of logical discourse), and the concordant constructions of body and its material (including performance) activities.

Because this study is conducted in the modality of language 'about' theatre practice, it is necessary to consider, first of all, the means by which this 'always there' body of experience can relate to /a/my/all bodies of language, as well as specific appearance of particular bodies in the languages of theatre. In the linguistic mode, when we consider words such as 'body' and 'practice' or 'speaking'; words that seek to contain and represent the actions of the body, there are a number of complex processes at play in the structuring of meaning. In the semiotic mode, to the word 'body' functions as other words do inasmuch as the relationship between an idea of 'the' body (or its traces) is signified through a particular sound signifier whose relationship to the sign is itself arbitrary. Further, the word is subject to the same complexities of readership as any word authored (in the Barthean sense). However, to consider that sign in the context of re-minding discourse about the embodiment of activities, 'body' as a word, and as an idea, and as an experience is subject to and constitutes a special order of linguistic provocation. In the first place it is the very existence of bodies that makes possible the language systems that contain the word 'body'. This operates at the moment (and capacity) for the production of signifiers, which is predicated upon the specific bodily regions (lips, tongue, lungs, brain) involved in speech production and which are themselves dependant upon the bodily system which gives them their potential for operation. The embodied capacity for speech/ signifier thereby predicates the production of languages of and *about* bodies:

Language is necessary for speech to be intelligible and to produce all of its effects; but the latter is necessary in order for language to be established; historically, the fact of speech always comes first. (Saussure q. Derrida (ed Kamuf) 1991: 65)

Further, the structures through which speech becomes 'intelligible' and 'produces its effects' is similarly predicated on an embodied relation to the world of signification. Drawing on linguistics, cognitive science and analytical philosophy, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson demonstrate the non-arbitrary relationship between bodily schemas and the conceptualisation of even abstract ideas, arguing that the experience of the body and its internal/ spatial arrangements provide a conceptual framework onto which language and its effects are mapped: "Conceptual structure arises from our sensorimotor experience and the neural structures that give rise to it. The very notion of 'structure' in our conceptual system is characterized by such things as image schemas and motor schemas." (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 77) Thus the mind that attempts to conceptualise body is itself embodied; and the attempt happens within a conceptual and metaphorical framework already structured by that which it attempts to represent:

... the embodi[ment] of mind ...[plays a] central role [in] our embodied understandings in all aspects of meaning and *in the structure and content of our thought*. Meaning has to do with the ways in which we function meaningfully in the world and make sense of it via bodily and imaginative structures. This stands in contrast with the... view that meaning is only an abstract relation among symbols (in one view) or between symbols and states of affairs in the world (in another view), having nothing to do with how our understanding is tied to the body. (ibid: emphasis mine).

However, the nature of the body's 'abiding presence', which forms the embodied basis of language actions and effects, is extremely complex. From the point of view of the consciousness that body produces, and thereby in the possible discourses that consciousnesses produce, bodily presence can be partial, contestable and problematic. In the first place, experience itself rarely cognises the role of the body. Drew Leder's exploration of the nature of this corporeal absence in the activities and effects of corporeal existence describes the very absence of body in the phenomenal field as a key constituent of the activity:

...[B]odily presence is of a highly paradoxical nature. While in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence. That is, one's own body is rarely the thematic object of experience. When reading a book or lost in thought, my own bodily state may be the farthest thing from my awareness. I experientially dwell in a world of ideas, paying little heed to my physical sensations or posture. Nor is this forgetfulness restricted to moments of higher -level cognition. I may be engaged in a fierce sport, muscles flexed and responsive to the slightest movements of my opponent. Yet it is precisely upon this opponent, this game, that my attention dwells, not on my own embodiment. (Leder 1990:1)

In the case of language acts and effects, and perhaps most interestingly in the case of the utterance of the word 'body', body is then both absolutely present and simultaneously (and at times *wholly*) effaced from the utterance. This effect is, of course, active in the processes of discourse; the organisation of one's tongue into a speech act, for example, is not the thematic object of making speech *even in the case of speech about ones' own tongue*. Through the relationship between embodied experience and conceptual schema that Lakoff and Johnson describe, then, it is precisely this experience of corporeal absence that has the effect of producing a notion of bodily relationship to discourse as partial and contestable. The (embodied) experience of Leder's thematically 'absent body' produces a language system in which its own experiential basis is effaced.

In addition to the notional absence of embodiment in discourse, there are, of course, partial appearances of bodies in languages which are separate from the 'always been there' experiential grounding of conceptual structures in Lakoff and Johnson's model. Notably there are experiences of what Leder has described as *dysappearance*, in which a particular body (or bodily region) becomes the thematic object of unwanted experience:

Such is often the case in disease. A specific organ rather than serving the rest of the body, manifests an independent pattern... One's body falls away, apart, from itself

[...]

In experiential terms, one becomes aware of the recalcitrant body as separate from and opposed to the "I." Yet as Hegel correctly points out this arises from an opposition *within* the organism, not between it and an ontologically separate thing. The self that takes note of the body remain a moment of the organism, an embodied self.(Leder 1990:88)

Through the process traced by Lakoff and Johnson, *dysappearance* can be mapped into conceptual and linguistic systems as the effect that the body has been constructed as *in opposition* to the activities of discourse, reason and thought. This effect draws upon both the experience of absence and *dysappearance*. Firstly, one's own body is not the thematic object of making discourse - even in the case of

discourse about the/a/my body; it is not to my own bodily state that I attend when writing these words. Further, should my body require such attendance, through for example hunger, fatigue or illness 'it' would *dys*appear in my phenomenal field as opposed to the activity of discourse. In addition, then, to the partial and contestable nature of the body in discourse, bodies, most especially when they offer themselves to experience in uninvited ways, concordantly can be (and in Western analytic traditions have been) represented in discourses as problematic:

Because the body is a tacit and self-concealing structure, the rational mind can come to seem disembodied. ...[t]he phenomenon of *dys*-appearance plays a pivotal role. The tendency to thematize the body particularly at times of disruption helps establish an association between corporeality and its dysfunctional modes. The body is seen not only as Other to the self, but as a definite threat to knowledge, virtue, or continued life. Dualism thus reifies the absences and divergences that always haunt our embodied being. (Leder, 1990:108)

Following Lakoff and Johnson's model, in which experiential schema are the basis of conceptual organisation in terms of both structure and content, it is possible then to trace conceptual dualisms – which notions of the body are subject to – to the constitutive role of bodily absence and *dys*appearance. Leder specifically explores the Cartesian tradition in relation to this dualism, because of Descartes' famous naming of a split subject into *res extensa* and *res cogitas*, as well as his status as 'interlocutor of choice' of those engaged in challenging dualist models of mind/ body. However, as the constitutive role of embodiment embeds duality and its consequences for the body into the structure of discourse itself, dualism as an intellectual structure for cognising the subject is a long standing and grounding assumption in a number of disciplines, including, of course, theatre. In this field, the division –or as Dwight Conquergood might have it, the apartheid of knowledges – into *res extensa* and *res cogitas* – is traced even to Ancient Greek roots. Zarrilli suggests that the 'version' of mind-body dualism in which the body is positioned in opposition to the body 'can be traced back to Plato who asserted that the mind had an independent and superior metaphysical status... The body was part of the physical world and therefore a deterrence or hindrance to a person's epistemic and spiritual development.' (1995:10). Elsewhere, Hollis Huston has located the consequences of this intellectual tradition of duality in the *Poetics*:

Though Aristotle recognized the soul of the drama when he saw it, he was so embarrassed by its body that he refused to discuss it. ("The tragic effect is quite possible without a performance and actors; and besides, the getting up of the Spectacle is more a matter for the costumier than the poet"). (Huston 2003: 131).

Inheriting this tradition of thought, Zarrilli observes that 'psychological realism' is 'particularly susceptible to mind-body dualism' (1995:13). In the pursuit of creating character, the body is usually *absented* from the practice of making theatre:

The rhetoric and semantics used to represent 'creating a character' all too often give the impression that the character is an object logically constructed by the mind and then put into the body. There is little if any discussion of the process by which the character so constructed gets incorporated. (ibid)

Further, through a process that echoes of the *dys*-appearing body of thought and language, the unruly body makes *dys*appearances both as the subject of narrative and the experience of actors. In an example particularly interesting because of its connections to both contemporary contexts and the progenitors of this study, Robert Gordon reports:

According to Lee Strasberg, Copeau identified the primary problem of acting as a "battle with the blood of the actor"; "The actor tells his arm 'come on now, arm, go out and make the gesture,' but the arm remains wooden. The 'blood' doesn't flow; the muscles don't move; the body

fights within itself; it's a terrifying thing'. (Gordon 2006: 139)

Hollis Huston detects a consistent fear of an unruly body emerging subversively into the very subjects of drama and literature:

But the discovery, in Eco's fourteenth century, of a copy of the philosopher's vanished book on the comedy inspires monks to murder. The justification of comedy threatens to unleash what tragic poetics had suppressed – the actor, flatulent ambassador from margins of text. (2003: 131).

In the structures of theatre and performance activity, then, we can see the conceptual schemas of mind/body dualism mapped onto, and reified by, discourses that efface particular cognitions of corporeality, even as they seek to speak of them. As Zarrilli asks:

How are we to think and talk about acting if we cannot make 'truth' claims about acting and if many of our languages of acting are often rife with dualistic assumptions? (1995: 16)

## Hope

*Every artist should be a theorist, if only in self –protection. Every theorist should be an artist, if only as an incentive responsibility.[...] To bring art and theory together, performance and thought, seems the right thing to do. (Huston 2003: 128)*

In a consideration of the generating structure of *differance*, Derrida, in what he acknowledges as a shocking gesture, considers Heidegger's notion of the 'first word of being', offering the very possibility as an object of 'hope'. The hopefulness is located in the potential of language to find this 'unique name', whose construction is based on *presence* rather than *differance*. Quoting Heidegger, he writes of this order of signification: "The relationship to what is present that rules in the essence of presencing itself is a unique one, altogether incomparable to any other relation" (Derrida in Kamuf 1991: 77). The relationship, though, is a potential and not realised one, and here the arbitrariness in the systems of signification is the salient point. Whatsoever the word might be, the processes producing language entail that the bodies that say and imagine the word/ body efface themselves from the utterance. Nevertheless the notion of apprehending the very embodiment of apprehension in a single moment of speech/act/cognition is what Jacques Lecoq might describe as a productive or necessary 'temptation' (Lecoq 1997: 21). Derrida signals the potential of such a speech act, which, but for a failure of cognition, could *in-corporate* Being:

Such is the question: the alliance of speech and Being in the unique word, in the finally proper name. And such is the question inscribed in the simulated affirmation of *differance*. It bears (on) each member of this sentence: 'Being/ speaks/ always and everywhere/ throughout/ language'. (Derrida in Kamuf 1991: 77)

However, Derrida himself denies the possibility of such a word: The failure here is not of the construction of the (arbitrary) sign but in the limitations of cognition:

What we know, or what we would know if it were simply a question here of something to know, is that there has never been, never will be, a unique word, a master-name...

There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being. (Ibid: 76).

Given the entrenchment of a dualist structure of the body and the reification of this by embodiment itself, the question then becomes, in what way can the/my/a body enter discourses? It is not my intention here to offer solutions to the totality of that question, but by exploring the body's entry into theatrical discourse refute the hopelessness of Derrida's 'knowledge'. When first I began my theatrical practice, I was fully invested into the Cartesian paradigm of 'having' an 'absent' and only 'dys-appearing' body, and engaged in a set of practices which discoursed those practices as if this conceptual duality was material reality. My experience of this concept/embodiment is not uncommon. Zarrilli writes of his students:

Given the resilience of mind-body dualism, students often experience a 'real' *disjuncture* between their minds and their bodies. They have great difficulty 'freeing' themselves to work out from their bodies. They have a 'mental block' which they must overcome before they are free to allow themselves to explore how to get acting *into* their bodies. (1995:13)

And yet those self-same practices taking place within a reifying belief and language structure were subject to the kind of seismic change that prompts brief glimpses of hope, even if it 'has never been and never will be named'.

## Physical Theatre

*The case for there being 'simply theatre' has all the attraction that a comfortable and safe position provides... Here, the 'physical' in physical theatre is redundant excess since all theatrical performance is an embodied activity. We witness live bodies on stage, and as spectators we invest every performer's action, gesture and spoken word... with significance and meaning. That, as the semiotics of performance has taught us, is the nature of the transaction between actor and audience... This position tells us everything and nothing, for it is unable to offer any further analysis or explanation of what has been shown and received.*  
(Murray and Keefe 2007a: 4)

In acknowledging the 'always been there' quality of the body in performance, Murray and Keefe nevertheless articulate a separate or particular *kind* of practice which is 'physical'; which is not accounted for 'simply' (or perhaps 'hopefully?') through this acknowledgement; and which must be accounted for within systems of language and languages of theatre that are potentially treacherous to the subject. Given dominant ideologies of distrust, on what basis do theatre practitioners summon forth the body in their practice? How and why might this calling take place? What are the implications and consequences of naming the body as a primary metaphorical category for making theatre?

The term 'physical theatre' is commonly understood to have been coined in the UK by Lloyd Newson of DV8 Physical Theatre Company. It is interesting to note that Newson is himself "now hesitant to use [the term] because of its current overuse in describing almost anything that isn't traditional dance or theatre" (Newson 1997). Newson's hesitancy reflects some of the difficulties arising from the attempt to categorise and the demand that the naming will somehow confer a fixed (enough) meaning to speak of the qualities of that which it attempts to name. Murray and Keefe similarly offer a discussion of 'the physical in theatre' (Murray and Keefe 2007a: 3-5) with the apparent *hope* that some particular quality of the practices it is ascribed to will be found essential to all. Given the extent of the discussion elsewhere – Murray and Keefe devote significant chapters of their books to it (2007a/b) – it is not my purpose here to provide definitional statements making claims about what physical theatre 'is'. Rather, I would point to the coinage of the term and even Newson's current resistance to it as useful signals about how usefully we might understand what is being called forth when we stake claims for *physical theatre* as a category of practice.

DV8 itself was formulated by performers from predominantly dance backgrounds, who under Newson's direction, sought to move away from their contemporary dance heritage of heightened

abstraction and transcend the limitations of what was commonly understood to be 'dance':

Obviously I've been influenced by other dance forms but I'm not a purist — or stylist. We find movement to express the meaning or idea we're presenting moment by moment, and if movement can't do it and words or song can, then we'll use those. Most dance companies, I feel, have restricted what they can speak about because they have accepted a limited definition of what movement constitutes 'dance'. (Newson 1997)

In this sense, then, Newson and his collaborators were not seeking to name what they did rather than state what they did *not* do. The coinage of the term *physical theatre* is, therefore, an example *par excellence* of a term coined through the process of *differance* that Derrida has described; the term attempts not to name what it is, but what it is not. *Physical Theatre* in the first instance is that which places itself in *differance* from the traditions of dance. For his part, Newson expresses what have become competing desires to describe his work as *physical theatre* and maintain a position in ideological difference not only to 'traditional' work but also to the work of his contemporaries: "DV8's values and politics will never be mainstream and I don't want them to be... I'm pleased our work has an edge to it: thought-provoking work will upset and create factions." (Newson 1997) His positioning of DV8 as anti-mainstream *in principle* necessarily negates the possibility of a fixed set of practices underpinning even his own work because of the shifting of mainstream values in tandem with contemporary cultural products.

Newson's more recent irritation with the appropriation of the term signals to the problems associated with all attempts to demand a given set of qualities associated with a specific order of things. It is perhaps particularly tempting to cultivate a kind of *hope* with relation to the term *physical theatre* because it calls forth the body and its suggestive capacities for Being — and as Terry Eagleton has suggested — seems even at times to make a nonsense of the cultural specificities of ordering meaning within conceptual interplays of *differance*: "Dead bodies are indecent: they proclaim with embarrassing candour the secret of all matter, that it has no obvious relation to meaning... The body is the most palpable sign we have of the givenness of human existence" (Eagleton 2003: 164). The attempt to make *physical theatre* meaningful in itself is hopeful attempt (in the face of Derrida's 'knowledge') to appropriate this apparent givenness of the body. It is worth pointing out that Murray and Keefe choose Eagleton's 'Morality' to conclude their chapter on the 'Genesis, Contexts, Namings' of *physical theatre*, suggesting that it is in this givenness of materiality that *physical theatre* can discover its originary.

Yet it is in the discursive space of *differance* that the body's subversive potential lies. Freed from the linguistic drive to be reduced to (a) meaning, the body and the concepts that it grounds — *physical* — resist the propositional structures that in any case betray them, and in so doing appear in discourse as sites at which the discourse itself can be called into question. It is in this spirit of resistance that I would locate the term *physical theatre*. Such a location is in clear sympathy with Newson's original use of the term but also in sympathy with the more recent use which he finds problematic — in "describing almost anything that isn't traditional dance or theatre" (Newson: 1997). It also takes into broad account Harvie's suggestion that *physical theatre* is a set of practices in dialogue with — or perhaps against — the conservative tradition of literariness in British Theatre. Perhaps most pertinently for the inception of this work and from the perspective of my experience of theatre making, in which I experienced my own 'givenness' as insisting upon the inadequacy of the accounts I was able to make of it, situating the notion of *physical theatre* as a point of resistance and subversion mirrors my own experience of bodily revolt and phenomenological revolution in the studio.

When I first experienced the shifting of my conceptual relation to body through my experiences in theatre making, my investiture in those conceptual systems meant that I experienced this shift as an upheaval not only of my concept of embodiment but my concept of *being*. It seems appropriate at once to confess to my own tendency to think systematically (hence my deep entrenchment and then shock in the failure of the understandings which I initially had brought into the studio) but also point out in my own defence that since conceptual structures work systematically, rethinking one order of conceptual



phenomena necessarily impacts the whole of the system that it occurs within. *Physical theatre* itself calls upon a systematic set of relationships in Anglo-Saxon discourses about binary and oppositional relationships between body/ word, emotional/ rational (Harvie 2005: 113-114) and which themselves are sited within Western analytic traditions of *res extensa/ res cogitas* that Leder among others has described. My experience seemed to suggest to me a necessity to take a position of resistance to these traditions. My understanding and use of *physical theatre*, then, is that it is constructed in resistance of the impulse to disembody the process of 'knowledge'; to set the process of knowledge in opposition to embodiment; and through so doing fix an absolute position for *body* within a conceptual system, and in so doing attempting to contain (within Derrida's unique name) the potential for subversion that the space between concepts – difference – allows.

## Alternative Discourses

The trope or lineage of practice that I explore below is necessarily limited; for both the functional and subject purposes of this study, it was necessary to impose limitations related to the scope of the project. As the project was primarily concerned with finding a means of bringing the/a/my body into discourse, I looked for accounts surrounding practices in which the body seemed to be foregrounded in the approach to theatre making, reasoning that within these accounts there would be a model through which I could render a conceptual body which transcended the position of body within the existing dualistic linguistic structures of Anglo-Saxon inheritance.

Within these boundaries, the practitioners whose work I chose to explore: Jacques Lecoq, Jacques Copeau and Ariane Mnouchkine were compelling both individually and as a collective. Though I consider them in chronological order below, it seems appropriate in the context of introducing their work as a theatrical lineage to begin with the work of Jacques Lecoq, which is central to this group of practitioners. Chronologically speaking, Lecoq's work began towards the end of Jacques Copeau's life and certainly followed what in the terms of this study were Copeau's most important theatrical experiments. Similarly, Ariane Mnouchkine's most significant work followed her own encounter with Lecoq. His body of work is therefore the chronological centre of this lineage, and through his connections to the others, he provides the means by which the three can be seen as a continuous, if not exactly direct, 'root/route' to contemporary practices. Additionally, though, Lecoq's influence on contemporary practitioners is almost unparalleled; graduates of his school include Stephen Berkoff, Phillipe Gaullier, and the founder members of Theatre du Complicite, "the most accomplished and obvious exemplar of contemporary physical theatres" (Murray and Keefe 2007a: 96). Indeed, Complicite's naming self-consciously recalls Lecoq's Parisian School, in which a notion of 'complicity' is a central tenet of the work. Lecoq is at the centre, then, of a nexus of practices that self-consciously realise the body that 'has always been on the stage'.

Among those who have graduated from Lecoq's school is Ariane Mnouchkine, whose work brings the traditions of Lecoq and Copeau into contemporary practice. There are compelling academic reasons to consider Mnouchkine within the terms of this study: she has an extraordinary body of practice upon which she has commented extensively. Her work is notoriously 'physical' and her collaboration with Helene Cixous implicates her approach in Cixous' theorising of *l'écriture corporeale*, suggesting a praxiological approach sympathetic to an exploration of the body in discourse and writing. Mnouchkine explicitly rejects the "psychological" approach to acting, my own struggles with which inspired this study. In addition to her direct work with Lecoq, she has articulated an interest in the work of Copeau and there are several ways, outlined below, in which her practice has inherited both progenitors. Aside from these most worthy of reasons though, Mnouchkine as an individual warrants attention because she cuts an extraordinary figure in contemporary theatre practice. She has been described by David Williams as "forthright, articulate, passionate, demanding and dissident" (Williams 1999: xiii) and Judith Miller as "the most powerful woman in French theater and one of the world's greatest living directors" (2007:55). She has been at the centre of controversy both within and without the theatre, and she has maintained her outspoken position whilst simultaneously occupying a central position in French cultural and political thought (Ibid). For a student for

whom culturally constructed narratives have become problematic, Mnouchkine's unflinching engagement with contemporary social contexts and the constructing processes of history makes her work enormously exciting, suggesting, as it does, the productive possibilities of 'hope'.

Jacques Copeau's work constitutes inspiration of a different order. Cited by Mnouchkine, and hugely influential in creating the artistic climate and inheritance that Lecoq worked within, *Le Patron* is a 'father figure' of French theatre whose influence extends, via touring work, residencies, lectures and students to both British and American theatrical institutions. (Evans 2006: 37). However, it is not so much his success as his struggle that make his work attractive in the terms of this study. When first he began his work, Copeau positioned himself in the pursuit of literature; his continuous valorisation of the 'work of the dramatist' signals an intellectual and artistic investment in 'the word' and its associations. Given that he now can be seen in the context of a 'physical' theatre trope of practices in Europe, such a starting point is intriguing, suggesting, as it does the possibilities for subverting though not necessarily transcending the conservative agenda of literary dominance.

When considering the trajectory of this study and its dominant concerns, a rough topology of the entailments of my initial desire notions of the body into accounts of practice can be mapped sequentially onto these three case studies; the roughness of the mapping is related to the inevitable overspill of these interrelated questions onto interrelated practices. With Copeau, I explore the practices and principles that demand a (re)cognition of the body as a primary category for the approach to theatre. In Lecoq's work, I consider the entailments of such a conception of bodies and theatre making for the activities of theatre, and consider how this speaks to the structures of hierarchical dualism that it seemingly challenges. In Mnouchkine's work, I trace out the methodological consequences in terms both of the structure and content of the work that such an approach produces.

In texts that consistent refer to source material written in other languages, it is customary to offer an apologetic nod to the impossibility of an absolute translation, because of the seemingly <sup>[6]</sup> arbitrary places at which one sign system becomes shifted from another. Such apologies are sometimes accompanied by an invitation to re-imagine such incompatibilities as site of potential and in so doing signal obtusely towards that most theatrical of knowledges; that meaning is made in the moment of sign-making through a complex interplay of difference and the lived present.

In the conception of this project, I had initially planned a similar apology/ invite. Instead, an unforeseen outcome of the project has been that I was moved, instead, to take up that invitation. One of the significant positions of mismatch that occurs between the French and the English is most precisely located at the sign *body* and its associated significances. The play of *differance* that accompanies this sign in the English marks the significance of *body* as *differant* from a wider range of concepts than in the French. As this perspective evolved for me as a result of tracing the project and was not a position from which I entered into the study, I therefore take up this invitation as part of the final chapter of this work and instead now turn to the discourses that prompted this decision.

# Chapter 1

# Jacques Copeau

Jacques Copeau is of interest to a consideration of the body in theatre for a number of reasons. Although he did not articulate an understanding of his own work as 'physical' theatre, which is in any case a particularly British[7] notion, his work is directly related to a number of practitioners whose work and practice is more easily recognisable as 'physical'. Not least of these, of course, is Jacques Lecoq, whose work is considered in more detail as part of this inquiry. Both directly and via Lecoq, Copeau's influence has had an impact upon the work of Etienne Decroux, Philippe Gaulier, Complicite, Theatre du Soleil, Stephen Berkoff, and through their followers countless young British companies whose work is increasingly identified as 'physical'.

Interestingly, A.C. Scott, who established the Asian Experimental Theatre Programme at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where Phillip Zarrilli forged his early practice, also cited Copeau's work as an 'inspiration' for the programme's 'rejection of [the] American actors' exclusive attention to a psychologically/ behaviourally-based paradigm of acting'. (Zarrilli 1995: 181) Zarrilli's practice continues to function as a cornerstone that 'attempt[s] to actualise an alternative' (Zarrilli 1995: 182) which places an attention to the body at the centre of its approach to practice:

Expanding on Copeau's vision, four general purposes guide training in the [...] Program. These aim to provide students with: (1) a repeatable set of psychophysiological techniques (breath control exercises, tai chi ch'uan, kalarippayattu, and selected yoga exercises) through which to cultivate the bodymind toward a state of readiness and through which to discover an alternative psychophysiological relationship to the bodymind-in-action; (2) a special space set aside for this work [...] (3) sufficient time to begin to discover this *new awareness of their bodies* in and through "time;" and (4) an opportunity to begin to actualize a non-psychologically based alternative paradigm of *acting through the body*. [emphasis mine]. (Zarrilli 1995: 183)

Zarrilli's concern here with a 'new awareness' of the body and 'acting through the body' begins to articulate why this legacy of practice has a cultural location which is sympathetic to the terms of my study as it connects to the shifting experience of corporeality. Further, Zarrilli's careful description of the work also illustrates the problematic of language in this discussion. Students in the Anglo-Saxon context attempting to (re)consider acting must not only approach the problem of acting through an alternative means ('the body') but must simultaneously rethink their conception of their bodies, in a way which explicitly draws attention to the implicit mindlessness of the Anglo-Saxon use of the word 'body'. Zarrilli does this through a repeated assertion of a notion of 'body' that expands on that typified by 'the athlete for whom the body remains [only] an instrument or tool'. (Zarrilli 1995: 182). In this identification he is forced to abandon general languages and discuss the work in terms of 'bodymind' training and a 'psychophysical' approach; words that echo and expand existing terminology, self-consciously demanding that we consider not only the expansion of ideas of 'body' and 'physicality', but that we also acknowledge the limitations of those ideas in general thought.

Tracing an emergent 'physical' theatre and an alternative to 'psychologically/ behaviourally motivated' approach to theatre – practiced by companies in the European tradition coming from Copeau via Lecoq and practitioners in a transatlantic tradition, for whom *Acting (Re)Considered* has become a key text in the field of performance studies – leads, then, almost inevitably to Copeau. What is also significant about this trajectory of work is that in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, as is clearly identified in Zarrilli's work and articulated by Harvie (2005: 142), is that this approach remains an *alternative*. In France, its proliferation via the practices of Copeau's theatrical – and in some cases literal family – means that a notion of a paradigm of practice based upon an awareness of body is embedded in theatrical practice to an extent that in the work of Mnouchkine – a contemporary inheritor of this European tradition - it is rarely asserted as a problem. Many of the techniques that were developed by Copeau have become a new theatrical orthodoxy in France and beyond – for example mask and mime work – and indeed Mnouchkine and the Soleil have used these practices as springboards from which to develop their own practice. However within the terms of her practice no argument is explicitly conducted in which Mnouchkine or her collaborators are moved to

make an argument for their understanding of acting as a physical problem, though they are still careful to assert that it is not 'psychological.[8] Rather, the corporeality of the problem of acting is a working assumption that is extended through the whole of the practice and, as I argue below, has become not only the basis of an approach to practice but also the basis of the Soleil's understanding of the intersect of practice and culture, articulating the political, social and aesthetic themes of their work.

It is possible to argue for Copeau as a source of this now embedded understanding of theatrical practice as rooted in an awareness of body in French theatrical practice for a number of reasons. In the first place, though he can be seen as the teacher of the teachers of so many contemporary practitioners and pedagogues, he himself had no teacher and no theatrical training. Therefore, we simply cannot look at the work of a predecessor to trace the emergence of the practices that now seem to be constituted by – but also constitute – an idea that the body and an awareness of the body is fundamental to the process of performance. The practices that he developed, though pursued in reference to a galaxy of theatrical luminaries and traditions, were developed, laboratory style, by and through his own work with actors. Insofar as his *practice* is concerned then, he was himself never shown *how* to approach theatre nor did the French theatrical climate at the time encourage directors to treat their work as a corporeal problem.

Copeau's inheritance was a theatrical culture that seemed to encourage a discursive, linguistic approach; much like I felt my own to be when first I began the study of theatre (though the discussion of Copeau's contemporaries seemed more to centre upon the demonstrative, emotionality of a star-system). Nevertheless this inheritance makes his 1924 statement 'the problem of the actor is a corporeal one' breathtaking in its concordant shift in thinking. It also produces several questions of its own, including of course, a consideration of how and why such a shift occurred.

A more careful examination of Copeau's work reveals the conceptual extent of this journey and is particularly interesting because increasingly it becomes clear that a practice develops with a set of demands and imperatives that at times seems to contradict and frustrate Copeau's thinking about theatre. In some senses, then, the discord between practice and its account that currently ignites contemporary discourse can itself be seen in Copeau's account of his own practice. Indeed, his notion of the relationship between practice and its account is already removed from the 'sharp division' that Conquergood refuted in the late 1990s (q. Schechner 2002:24). It is worth noting that this quality is cited by Conquergood as a definitional aspect of 'forward thinking' performance studies departments. (Ibid).

Copeau's understanding of theatre and its practice as extending beyond the rehearsal room and stage can be seen in the first place by tracing his own path to practice/ and how he describes this. In 1927, he claimed for himself a lifelong dedication to the theatre:

I have [...] all the experiences of a man whose very life has been identified with the theatre, whose every thought had the theatre for its object. [...]The] irresistible attraction that I felt for the theatre [...] was evident in all the tastes and habits of my childhood. (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990): 5

Given this assertion, it is perhaps then surprising to learn that in 1913, the year that Copeau entered professional theatre practice[9], he was already thirty-two years old. Up until this time he had pursued what John Rudlin has termed "a promising literary career"; he had worked as a critic "for several Parisian magazines" (Rudlin 2000: 55) and then in 1909 became co-founder and first editor of the "influential" *Nouvelle Revue Francaise*. Copeau's move to the theatre in no way signalled his turning away from his literary peers and interest; indeed, when eventually he took over the old *l' Athénée St-Germain*, renaming it the *Theatre du Vieux Colombier* and establishing a company there of the same name, it was with the help and support of his colleagues at the *NRF*. David Whitton writes:

The NRF group were keenly interested in the theatre and they lent the Vieux Colombier moral, financial and even practical support. The novelist Roger Martin du Gard once acted on its stage and Georges Duhamel occasionally prompted. Most of the group, however, were devoted to the novel and saw the theatre as a secondary pursuit. (Whitton 1997: 57)

The NRF's concerns primarily with the novel deftly illustrate the logocentricity of Copeau's background interest in the theatre and also locate his work quite squarely in what Drew Leder has described as the 'disembodiment' which characterises 'an abiding strain of Western intellectual history'. (Leder 1990: 1)

The NRF group configured theatre as an adjunct of literature, in very much the same way that contemporary Performance Studies in the UK arose as *adjuncts* to literature departments. Indeed, this literary background that prefigured Copeau's career in practice was not abandoned when he began work at the *Vieux Colombier*, the theatre in which he and his fledgling company took residence.

During his work as a critic for the *NRF*, Copeau had levelled a sustained and withering attack upon what he saw as the problems of French theatrical practice, and claimed his decision to work as a director arose from a belief that he could offer an alternative model of practice to the one he had criticised so roundly. In this sense, Copeau working in France nearly a hundred years ago operated in a way that suggests he saw no 'sharp division' between theory and practice. This is somewhat different to contemporary Anglo-Saxon practice, which has only recently explicitly begun the attempt to overcome a disjuncture between those aspects of theatre. Richard Schechner, for example, argues for a 'shift' in approach 'combining scholarly research with artistic training and practice' coming from performance theorists such as Dwight Conquergood as late as the mid 1990s (Schechner 2006: 22). Conquergood himself articulated a 'deeply entrenched division of labour, apartheid of knowledges, that plays out inside the academy as the difference between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualization and creativity' in 1999, at which time, the 'agenda [to] refuse and supersede' this 'booby-trapped' duality was still considered 'radical' (q. in Schechner 2006: 24). However, Copeau's 1914 move from critic to director presented no such disjuncture to the European artistic community who viewed the move with interest. The statements that Copeau himself produced at this time, in which he expresses no particular concern as to the pragmatic differences between evoking ideal practice in discourse and achieving it in practice suggest that in his own mind, his decision reflected a change of form through which he continued the discussion and now more direct pursuit of good, if not ideal theatre practice.

Though the current academic climate of performance studies seeks to 'refuse and supersede' the division that Copeau at this time seems almost wholly unaware of, it is at this point in Copeau's career and this study at which the nature of the relationship between performance and its account become pertinent to both Copeau's experience and this discourse. Does Copeau's unproblematised assertion that his work, though now taking place in theatre spaces rather than the discursive space of the *NRF*, represent a realisation of Dwayne Conquergood's vision of a unified practice and its account? In the face of both Copeau's apparent dismissal of any divide and Conquergood's statement, it seems almost necessary to defend the assertion that there *is* a difference; nevertheless, then, on a pragmatic level at least, *writing about practice* constitutes a different phenomenal activity than *performing practice*. If we are to assume that there is no difference between the two, then we are to claim that practice itself lies neither in the phenomenal world nor purely in the conceptual world. What remains has the hallmarks of the problematic Aristotelean *essence*: an immaterial *quality* that is expressed (often inadequately or incompletely) in both the corporeal realm and in thought/ discourse.

Indeed, such a notion is unlikely to have left Copeau squirming in post-modern discomfort. In early 1900's Europe, art as 'imitation' in the classic sense was under siege from photography and film, reproducers *par excellence*; artists in all disciplines were now galvanised by the need to reconfigure their practice as a pursuit redirected rather than supplanted by the advent of these infinitely more accurate imitations produced by technology. Thus the search for an 'essential' quality of a practice; 'painterlyness' in painting, sculptyerlyness in making, and so forth, cultivated an artistic climate that valued art for arts' sake and gave impetus to the search for those core qualities of a practice that resisted the reductive imitations of

the new technologies; an 'essential' art of theatre was a matter of urgency more than intellectual idealising. Crucially, the modalities of this 'essence' were 'but two aspects of a single act. Thus there is no longer any conflict, nor even any difference in the ideas of the poet, the actor and the director' (q. Evans 2006: 49).

The critical stance that had consumed Copeau's literary career now motivated his practice as a director – unsurprising, given that he saw no fundamental difference between the two. He openly sought to identify the 'essential' art of the theatre and to remove from the theatre any artifice superfluous to this aim. The fact that Copeau's first act in *Vieux Colombier* was to remove it of all of its 'theatrical' décor and artifice is perhaps emblematic of the fact that he brought to his practice a sense of the *immateriality* of theatre; the art as he understood it was not located in the fixtures and fittings of the theatrical establishment:

Pictures of the 1913 *Vieux Colombier* show that Copeau retained only basic architectural elements of the original. The proscenium stayed but a small forestage, only slightly framed by an arch (merely another like those that supported the house roof), indicates that Copeau wanted a blend of stage space and house space... The stage was bare and lacked any permanent masking... Copeau left an empty cubical volume at the end of an equally empty rectangular auditorium. (Paterson 1984: 37)

His literary background translated, in a very real sense, to an understanding of theatrical practice as primarily located in the realm of thought and discourse. His critical stance was informed by what heretofore had been an imagined, projected sense of what *theatre should be* and not the practice that he saw. Removing the seats, the décor, the staging was in this sense then, the first stage of making material the *incorporeality* of Copeau's notion of theatre, carried forward from his literary career.

His most stringent criticism of French theatre had been that a great many of its customs and norms obscured the 'essential art of the theatre' in service of a star system whose priorities were not the pursuit of the art for its own sake. In 1913, when he publicly announced his intention to work as a director in an article published in the *NRF*, he began publicly to articulate this fundamental vision of theatre practice. Self consciously entitled "*An Attempt at a Dramatic Renovation*"<sup>[10]</sup>, the article served as a statement of intent for his work at the *Vieux Colombier* and signalled his belief that attention to the text was the essence of the theatrical task. In this conception, even the other 'arts' of the theatre were mere distractions. For example of the scenic arts, he wrote:

To hold to a particular theory of scenic design means that one approaches the theatre from a peripheral point of view (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 82)

In drawing this distinction, Copeau's thinking becomes distinguished from those contemporary ideas of a performance practice that straddles both practice/ and its account and which Conquergood has referred to as 'radical'. In the first place in contemporary thought, performance studies and theories of meaning-making recognise a multitude of impetuses – conceivably including 'a particular theory of scenic design' into a 'performance text'. In the second place, the work of the actor in Copeau's vision is 'in service to' an essential but conceptual – i.e. immaterial – imperative that is the 'dramatic art', while contemporary visions assert the phenomenal dominance of the actor:

Bodied spatiality is at the heart of dramatic presentation, for it is through the actor's corporeal presence under the spectator's gaze that the dramatic text actualizes itself In the field of performance. (Garner 1994: 1)

For Copeau, the actor was in service to the dramatic text, and the conventions (Evans 2006: 43) of performance that were widespread within French theatre were to be removed as they again detracted from the essential dramatic work. Copeau rejected the star system, in which the audience were drawn to the

theatre to watch their favourite famous actor rather than by the performance that they were currently in. For him, the role of the actor was at service to the theatre; the theatre was not a vehicle for celebrity. He vowed for his actors:

We shall always have in view [...] their subordination to the ensemble. We shall fight against the encroachment of professional tricks, against all professional distortions, against the ossification of specialisation. (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 24)

His work was orientated by his desire to strip away and remove such 'distortions', both practically and figuratively. The theatres that Copeau was responsible for – the *Vieux Colombier* in Paris, and during the war the Garrick in New York- were stripped of their elaborate fixtures and fittings, and their extensive naturalistic sets and painted scenery boards were thrown away. Their proscenium arches were torn out and they were refitted as models of simplicity. Copeau wrote of this process:

I want the stage to be naked and neutral in order [...] that the dramatic work may have a chance in a neutral atmosphere (Ibid: 82)

Copeau's location of the 'dramatic work' again distinguishes him somewhat from phenomenologically informed contemporary accounts and again can be situated in the context of his background literary interest. Where in contemporary thought the dramatic work, or the 'meaning making' is the movement/moment semiotic ideograms that Zarrilli describes, for Copeau the dramatic meaning was located specifically in the work of writers, whom he describes as 'dramatists'. It would be difficult to understate the high regard in which Copeau held for such writers. His writings are littered with references to, for example, Shakespeare, Molière, and Racine about whom he spoke with unwavering reverence. He used their work and their models of practice constantly to interrogate his own work and the work of those around him. A brief glance at a chronology of his productions reveals a repertoire in which he returns again and again to the classics<sup>[11]</sup>, despite his mission to renew the French theatre, a point that had been picked up by the critics, to whom he remarked:

Astounding that a new theatre company should dedicate itself to the classic repertoire? It shows evidence of youth and innovation to give life to [...] the old, tired repertoire, defaced by a so-called tradition. (Ibid: 142)

The classics and their authors for Copeau "[were] not a dead, but a living example." (Ibid: 141). He had a deep sense of the continuation of a European tradition, arguing that his work was not a revolution, but a return:

It is often repeated that I intend to break with tradition. The exact opposite is true. I am seeking to bring works closer to the 'true tradition' by freeing them [...] The important tradition is the original one. (Ibid: 145)

However, in order to continue properly the tradition of the great European dramatists, one needed a great European dramatist. Copeau in no way saw himself in this role; his work was only the groundwork. Rudlin writes:

The purification, both physical and ideological, of the stage and the education of the actor [...] were simply necessary preparations for the coming of the Poet, the new Aeschylus, the new Shakespeare, the new Molière. (Rudlin and Paul: 2000: 102)

Copeau held a highly idealised image of these great dramatists making it difficult to see how anyone could have lived up to these models. They appear in his writings as flawless figures of perfection, their genius unquestionable. In an essay considering the virtues of the theatrical writer, Copeau writes:

Molière is our perfect model because he essentially and infallible metteur en scene, that is, a man whose imagination takes fire from these possibilities to the best account, who sees straight of the whole perspective afforded him by the stage, is never at a loss over a movement ore a phrase, and knows how to do all that it is possible to do within a given genre. (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 143)

Copeau's reverential description of Molière in these terms sets an almost impossible pedestal for the 'new poet' of the stage to ascend. He expected the same qualities of genius in the writer who was to emerge following his purge of the stage. This figure had existed in his imagination since his days as a critic – a writer whose work would capture the modern condition as completely as Shakespeare and Molière had articulated their own:

Modern man has not yet had his tragic expression.

The profound movements of contemporary thought; the nascent, the still uncertain and all the more troubling modifications of sensitivity that they give rise to, have not influenced dramaturgy at all... the efforts of today's artists have not influenced theatre. (Ibid: 104)

Molière and Shakespeare, it must be noted, worked in a system of theatre very different from the conventions open to Copeau. Working directly with the actors in their troupes, distinctions between professional and personal lives must have been blurred, as groups worked, travelled and lived together. No 'director' would have been responsible for interpreting the work of the playwright; the playwrights themselves would most likely have been present and involved in those aspects of production that were increasingly, in Copeau's time, being seen as the responsibility of the director. It is fascinating to note that, though he is now famed a director, such a figure would be unnecessary in his own version of theatrical utopia, wherein the Poet would be as involved in the production of their work as Shakespeare and Molière had been in theirs:

It is true that creating a dramatic work in words and actually mounting it on the stage with live actors are but two phases of one and the same intellectual operation. And it is also true that all great dramatists, from Aeschylus to Shakespeare, from Aristophanes to Molière, and from Racine to Ibsen, have been directors. [...]

Let us hope for a dramatist who replaces or eliminates the director, and personally takes over the directing; rather than for professional directors who pretend to be dramatists. (Copeau 1963: 215)

Copeau's firm belief was that the faults of the French theatre system were the reason that this dramatist, the Poet of his imagination, had failed to emerge. Most notable though, was his belief that this almost ethereal figure would be crafted specifically by working in the theatre: this genius was not born a fully-fledged genius capable of rivalling Molière. Instead, the Poet would become a great dramatist *through* working with the right medium, which was in Copeau's mind a performance environment open to the text and purged of the egos of actors and scenic artists. In much the same way, however, working in the wrong environment, the environment that the corrupt French theatre system currently provided, could destroy the potential of writers, much as the 'professional tricks' of the performers had distorted and corrupted their performance:

In his quest to 'return to sincerity', Copeau dismissed much of his country's theatrical heritage as *cabotinage*, the total mechanisation of the person' as he called it... Copeau saw it as evidence of a moribund theatrical culture. Much of his writing is underpinned by this assumed polarity of the sincere versus the artificial and it becomes a touchstone for the construction of his own tradition: he vereates Aeschylus (and Greek drama in general), Noh theatre, Molière, *commedia dell'arte*, and his contemporaries Stanislavsky and Antoine; he abhors the National Conservatoire, the Comedie-Francaise, Dumas *films* and the bourgeois comedy of the nineteenth century. Above all, he places



huge emphasis on the revivifying potential of youth... (Pitches 2007: 49)

Copeau's theatrical practice and literary career, then, shared the same ultimate goal; the purgation from French theatre all that blocked, prevented and corrupted the development of the next great dramatist of the European tradition, whose comedy would rival Molière, whose heroes would rival Shakespeare and most importantly, whose work would articulate the concerns of the age in a manner that would appeal to the public:

[...] Drama is essentially a fact of the present, a contemporary phenomenon [...] The greatest geniuses of the theatre, those whose immortal works still touch us in performance or reading [...] worked for the people of their day. [...] Their genius, however exceptional, appealed to the taste of the public... (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul: 1990: 188)

In a theatrical climate that viewed the performance text as little more than a vehicle for the egos of actors and scenic artists, and whose audiences were drawn on the basis of who was performing rather than upon what was performed, the notion that the dramatic text should be the focus of theatrical activity was a revolutionary one, requiring an approach to practice of equal innovation.

### **Pedagogical Concerns**

When Copeau wrote his 1913 manifesto, "*An Attempt at a Dramatic Renovation*" he announced his long-term intention to found a Theatre School, from which future incarnations of the *Vieux Colombier* Company would be formed. The notion of a school of performance had no real precedent in France, although a theatrical education of sorts was available at the '*Conservatoire National de Musique et de Declamation*'.<sup>[12]</sup> However, the founding of the Moscow Art Theatre became the inspiration for practitioners Europe-wide to consider the possibility of an environment devoted solely to the education of theatre artists, where they might learn their craft in a non-public setting.

The foundation of such a theatre school was fundamental to Copeau's move into practice. His critique of French theatre had led him to believe that the only antidote to the problems endemic to the system was to offer an alternative education to future theatre artists, to free them of the accumulation of the clichéd tricks of the trade and fashionable affectations that he had labelled '*cabotinage*'. He rapidly became absorbed in this attempt – while the removal of the fixtures and fittings of a theatre might involve an afternoon's hard labour, the removal of individual actors' idiosyncratic attitudes and expectations was an altogether lengthier and more complex process. The School was intended to explore how to overcome what Copeau came to consider this central obstacle to the achievement of the 'dramatic renovation':

No matter how we approach the problem of theatre, we come back to the problem of the actor as the instrument and perfect realiser of a dramatic idea. (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 82)

Despite this fundamental concern, however, in its first season, the *Vieux Colombier* functioned without a school. For Copeau this was a painful compromise necessitated largely by an inability to find sufficient finances for such a project. He had been determined that the *Vieux Colombier* Company would be self-funding in order that he retain control over its direction and agenda, and wanted to maintain a similar freedom within the school. While the Company could generate funds through performance, though, a school could not maintain its financial independence so easily, especially as Copeau was hugely uncomfortable with the idea of charging the students fees.<sup>[13]</sup> Therefore, he made the decision to found the Company before he was able fully to commit to the foundation of a school, hoping that success with the troupe would facilitate the establishment of the school:

[...] If, in October 1913, I had proposed the founding of a School, no-one would have listened to me. There was already enough scepticism surrounding our theatrical attempt.[...] it was imperative to exist first of all. We had to familiarise the public with our utopian ideas. We had to give proof of what a company of actors, mostly novices, could give in a year's work in common, under direction (Ibid: 28)

Though he had compromised with circumstance, Copeau always maintained that his goal and primary concern was the creation of a School: an exploratory space in which students could work without the constant pressure of performance. He concerned himself, first of all, with engaging not seasoned professionals but young, unknown actors, who were not yet lost to the deadly *cabotinage* of the Parisian theatre world. Most importantly, he looked for actors whom he believed to be open to an educative process and more interested in learning the art of theatre than furthering their own careers.

Moreover, during the Vieux Colombier's first season, rehearsals were conducted not in their newly renovated theatre, but in the garden at Copeau's family home in Limon, outside of Paris. (Ibid 24) His intention was to remove his actors from the corrupting pressures and demands of cosmopolitan culture and to create an enclosed and protective atmosphere around them. This atmosphere was to mimic the conditions of a school:

Copeau realised that sustainable change was impossible without actors who not only desired the creation of a new theatre, but who also possessed the skills and techniques to make it happen. His pedagogy developed over several phases, drawing together and synthesising various practices and influences. It is possible to trace his journey over sixteen years of almost continuous experiment and exploration: from the first exercises in physical training, rehearsal process and improvisation with his actors at Limon in 1913; through his work with Suzanne Bing and the Vieux-Colombier School...; to the final experiment with Les Copiaus.... Throughout all of these periods of change and development, at the heart of Copeau's training regime was a profound creative journey for the student (Evans 2006: 57)

These first attempts that Copeau speaks of were not always successful. By his own admission, their efforts were unfocused and without direction: "There was a lack of experience, clear ideas and methods on my part," (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 29) he explained. However, Copeau wanted to foster for his students a spirit of research and experimentation, and he approached his own work with equal pragmatism. Therefore undeterred, these early actor-training exercises were negotiated, explored and reflected upon in close collaboration with the company, whose individual expertise and experience Copeau was keen to utilise and expand upon. He was himself a sought after public speaker and therefore led the Company in sessions focused on vocal technique and reading. However, in areas where he lacked expertise – for example, in full body physical work – he encouraged others with experience in gymnastics and dance to lead group work. (Rudlin 2000: 56, 67)

Integral to this conception of a dramatic education was the idea that it should be conducted *separately* from the demands of performance. In every incarnation of Copeau's schools, he attempted to remove his actors figuratively and practically from the world that would corrupt them: the afternoons in Limon were echoed in the wholesale removal of his company between seasons from New York, where he worked towards the end of the war. When the Vieux Colombier returned to Paris in 1920, it was primarily as a school; he was only reluctantly persuaded to resume the production of plays for performance. And when, in 1924, he felt that the demands of the commercial theatre were about to intrude on the educative space that he had created within the school, the choice he made was to close the theatre, and remove his students and actors from the capital to Burgundy, where they could continue their explorations unfettered by the demands of the outside world.

Copeau's singular focus on the creation of a pedagogical institution survived even when

there were no actors to educate because of the outbreak of the First World War. He had been declared unfit for duty, though he was anything but inactive during the time that the French theatre was affected. The actors were dispersed but he kept correspondence with them, discussing plans for the work that would resume after the war. In the meantime, in Paris, with the support of Suzanne Bing, he pursued his vision of a theatrical education, by running what seemed to function almost as a playgroup, for children ranging in age from nine to fourteen. He and Bing observed and recorded their creative play, and used it to develop ideas for performance exercises. He organised a lecture tour, in which he referred to his initial manifesto, discussing the successes so far and possible developments for the future and reaffirming his commitment to training. Also during this time, he made several valuable connections with practitioners whose work he admired, such as Stanislavsky, Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig. These practitioners, despite the diversity of their own particular specialisations – music, scenography and directing, shared Copeau's belief that without training, there could be no progress in theatre. Craig, for example, argued that he could not produce the theatre of his imagination without training students from new over an extended period of time, reportedly telling a potential employer: "Lacking this, I feel I can only improvise things as mediocre as those you can produce yourself at the present time." (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 27)

### **Approach to Training**

Copeau used the experience he gained and the contacts he had made to interrogate his own ideas about practice. He carefully recorded conversations with his contemporaries about the nature of theatre and of art, looking for shared principles in the diverse conceptions of practice. More than influence his thinking, though, these contacts and conversations directly altered his practice; for example, he employed students of Emile Jacques-Dalcroze to teach Dalcroze's eurhythmics in the Vieux Colombier after the war.

Copeau's use, and later rejection, of Dalcroze's eurhythmics provide an excellent example of his revolutionary attitude towards actor training. First of all, the eurhythmics were used by Copeau and his actors *purely as a training tool*. While the same could very much be said for the use of techniques such as gymnastics and the speech work that Copeau conducted in the afternoon sessions at Limon, it might also be argued that some of those skills could be used directly in performance. A particular scene, for example, might have functions as a vocal exercise *as well as* being specific to a performance in the repertoire, or, in the same way, a specific play might require the ability to jump and tumble as developed in gymnastics. However, the eurhythmics, though they had a performative outcome, were never performed for the public by any of Copeau's students or troupes.

The supplementation of production orientated work with the exploration of techniques *not* intended for performance is a significant development. If we take 'rehearsal' to mean time dedicated to understanding the needs and solving the problems of a particular text<sup>[14]</sup> for performance, then this *non-specific* work that the Vieux Colombier did took place outside of the established rehearsal-performance cycle. This work took place in what might be called a 'pre-performance' mode; centred around and concerned with performance, unlike rehearsal, its activities are not related to a particular production. Copeau and his collaborators<sup>[15]</sup> ultimately rejected eurhythmics, precisely because they were felt to be *too specific* to the development of their performance outcome:

To start the actor with the study of Music is to immerse him in the universality of his art.  
To start him with [eu]rhythmics is to put him in touch with something particular. [...]  
Rhythmics is another language, a speciality, and consequently a deformation. (Ibid: 66)

This resistance to specialisation is key to Copeau's thinking. Indoctrination into a particular style of performance was at the heart of his objections to the French theatre system. In

the same way that 'a particular theory of scenic design' was a 'peripheral' concern, if actors concerned themselves with achieving a particular style of performance, their attention was necessarily diverted away from the 'real dramatic work'. Instead of working toward some outward projected goal of performance or style, therefore, Copeau wanted his actors to work, he said, inwardly:

Copeau had a lifelong distrust of anything which smacked of artificiality. In seeking to refine the skills and techniques required of the actor, he wanted the actor to achieve the kind of 'strength and simplicity' which he admires in other craftsmen... This quality was built on an integrity of purpose which began with the body and the physical actions of the artisan. Copeau had eventually rejected Jaques-Dalcroze's Eurhythmics as the physical training system for his students because he felt it encouraged the actor to become too self-conscious in their movement [...]

Copeau's emphasis on the physical training of actors was thus an integral part of his mission to rejuvenate the theatre. (Evans 2006: 63)

The pre-performance work for the actors therefore constituted work that was understood metaphorically as directed towards simplicity. It is within this mode that an evolving sense of the role of physical training emerges. Copeau recognised, first of all, that the habits and corruptions of the dreaded *cabotinage* were *physically manifest*, acting as blockages to this work:

[...] it [cabotinage] is a disease which is not only endemic to the theatre. It's the malady of insincerity, or rather of falseness. He [sic] who suffers from it ceases to be authentic, to be human. He is discredited, unnatural. Outer reality no longer reaches him. He is no longer aware of his own feelings. [...] I am speaking of all [sic] actors, of the most unimportant of them and of his slightest gesture, of the total mechanisation of the person (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 253)

The approach to these problems, then, necessarily involved physical work. Copeau rapidly realised that his theoretical aspirations would remain theoretical if his actors were not free from these physical blocks. His years as a critic, in which his earnest critique of the Parisian stage had effected no change, if nothing else had demonstrated to him the futility of mere abstraction:

The predominant idea of my work is never to submit to any preconception. In what I was doing, there was always a close blending of experience and intellectualising. (Ibid 253)

Just as Copeau himself had blended his aspirational theorising about theatre with his lived experience of its practice, his challenge was to enable his performers to physically realise their understanding of performance:

[...] after years of working with actors, I arrived at the conviction that the problem of the actor is basically a corporeal one: the actor is standing on the stage. [emphasis added.] (Ibid 253)

Copeau had addressed himself to the stage, by clearing it of its decorative distractions, and he addressed himself directly to the actor, through the theoretical education he offered. Through demanding physical work, he attempted to address himself to 'the standing'; the physical presence of the performer. The paradox of this work, of course, is that the body is both the solution and apparently its problem; the performance can only be done by the standing body and yet it is apparently the body that refuses the performance:

[...] the body, for the actor, starts out by being an obstacle. Afterwards, it becomes a terrible hurdle to link physical action with the text. In order to do it naturally, a prolonged effort is necessary. (Ibid 253)

The gymnastics and other physical disciplines then were designed to facilitate an easy relationship between the actors' intellectual sense of themselves and their bodily realisation of their intentions and knowledge. Ultimately the actor standing on the stage would be free from the encumbrances of the *cabotinage* – physical manifestations of ego, self-consciousness and the insecurity that arose when the performers felt their outward physicality was at odds with their internal perspective. An observer explains:

All that [physical exercise] was done to give the young actors a sense of reliance in gesture, agility and the mastery of nerves and muscles (Ibid 253)

Without this physically manifest emotional baggage, the actor is left standing on the stage with only the text. Copeau speaks of this unencumbered state as a state of 'neutrality':

To start from silence and calm. That is the first point. An actor must know how to be silent, to listen, respond, keep still, begin a gesture, develop it, return to stillness and silence [...] (Rudlin 2000: 75)

The techniques that Copeau developed in his pedagogical explorations were orientated by the search for this state of neutrality, just as the startling new architectural aesthetic he had created was also in service to this notion of a 'neutral atmosphere'. The techniques that he developed have become a veritable source book to twentieth century practitioners, some of whom have made these innovations the focus for their own research; Lecoq and Decroux, for example pursued the use of mask work, a now widely recognised tool in actor training. A core principle of Copeau's work was the development of spontaneity through creative play and games, which again has been widely developed by subsequent practitioners such as Augusto Boal and Viola Spolin. Physical work such as gymnastics and dance appear regularly on actor training programmes in schools and colleges, and the exploration of breath control as a point of departure for performance research has also survived into modern practice. Perhaps more important than these individual techniques, however, was Copeau's visionary desire to create a literal and figurative space to explore them:

Copeau was determined to get the training right; for him, as for Meyerhold, physical training and the development of the actor's powers of expression were central to the education of the new actor. Furthermore, he realised that such physical authority was useless unless the actor was equipped with the understanding and sensitivity to make good use of it. To this end, other studies (for example art, philosophy and literature) were included in order to cultivate the student's whole personality, and, of the younger students, voice work and diction were equally informed by play, improvisation, movement and rhythm....

... The blending of traditional skills with those of the acrobat, the clown, the commedia actor and the story-teller is a remarkable innovation, attractive even now... (Evans 2006: 65)

## **The Actor and the Text**

In the idealised theatre that Copeau pursued, the components of practice had undergone an extensive clearing process, which he had envisaged as a kind of excavation, a work of restoration to what he had called 'the true tradition'. The theatre itself would be a building stripped of the artifice and splendour of the nineteenth century playhouses that Copeau inherited, with their red velvet, plush carpets and gilded

plasterwork. From the stage, Copeau had removed the extensive decorative sets and fantastic machinery of special effects that had become so popular. The actors on the stage had been similarly unmasked, appearing without the monstrous fig leaves of ego and self-regard, open instead to the text. The text itself, free from the sum of these encumbrances, was realised with simplicity and honesty, its dramatic conception living and dying on the measure of that conception alone, and not the supposed cleverness, modishness or extravagance of its execution.

What is left standing, therefore, at the end of this process of dramatic restoration, thrown into stark relief by the *tréteau nu*, is the actor with a text. Copeau's understanding of the interaction of these two is furnished, first of all, by his understanding of what specifically constitutes the actor's presence on the stage. For the actor standing on the stage, the sense of self undoubtedly can exert a powerful attentional pull. The attention of the audience however, is drawn to the entirety of the actor's corporeal presence in its particular context. Therefore, though the actor's sense of self may harbour or construct a particular intention for appearance, it is the actor's voice, position, gesture and facial expression that must realise that intention. Copeau's work with the actor was an acknowledgement of this lived and sometimes problematic physical presence and an attempt to prepare the entirety of that presence for realisation of text ' - work which is done not only with the mouth, nor even with the mouth and mind, but also with the body, with the whole person, all the faculties, and with the whole being' (Copeau 1963: 218).

'Realisation' – of action, character, line – in Copeau's work was a notion invested with a technical, physical precision. This clarity was lent by the sometime inclusion in the Vieux Colombier programme of the eurhythmic work of Emile Jacques Dalcroze, in which 'realisation' had a particular and very specific meaning:

'Realise' is used in rhythmic gymnastics in the technical sense of 'express by movements of the body'. (Rudlin and Paul 1990: 259)

This conception of 'realisation' is therefore not an ethereal and imprecise imagining, but a lived and precise set of movements executed by a body trained to be flexible and sensitive to such meticulousness. This body was the actor in Copeau's work; an active and exacting physical presence, invested wholly into the text:

For the actor, the whole art is the gift of himself [sic]. In order to give himself, he must first possess himself. Our craft, with the discipline it presupposes, the reflexes it has mastered and holds at its command, is the very warp and weft of our art [...] Emotive expression grows out of correct expression. Not only does technique not exclude sensitivity: it authenticates and liberates it. (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 77)

To speak of the actor as invested *into* a text is in this case not a mere linguistic construction. The metaphor is particularly apt for Copeau's work, because it begins to communicate something of the sense of depth that Copeau brings to notions of text. His understanding of performance as a very specific realisation of given action is borne of an understanding of the dramatic text as a clear and precise map to that action. In Copeau's conception then, the text is almost a work of choreography, guiding the voice, the gesture, the position of the actor. "When a text is created for dramatic life, there is a necessary *mise en scene* within the work itself," he told his (acting) students. "Only the text counts; nothing but the text!"<sup>[16]</sup>

The sense of text is in stark contrast to the conception of text as, for example, a script that amounts to the transcription of dialogue, or the point of departure for a production. This multidimensional depth that the text held for Copeau was probably enriched in a number of ways. First of all, in his ideal model of theatre practice, the writing of the work is done in collaboration with actors, who would work and improvise with the ideas the writer brought. "The poet does not nurture an inert and distant masterpiece that addresses itself only to the mind," he wrote, "but [also] to the

breath of the lines and their slightest motions, outbursts and silences.” (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 144) The work was first physically created and then written down.<sup>[17]</sup> In this model, the text does not predate the dramatic realisation, or even have an independent existence from it. Rather, it functions as an echo of and a map to its realisation. Of Molière, the ‘perfect’ dramatist, Copeau said:

Stay with Molière for an understanding of the stage, he is an actor. He does not write one word without hearing it and without making it act.

[...] he was a man of the theatre and he wrote for actors (q. Jouvett in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 144)

The notion that the text functions as a map from which one can recreate a performance is itself dependant on the idea that one can indeed record the three-dimensionality of movement onto the page. This is the principle behind Labanotation, a system developed primarily for the use of dancers by Rudolph Laban at around the same time that Copeau was working. Though Laban is never directly referred to by Copeau, it is most probable that Copeau will have been aware of his work as a student and pedagogue of movement. Suzanne Bing, Copeau’s principal collaborator in actor-training, had spent some time during the war teaching at The Children’s School in New York. Known for its use of innovative educational practices, Laban’s work featured on the curriculum, which in turn provided inspiration for Bing’s later work with Copeau. Copeau, then, will have been well-acquainted with the notion that the page can in fact record movement, bringing the living body and a sense of depth to his conception of text.

This depth was further furnished by Copeau’s great sensitivity to the details of performance. Though famed for the *tréteau nu*, Copeau was in no way averse to the use of carefully selected details of scenery, costume and props to not support but become part of the overall sense of a performance. Such details, though, were related, even dictated, specifically and only by the needs of the text.

That the staging of a play could be interwoven in such detail in the text was most probably reinforced by the operation of the ‘association de la régie théâtrale’,<sup>[18]</sup> an archiving organisation working in Paris at the same time as Copeau. The association recorded the details of a performance by interleaving the printed text with plans for action, lighting, costume- all the details, in fact, of the *mise en scene*:

You have to get out of your mind the modern system of production to understand what ‘la régie’ is. [...] The ‘stagings’ were conceived as inseparable from the works [...] The books were sold or hired to other theatres at home and abroad who wanted to mount the plays or operas [...]<sup>[19]</sup>

The archive had been established in Paris in 1830 and operated throughout the majority of Copeau’s theatre career until around 1930, and again although Copeau does not directly make reference to it, it is reasonable to assume that he was well acquainted with its work and utilised it as a resource in his ongoing search for ‘the true tradition:

Very often I thought I had invented things in the interpretation of Molière and Shakespeare. And later, something revealed that I had put my finger on a detail from the original interpretation. (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 147)

The text, then, for Copeau was an extraordinarily rich resource of astonishing depth and detail, a complete world for an actor to realise and inhabit. This conception of text does not readily lend itself to the structures of understanding that arise in the context of the British conception of a ‘uniquely literary’ theatre. At face value, Copeau’s deep reverence for the text seems to map comfortably onto the valorised text of conservative British theatre. However, that reverence has to be understood in the context of an understanding of text that was not limited by

the notion of a written word as an absolute ground meaning. Meaning and signification were not achieved by the word but the word-in-play. Copeau contended that it was *only* through realisation that the work would reveal itself, that it was the point of unity between the actor and the text, at which the 'real dramatic work' took place:

This work of interpretation becomes possible on the day that the actor, putting away his [sic] "sides," begins to speak his lines for memory and tries to harmonize what he says with what he does. [... achieving] an accent of enduring truth, if he is professional enough, if he persists in his work, and if he has sufficient power of concentration and sincerity enough to identify himself – first physically, then emotionally – with the character he portrays. (Copeau 1963: 218 emphasis added)

Again here, we are reminded that Copeau's actors were not asked to make an imaginative, interpretative projection onto a character, but were asked instead to simply *realise*, make *material*, the performance, assured that interpretation and emotional identification would flow from its execution. For Copeau, it is ultimately the unity and precision of these technical elements that create theatre. "[T]here is no longer an intermediary between creation and its proper technical and theatrical realisation," he writes, "Dramatic invention and its *mise en scene* are but two aspects of a single act." (Ibid). The moment of their combination is the instant of realisation, at which of course, an audience would begin to construct its understanding of the performance. It is, in Copeau's work, the moment attended to, in which the accumulated preparations, the 'crafts' of the theatre finally combine to create art:

[...] Thus there is no longer any conflict, nor even any difference in the ideas of the poet, the actor and the director. What's more, there is an identity of means and expression [...]

The theatre is a world, a perfect world, as a geometric shape is perfect, as are all creations of an accomplished art. It communicates with the real world, borrowing its forms, colours and its accents, but gives it back an image composed only from its own resources. [...]

The configuration of a masterpiece on the stage is at the mercy of the most trivial accident. The purity of the performance rests on an exquisite discipline of all the material elements. The more elevated the [...] art, the more [the] craft must be infallible. It is the invisible and profound perfection of the craft which allows art to rise without yielding. (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 116-118)



## Chapter Two Lecoq

## Jacques

### From Copeau to Lecoq: Approaches to Theatre

Early on in his career as a theatre practitioner, Jacques Lecoq came to regard the work of Jacques Copeau as a 'reference point' (Lecoq 1997: 5) for his own practice. Certainly, Copeau's shadow was an almost ubiquitous influence upon those individual practitioners that first introduced the young Lecoq to the idea of making theatre. One of Copeau's own students, Charles Dullin had himself taught the performer Jean Louis Barrault, whose performance had greatly impressed Lecoq in his formative experiences as a member of a theatrical audience. Dullin had also taught Claude Martin, with whom Lecoq subsequently collaborated in what would be his first theatrical experiments. These experiments ultimately led to Lecoq's professional debut with a company formed by some of the Vieux Colombier's most illustrious alumni, including Copeau's daughter and son-in-law, Marie-Helene and Jean Dasté. They belonged, as Lecoq has described it, to 'the same theatrical family' (ibid: 5) -a legacy that became the foundation upon which Lecoq would base his own work.

However, from the outset, Lecoq's route into theatre marks him out as perhaps the most unlikely of Copeau's several successful inheritors.[20] He was never a member of Copeau's companies nor did he study in any incarnation of Copeau's schools. He did not even study at one of Copeau's students' schools – of which there were many.[21] In fact Jacques Lecoq came to professional practice without having had any theatrical training whatsoever. Moreover, he had expressed no interest in theatre as a child and young adult. As a result he arrived at the theatre with no great vision for what he wanted either for or from it, and with no pre-conception of the role he might eventually play there.

For Copeau, however, as a man driven by vision, the notion of a theatre practitioner whose youth had neither been dedicated nor even drawn to the theatre would have been almost inconceivable. In Copeau's eyes, theatre constituted a complete world, a way of life to which consummate theatre artists found themselves inexorably drawn as he had been. He unashamedly regarded the theatre as a sacred place and therefore expected priests, monks and worshippers. Lecoq on the other hand makes no claim or demand for such fanaticism – either from himself, his collaborators, nor later on, his students. Indeed, where Copeau demanded a serious, almost spiritual fidelity to the theatre, Lecoq made a virtue of his altogether more light-hearted approach: "It is essential to have fun and our school is a happy school," he wrote, "Not for us tortured self-questioning about the best way to walk on stage: it is enough that it be done with pleasure." (ibid: 68)

Far from the quasi-religious dedication to theatre of Copeau's vision, Lecoq spent his youth and adolescence in the sporting arena, dreaming not of a visionary new theatre nor a 'dramatic renovation' but instead, he said, of fantastically enormous high jumps, or the internal rhythms of gymnastics:

... I discovered the geometry of movement through exercising on the parallel bars [...] The movement of the body through space demanded by gymnastic exercise is of a purely abstract order [...] On my way home in the metro, I would go over [the movements] in my mind. I would then sense all the rhythms perfectly [...] I would run up for the high jump, then spring with the sensation of clearing a two metre bar (Ibid: 3)

Indeed, such was Lecoq's commitment to sport, he elected to attend a college of physical education, where he met Jean-Marie Conty – an individual whose interest in the links between theatre

and sport sparked Lecoq's own curiosity, igniting the process by which Lecoq came eventually to be regarded as a practitioner of theatre rather than a practitioner of sport.

Lecoq himself, though, might question such an easy and dismissive distinction between the practices of theatre and the activities of sport. He does carefully outline how 'sport' and sporting practices formed the basis of his own theatrical techniques:

... As we were athletes [...] our fundamental gestural language was based on the sports we practised [...] Sports, movement and theatre were already closely related. (Ibid: 4)

However, even before his explicit use of sporting techniques as theatrical practice, Lecoq expresses an appreciation of sport that is simultaneously an articulation of that fundamental relationship – between the performer, the spectacle and the spectator – that ultimately propels the individualised movement of the body through space into the realms of theatre. Of his time training in his youth, for example, he has written:

I discovered extraordinary sensations which could be carried over into everyday life [...] I adored running, but it was the pure poetry of athletics which attracted me most: the contraction or elongation of the runners' shadows thrown by the sun slanting across the stadium when the rhythm of running sets in. This physical poetry had a powerful effect on me. (Ibid: 3)

Therefore, although in an outward, almost arbitrarily categorical sense Lecoq moved, as he puts it 'from sport to theatre' (Ibid: 3), in fact his central fascination and practice had always been directed towards the movement of the body through space. The move, then, from the stadium to the theatre was significant only inasmuch as it offered spectators alternative perspectives upon what Lecoq viewed as continuous, notionally unchanging terms of practice:

[This was] my professional debut in theatre. I took on responsibility for physical training within the company. It was not a question of training athletes, but of training dramatic characters such as a king, a queen – a natural extension of the gestures acquired through sports. I hardly noticed the difference. (Ibid: 4)

The difference between Lecoq's unconventional journey into practice and Copeau's fundamentalist vision of how the practitioners of theatre should be trained functions in a similar way. Outwardly, Lecoq's lack of theatrical ambition or even interest marks him out as an unsuitable candidate for Copeau's theatre and schools. Theatrical education at Copeau's schools began as young as ten, at which age Copeau expected to have sought out theatre training "urged on by their vocation" (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 38)

Moreover, at this age, he required of his young apprentices an already exceptional attitude, (not accidentally) more reminiscent of the seminary, rather than the stage door:

He who claims the noble name of pupil or disciple comes in order to attach his person and

life to the core of feelings and ideas: [...] he must 'espouse' them. (Ibid: 38)

There are, of course several motivating factors behind Copeau's rather severe attitude towards his young pupils. Not least amongst these was his religious sensibility, and the associated tendency that he had to view religion not just as an ideological basis, but an actual model of practice for the theatre. He wanted, he said, to train practitioners "capable of creating a pure tradition and endowing the art of theatre with a religious dignity." (Ibid: 11) He was also greatly inspired by theatrical traditions, such as Japanese Noh, whose practices, as he understood them, *did* take place in such a culturally significant space – and wherein theatrical education began young took place, in the case of Noh, in familial structures. Therefore, part of the attempt that he made to ascribe similar cultural value to theatre was by attempting to create a similar cultural context in which to train and practice. However, the overriding motivation for beginning theatre education so young was doubtless related more to the theatre culture in which he was forced to practice, the culture that he had critiqued the whole of his working life. He took his students young, he said, because he wanted to prevent them becoming intoxicated and misled by the deadly '*cabotinage*' of the Parisian theatre scene: "We are intervening in the children's lives to prevent them from becoming like that," (Ibid: 10) he claimed.

If the *cabotinage* was the biggest threat to the development of rounded and accomplished theatre practitioners, then, Lecoq's unusual and fortuitous path into practice in fact sits very easily alongside Copeau's ideological concerns. Lecoq's apparent disinterest in theatre as a young man was not only misleading inasmuch as he ultimately demonstrated what could be termed as a 'theatrical' interest in the sporting pursuits of his youth, but also, his interest in sport protected him from the intoxication of theatre in a way that even Copeau, in his theatre schools, could not have dreamt of. "Preserve them from theatricality," Copeau had written, "... draw them towards the great art of theatre without their suspecting it" (Ibid: 11). In this, he had written almost the definition of Lecoq's preparation for theatre. Moreover, in the case of Lecoq, who, in having brought no personal ambition for either his role in the theatre, or for that matter, the theatre *as an art*, produced work that was not driven by the demands of ego nor even idealism, (the driving force behind Copeau's work - and itself a kind of egotism). Lecoq's work was instead driven by an uncomplicated interest in performance – an attitude and approach to which Copeau, even with his high-minded ideals, could hardly have objected, given that he had witnessed for himself the distorting effect of ambition on his students:

What is called 'vocation' for the theatre, nine times out of ten does not warrant being encouraged. Such a vocation is already a deformation. (Ibid: 10)

It is interesting here to note that Copeau's sense of *vision* about the theatre, his sense of *idealising* about what *should* be is something that he recognises in others as a possible distortion. Copeau's own thinking does not here account for the lived processes that produce Lecoq's entry to practice. In this failure of the imagination, Copeau's visionary accounting does not account for the in-practice of Lecoq's trajectory into the theatre. This does not mitigate the fundamental concordance of Lecoq's approach to practice with Copeau's reasoned positions, however. In order properly to appreciate this concordance, it is necessary to look both at the discourse and the practice.

### **Points of Convergence and Departure**

Though the attitudes and approaches towards theatre of both men reveal conceptual harmony only at close inspection, the terms of their practices present an altogether different case. Lecoq demonstrates both the use of rehearsal techniques first explored and made popular by Copeau, and an attitude to the value of pedagogy which Copeau had displayed. For example mask work, mime work and a careful, almost reverential approach to the spoken word were features first of the Vieux Colombier's curriculum and then later at Lecoq's school, The International Theatre School. Though Lecoq is unclear about what proportion of these shared techniques were directly related to his contact with Copeau's work, it is clear that the

sympathetic perspectives of both men led to Lecoq's independent 'discovery' and exploration of theatrical forms that Copeau had expressed interest in – Greek chorus work, the commedia de'll arte and the traditional, almost archetypal figures of the French comedic tradition.

A more substantial convergence still, though, can be seen in the commitment and attitude of both men to pedagogical practice. Just as Copeau had ultimately chosen the preservation of his school over the opportunity to practice by retreating to Burgundy in 1924, so some thirty years later, Lecoq faced with the conflicting demands upon his time brought by the teaching and the practice of theatre, chose with no apparent hesitation, teaching:

The school developed rapidly and I had to make a choice. I took the decision to devote myself completely to teaching [...] I have always loved teaching, seeing it as a path to my own greater knowledge and understanding of movement. Through teaching I have discovered that the body knows things about which the mind is ignorant. This research into body and movement has been my passion and I still long to share it with others. (Lecoq 1997: 8)

This choice reveals that Lecoq, even as a teacher of theatre, remained conceptually in the stands of the Roland-Garros Stadium; watching the movement of his students through space in the same fascination that he had watched the elongation and contraction of the runners shadows across the track in his youth. But it also reveals that, as a pedagogue, he sympathised deeply with Copeau's conception of the interchange between the teacher and student. The notion that one learns from teaching had been a driving principle of the Vieux Colombier: 'a true master' Copeau had written, 'asks his pupils to teach him ... the master and pupil echo one another.' (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 9) A significant development of this attitude can in fact be seen in Lecoq's work: he refers to his school as a 'school in motion'(Lecoq 1997: 9) a reference not only to the shifting geographical location but also to its evolving curriculum – a notion echoed by his students: 'He was interested in creating a site to build on, not a finished edifice,' one has written, explaining later that Lecoq's book '[is not] an instruction manual but is more a perspective on his constantly shifting teaching caught in words at one specific moment in time.' (McBurney in *ibid*: x) Like the 'true' pedagogue of Copeau's idealistic vision, those 'shifts' were along lines set out by the students of the school; the 'auto-cours'[22] is perhaps the most obvious example, and was developed as a direct response to student requests.

Within terms of pedagogical practice, though, Copeau's ideals converge with Lecoq's practice in ways that even Copeau might not have imagined. Both men believed wholeheartedly that teaching was an experience of learning for both the teacher and pupil. However, whilst Copeau undoubtedly allowed his practice to be authored by the experience of teaching, the nature of his visionary perspective orientated the conceptual movement in his work as a journey *toward* a 'perfect' practice; ultimately, he envisaged an *end* to the process - the visionary new theatre at the core of his ideals. In fact, he became privately impatient with some of his students as they took familiar steps through the course of their education: "Did you see them today?" he once remarked to an assistant, "I always know in advance what they are going to do... It is all sheer imitation of imitation." (q. Rudlin 2000: 55) This frustration reveals Copeau's belief that his knowledge - that which he learned through his pupils - was cumulative, rather than shifting. Within the terms of the conceptual structuring of mind (text, word) and body (action, performance) it resonates with Copeau's long standing affinity with the text. Though he undoubtedly shifted the focus of his activities to a corporeal education of the actor, his fundamental interest was directed towards an 'inner' vision; his corporeal education was in service of a set of ideals associated with 'the text'.

Lecoq's practice, however, takes the initial shared perspective – the notion that teaching is an ongoing education for both teacher and student – and, while it remains a point of convergence in the thinking of the two men, it also functions as a point of departure inasmuch as Lecoq

*begins* from this perspective, but ultimately develops it. This is partially enabled by the fact that in Lecoq's work, there is crucially no 'ideal' model of theatre to move towards. Therefore the conceptual movement of the pedagogical journey – for both Lecoq and his students – becomes itself the point of the process. "I have always loved teaching," Lecoq has, after all, said. "This research... has been my passion". (Lecoq 1997: 8-9) Writing toward the end of his life and after half a century of teaching, Lecoq is speaking of both the process and his own development as ongoing. Where Copeau had searched *for*, Lecoq had a sense of *researching*; demonstrating a pedagogical attitude that is at once an inheritance and a progression from the work of his predecessor. It demonstrates, in Lecoq, a fundamental orientation towards the *lived moment*; it is in the material present that Lecoq's work begins rather than in an abstracted or immaterial sense of an imagined future. Lecoq's work *begins* with the body and its material presence where Copeau's work had arrived there as a pragmatic strategy, directed toward a fundamentally immaterial vision.

This sense of progression in teaching, then, also characterises the central question of the actors' presence in the work of both practitioners. Copeau had embarked on a search for theatre and at its heart had found the physical presence of the actor as a foundation and ground upon which theatre is constructed. "Aim for nothing less than making the actor, not only the medium, but the source of all dramatic inspiration", (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 12) he had urged. In this respect, then, the search for the theatre had led him to the moving body. But it is precisely at this point – the understanding that theatre is constructed by and upon the movement of the body through space - that the work of Lecoq begins. Lecoq understands and shares this central principle of Copeau's work, one that had evolved over the lifetime of Copeau's practice, and it became a departure point for his own journey – a conceptual location at which his work began.

This sense that Lecoq's development began at the point at which Copeau's ended first of all marks him out as a worthy inheritor of Copeau in spite, (and in some cases because,) of his rather unusual path into theatrical practice. But it also changes entirely the nature of the question of the role of the body in his theatrical practice. Where Copeau had come to the theatre and found the body, Lecoq had watched the body and found, in the watching, the germ of theatre. The question for Lecoq, therefore, is not by what means does the physical become a primary category *for* theatrical practice, but by what means does the movement of the body *become* theatrical practice?

### **Movement practice/ Theatre practice**

Jacques Lecoq came to theatre, he said, 'by way of sports'. (Lecoq 1997: 3). His role in theatre was almost exclusively as a pedagogue; he began by training actors in the companies of various associates, before creating his own company and school. His work with his company rapidly gave way to full-time teaching at his school, which he headed until his death in 1999.

Lecoq was very clear about the aim of the curriculum that he had devised; he wanted to teach the students to become practitioners of theatre:

The aim of the school is to produce a young theatre of new work. [...] Creative work is constantly stimulated largely through improvisation, which is the first approach to playwriting. The school's sights are set on art theatre [...] It is not just a matter of training actors, but of educating theatre artists of all kinds: authors, directors, scenographers as well as actors. (Ibid: 16)

In making the objectives of the school so explicit, Lecoq was making a core assertion and claim that the activities of the curriculum would affect a transformation on the students, ultimately enabling their performance of the specific actions of theatre practitioners. The curriculum is therefore a significant means by which Lecoq signalled his conceptions of how movements of the body could become theatrical practice, especially in light of the relative lack of theoretical material that he produced. Where Copeau wrote copious treatises before, during and after he produced theatre, Lecoq only reluctantly (Murray 2003: 16) wrote about his practice toward the end of his life. This, according to Simon Murray, reflected his 'affirmation of acquiring knowledge through *doing*' (Murray 2003: 44). Interestingly, Murray very specifically articulates that the corollary to this aspect of Lecoq's approach is 'a low tolerance for "book learning"' (ibid: 44). In positioning 'book learning' and lived experience in this way, Murray is clearly positing an oppositional, dualistic relation between 'doing' and 'reading' which are entailments of that fundamental mind/body split expressed by Descartes *res extensa/ res cognito*. Elsewhere, Murray has situated interest in Lecoq's work as part of an overall reconfiguration of this spilt:

..., Lecoq is important to our understanding of contemporary Western drama because he was a central figure in a ... movement of practitioners... who proposed that it is the actor's body –rather than simply the spoken text – which is the crucial generator of meaning(s) in theatre. Lecoq's school in Paris thrived... during a period when many young European theatre-makers were creating work which they wished to describe as physical theatre [...]. [T]his development was particularly marked in Britain [and] reflects a reaction against a dominant tradition [...] that has placed the spoken word at the centre of theatrical experience. [...]

[...]

The significance of the body in late twentieth-century Western culture [...] provides a framework for theatre movements celebrating movement and physicality....

...Jacques Lecoq is but a single player in a larger pattern of cultural circumstances all concerned with the significance of the body... (Ibid: 4)

Murray here is not only positioning Lecoq as *part of* this reconfiguration, but as having partisan interest in the body. If Lecoq's School curriculum can stand as testament to his practice then it is to the curriculum that we must look to uncover the basis for these propositions.

## **Movement as Practice**

It is first of all worth noting that *all* of the work done at the International Theatre School under Lecoq's direction was movement based. The pedagogic process that he recorded presented the work as a series of embodied tasks and explorations that were conceived of as things *done*. The conceptual framework of the students' activities was never considered in the school separately from its embodied exploration – understanding was not a cognitive task notionally separated from the movements of the body.[23] 'Movement,' said Lecoq, '...is our permanent guide in this journey from life to theatre.' (Lecoq 1997: 16) Thus his students approached even quite abstracted notions – of colour, of elemental qualities, of flavour, for example - through practical explorations in which they searched for the 'reflection' of those ideas in the movements of their bodies. This work then formed a knowledge that was at once conceptual and material; a body of knowledge in the most precise sense:

After having experienced, by means of these identifications, the greatest possible number of natural dynamics [...] the actor (or 'author') is in a position to use these experiences [...] He will acquire a set of references [...] as a support for future work.

The main results of this identification work are the traces that remain inscribed in each actor, circuits laid down in the body [...] These experiences [...] remain for ever engraved in the body of the actor. [...] Our bodies remember! (Ibid: 16)

In this sense, it is doubtless then that Lecoq required his students engage a process of learning through their bodies. However, Lecoq's description of that process as making a body of knowledge, a body that remembers, has interesting implications for Dwight Conquergood's statements about the notion of an 'apartheid of knowledges' (q. Schechner 2006: 24). Lecoq is locating knowledge and memory in the realm of the physical when in dualistic conceptual structuring, as activities of the 'mind' they would commonly be associated with *res cogitas*. Lecoq is not so much denying the 'apartheid of knowledges' here so much as practicing as if there were not one. In this, then, the conceptual structure which places the body and its activities as of a different order of considerations than the mind (and which entails a denial of the body as fundamentally incapable of the 'higher' functions of the mind) is here unsatisfactory.

Moreover, the model continues to fail to fit the terms of Lecoq's practice. Lecoq consistently invited his students to develop their understanding of performance theory and theatrical practices as an embodied knowledge. Moving from the abstract to the exploration of what he called the 'principal territories' of theatre (melodrama, commedia dell'arte, bouffons, tragedy, and clowning) (ibid: 14-15) was also an embodied task; the students undertook an exploration of those territories in performance rather than, for example, an historical study of them. Additionally, when the students moved to the exploration of text, they approached words and their meanings through their embodiedness; both as syllables to be sounded by the body, and as concepts understood through the experiencing body:

... we search for the body of words. For this purpose we have to choose words which provide a real physical dynamic. Verbs lend themselves more readily to this: to take, to raise, to break, to saw, each contains an action which nourishes the verb itself. 'I saw' carries within it the dynamics of a movement. (Ibid: 50)

These ideas about 'the body of words' fit very well with the notion of the 'always there' body, grounding experience and language; in these exercises Lecoq is inviting his students to register the experiential ground of abstract communication, and in so doing is calling for them to re-member their potentially 'absent' bodies. In fact, the whole curriculum can be read in the terms of such a re-membering; the students' bodies were called forth as the thematic focus of the investigation of all aspects of theatre: Lecoq reported no exercise or assignment on the curriculum that did not involve the students performing. By insisting on the sole use of embodied explorations, tasks and exercises, he was thereby asserting that in fact the *only* relevant knowledge of theatre for his student theatre practitioners was an *embodied* knowledge, based specifically upon experience of what he called 'playing'. [24] Moreover it is notable that Lecoq asserted that this movement-based knowledge was not only pertinent to the particular problems of the actor (- who, after all, must know how to do what is to be done on the stage -) but also constituted an approach to the work of directors, writers and scenographers.

It is probable that this insistence on an embodied practice coupled with Lecoq's own lack of written output combine to create the image of Lecoq as 'anti-intellectual' and with a 'low tolerance for "book learning"' (Murray 2003: 44). However to do so is once more to posit the knowledges of the body created through these activities as in-opposition to or at the very least as *instead* of the intellectual knowledge associated with books. Asserting that the *only* relevant knowledge is an embodied knowledge is only problematic if one assumes that the *only embodied* somehow necessarily excludes the intelligences and understandings available to the mind and its activities.

## **Movement as Understanding**

The laws of movement govern all theatrical situations. A piece of writing is a structure in motion. (ibid: 22)

In 1930 Lecoq's predecessor, Jacques Copeau had concluded 'the problem of the actor is basically a corporeal one; the actor is standing on the stage.' (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 49) Lecoq's work, however, had now widened the scope of that notion. He proposed to train students to act, to write for the theatre, design for the theatre, and direct theatre through a complex understanding of movement:

The laws of movement have to be understood on the basis of the human body in motion: balance, imbalance, opposition, alternation, compensation, action and reaction. (Lecoq 1997: 21)

In this, we can see that Lecoq's metaphorical structuring of movement as an absolute category of knowledge; it incorporates all aspects of performance theory. This sense of movement characterised Lecoq's understanding of what would otherwise be philosophically problematic notions of the 'laws' that governed his work. He spoke, for example, of a 'reality' that had an undeniable, factual basis. 'When a car tyre bursts, that's not an opinion, it's a fact. I observe,' he wrote, '[...] for an observation to be made one must pay close attention [...] while trying to be as objective as possible.' (Ibid 17-20) He also articulated a belief in a permanent, archetypal nature of things, setting his students the task of finding the essence of, for example fire or wind, wood or oil. A notion of 'neutrality' was central to his work; neutral was 'the accepted reference point', (ibid 21) and the 'neutral mask' formed the core of the students mask work (which itself supported improvisation and movement technique).

However, his understanding of movement metaphorically framed these concepts, removing any sense of the tangible and absolute reality that he would otherwise be suggesting:

I have a strong belief in permanency, in the 'Tree of trees', the 'Mask of masks', the balance that sums up perfect harmony. I realise that this tendency of mine may become an obstacle [... ] Of course there is no such thing as absolute and universal neutrality, it is merely a temptation. [...] There can be no absolute [... ] (Ibid 21)

When Lecoq therefore spoke of the 'immutable' laws of movement, of working from a 'fixed point' of 'neutral' and of 'reality', he always understood those terms to be characterised by movement, negotiated by changes of time and location. 'Equilibrium itself is in motion,' (ibid: 24) he wrote. Movement thereby functioned for Lecoq not only as the manner and means of his practice, but also as a metaphorical framework through which he understood that practice: 'Movement is more than just a matter of covering the distance between points A and B' (Ibid 21).

The detail of Lecoq's relationship to 'movement' and 'absolutes' provide interesting entailments for wider discussions in which bodies or embodiment are considered as foundational or generating structures. Lecoq's *absolutes* are *momentary* and specifically produced by circumstances in – rather than through – time. When notions of the body are mobilised as an originary structure upon which alternative conceptual structurings might be mapped – for example in the nuanced assertions of sexual difference in Luce Irigaray's writings, or in Helene Cixous' *l'écriture corporeale* – there is a concern that the body as foundation is fundamentally essentialist, and that such paradigms reinscribe the problematic dualistic structures they seek to critique. However, Lecoq's notion of *movement*, and of bodies *particularised* by their location in space and in-relation, invites a re-imagining of these discourses not as *solidifying* as essential, but as *incorporating* their momentary circumstances as contingencies upon which identities are negotiated. In this



way, such writings speak *from* as well as *to* their social construction and they do so by self-consciously presenting those circumstances; wholly embodying them.

For Lecoq, the notion of movement was foundational to the notion of a necessarily corporeal theatre; movement was a concept indistinguishable from the living, breathing body in motion: '[if] there is no movement [,] death follows.' (Ibid 21). As a governing structure for not only the task of the actor, but also of the other arts of the theatre, his movement-based work not only recognised the corporeal problem of Copeau's actor, standing on the stage, but by setting the actor in motion, thereby made corporeal the problems of the space that the actor moved through, and the text that must be breathed and done. An understanding and fascination with movement defined his theatre practice, encompassing - literally and metaphorically - the whole of his work, which consistently sought to undermine the phenomenal experience of corporeal absence in his students.

## **The Movements of the Body as Theatrical Practice**

The early stages of our work at the school are not based on text, nor on any theatre tradition, oriental, Balinese, or other[25]. Our primary reference point is simply life. So we have to be able to recognise this life through the miming body and through replay [... .] In this way we can bring the great theatre traditions within reach [... .] (Lecoq 1997: 47)

Lecoq's understanding of, and central focus upon, movement meant that in many ways theatre practice was, for him, no more than a specialised kind of movement practice. The process by which he came to understand the specialisation of the movements of his work as theatrical is, however, not entirely clear. As both designer of the curriculum that his major work - *The Moving Body* - documented, he was rarely given to problematise the process by which the activities of the curriculum had come to be conceived of as theatrical. The status of those activities as theatrical is assumed by the text, which simultaneously affirms that status by unreflexively including those activities within its own framework.

Additionally, Lecoq did not appear motivated to make clear the distinction between movement practice and specialised theatre practice. He made the slightly provocative statement that he had 'hardly noticed the difference' between the training of actors and the training of athletes, suggestive, of course, of the idea that there might not *be* any difference. Furthermore, he argued that his work at the International Theatre School was not only based upon, but also always remained bounded to, the everyday (which is to say, non-theatrically specialised) movements of the body:

Play [performance] may be very close to replay or may distance itself through the most daring theatrical transposition, but it must never lose sight of the root anchoring it to reality. A large part of my teaching method involves making students understand this principle. (ibid 29)

The primary means by which the students' work remained 'anchored' to reality was in fact through observation, which formed a fundamental part of the movement technique that Lecoq taught. The students were expected to observe and then replay, in exacting detail, the movements of the world around them (which Lecoq referred to as 'reality'.) The qualitative difference between those movements that had been properly researched in this way and those that had not was, according to Lecoq, instantly recognisable. The research and performance of animal movements exemplified this difference:

Real observation of animals is essential here. I can soon tell which students have cats and which don't, which have observed insects and which are just imagining them. The first ones act, the others demonstrate. They have to go to the zoo to observe and to analyse, however difficult it may be: [animal movements] are extremely complex and cannot easily be embodied. (Ibid 94)

This careful attention to the physical world speaks once more to the notion of phenomenal absence. Lecoq's understanding of the theatrical body is transmitted to his students by his demand that they bring both their own and other bodies to phenomenal presence. The rigorous process, which demands an experiential – rather than imagined - *presencing* of the physical world – vanquishes the phenomenal structures of absence that ground body-mind dualism. There is a hint here of the modality of *dysappearance* here, too – Lecoq is careful to underline the difficulties of the task, and is specific in noting that it is a challenge of *embodiment*; it is at the level of their body that the students struggle to fulfil the task. This brings to mind Copeau's notion of the resistant, resisting body:

the body, for the actor, starts out by being an obstacle. Afterwards, it becomes a terrible hurdle to link physical action with the text. In order to do it naturally, a prolonged effort is necessary. (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 49)

In Lecoq's work, the solution to this resistant body is an absolute insistence on bringing the usually absent body to presence, to mind. It is through this detailed attention to corporeality – and interestingly in the case of observation exercises, *intercorporeality* – that lifts the body from *dysappearance* to presence. There is again a sense in which, if we were to try and frame this set of problems within conceptual dualism, it would make for an awkward account. In Copeau's discussion, as we have seen, it seems that it is 'the body' that here is the problem; but in Lecoq's configuration, it is a lack of *attention to the body* that is the problem. Consciousness and attention – undoubtedly activities of the mind – are both the problem and the solution for Lecoq – just as the body was both the problem and solution for Copeau. Though both positions are entailments of the work of both men, so long as the oppositional dualism stands, they seem paradoxically to contradict each other whilst speaking from the basis of remarkably sympathetic experiences of practices. The apparent operational assumption of Lecoq's work observed earlier, in which he proceeds as if there were no 'apartheid' between the activities of the body/ and mind, becomes not so much a potentially interesting perspective through which to view the work, but the only way to maintain a sense of sympathy extending through the practices.

Lecoq saw his role in the classroom primarily as drawing attention to the qualitative difference in properly observed movements and those that were not. He drew a distinction between his kind of critique and the statement of 'opinion'; 'There is not much point', he wrote, 'after seeing an improvisation, in a teacher saying "that gave me pleasure"'. (Lecoq 1997: 20) Moreover, he argued, though audiences might couch their responses to a work in terms of opinion, they would actually be responding to the same aspect of the work as he:

The critical comments one makes about the work do not attempt to distinguish the good from the bad, but rather to separate what is accurate and true from what is too long or too brief, what is interesting from what is not. [... T]he only thing which interests us is what is accurate and true [... It] can be sensed by anyone and an audience always knows perfectly well when something is accurate and true. They may not know why, but it is up to us to know, because we are, after all, specialists.

My comments are always related to the movement I see. (Ibid: 20)

Though the work and exercises ultimately lead to the 'transposition' of everyday movements, so that they were altered in replay, fundamentally the original, tightly observed and carefully

executed movement, should remain present - in even the most extreme abstraction. Lecoq likened this to the work of painters transposing, rather than re-presenting, their subjects:

Corot, Cézanne or Soutine were able to paint all kinds of trees, to transfigure them or to capture a particular facet, an unusual light for example, but if “The Tree” had not been there in the painting, nothing would have happened. (Ibid: 21)

His conception of the close relationship between movement and theatre, and his treatment of theatre practice as a particular kind of movement practice, had been in some senses suggestive of the notion that *all* of the movements of the body *potentially* could be understood or categorised as theatrical. This potential could only be realised, however, by a process of transference in which the everyday movements of the world around were transposed by the actor into theatrical space.

Lecoq therefore saw the training of practitioners as physical task not only because of the way that movement metaphorically functioned in his thinking (where it stood for the totality of the corporeal stage) but also because he wanted to enable students accurately to transfer the movements that they had observed[26] from the world into theatrical space. Therefore a substantial part of his task at the school was concerned with training for this problem:

Physical preparation does not aim to emulate a particular physical model, nor to impose established dramatic forms. It should assist everyone towards the fullest realisation of accurate movement. There should be no sense of the body ‘getting in the way’ [...] (Ibid: 70)

Significant in this part of the work was Lecoq’s insistence that this preparation was itself specialised to theatrical space:

Purely athletic exercises are [...] insufficient for actor training. I have known actors who were extremely stiff in the gym, who nevertheless moved with wonderful suppleness on stage, and others, who were very supple in training, but who were incapable of creating an illusion. [...]

[...] they can never replace the true physical education of the body of an actor who lives in the world of illusion. (Ibid 72-73)

In this, we can see that though he did work vigorously on acrobatics and gymnastics with his students such extra-ordinary movements were always done in the context of theatrical play. In this way, Lecoq discouraged his students from participation in exercises that encouraged inattentive repetition of movements. Of paramount importance at all times was the students’ attention to being thematically and experientially present. This is a special order of relationship to the lived body, quite different from that articulated by Drew Leder in his discussion, cited earlier, of the experience of playing tennis, which is typified by the phenomenal absence of the body from the activity. Leder’s whole attention is on the game; Lecoq requires that his students play in the fullest realisation of the *means* of play.

The techniques that formed the bulk of his curriculum were in many ways employed in this search for accurate movement. The mask, he said, forced the spectator ‘to look at the whole body. [...] Every movement is revealed as powerfully expressive.’ (Ibid: 39). Similarly, the work with mime enabled the students properly to understand their corporeal relations with the world, in order that those relations could be accurately transported into theatrical space:

To mime is literally to embody and therefore to understand better. A person who handles bricks all day long reaches a point where he no longer knows what he is handling. It has become an automatic part of his physical life. If he is asked to mime handling a brick, he rediscovers the meaning of the object, its weight and volume. [...] The action of miming becomes a form of knowledge (Ibid: 22)

In this we see another manifestation of Lecoq’s operational assumption that there exists no ‘apartheid of knowledges’ between the body and the mind. Miming ‘becomes a form of knowledge;’ and ‘to embody [is] therefore to understand better’. An understanding of the theatrical world arises through the engagement of both modalities; a practice of attentive movement.

What then emerges from Lecoq’s curriculum is that though it was constructed of and included many recognised ‘theatrical’ techniques, the terms on which those techniques were theatrical practice were very particular to Lecoq. Mime and mask work, for example, appear variously on both drama courses and stages, and in those terms can be considered ‘theatrical forms’; they are done on the stage. Lecoq, however, was uninterested largely in what *could* be performed on the stage, addressing instead the question of *how* performances might be achieved by his students. For him, disciplines of mime and mask work were theatrical because by means of the technical processes they entail, they assisted his students’ discovery of the problems of bringing their absent or disappearing bodies to presence. What Lecoq sought from his students was not the specialised, gestural languages that existed only on the stage, and he was therefore not concerned with the *distinction* between theatrical movements and the everyday movements of the body. Lecoq’s interest was, in fact, to look for a quality of convergence, of equivalence between the two.

### **Non-Theatrical Movement**

Though Lecoq sought convergence between the movements of his students as actors and the everyday movements of the body, it is nevertheless clear that he did draw distinctions between movements that were specifically of interest to developing theatrical knowledge and those that were not. This becomes particularly clear when considering his documentation of the work of the International Theatre School. First of all, his documentation is *selective*; there is no discussion of, for example, the students’ luncheon arrangements or the schools bureaucratic processes. This is an important exclusion, because those activities, after all, engaged the body in the everyday movements that Lecoq based his practice upon. Despite their theatrical potential then, not all of those everyday movements of the body fell unconditionally into Lecoq’s conception of theatre practice. Further, the bringing to presence of the absent or disappearing body was a specific activity for theatre practice and not as a ‘*practice of everyday life*’.

In addition to this, Lecoq used the documentation process to articulate some significant exclusions from the School’s curriculum, on the basis that they did not address the problems of performance and they were therefore not theatrical practice. What was particularly interesting about some of those rejected techniques was their common appearance on other drama and theatre courses:

My conception of physical preparation is in disagreement with one aspect of the movement methods recommended to many actors. Frequently, these are gymnastic methods which I call ‘comforting’, since their principal aim is a feeling of well-being for those who practise

them. The various relaxation methods which are invading drama training may possibly serve to calm certain fears, or to help an individual recover their sense of personal harmony, but they never deal with the relationship to acting. For an actor, the only internal harmony that matters is that of play (Lecoq 1997: 72)

Lecoq's reasons for rejecting relaxation exercises begin to reveal something of his process of discrimination between theatrical and non-theatrical practices. Relaxation techniques, as he saw them, were not addressed specifically to the actor's body as a theatrical phenomenon; they did not 'deal with the relationship to acting'. Though he conceded that such activities had a more general application, inasmuch as they might contribute to an actor's sense of well-being, the techniques did not address themselves directly to the body of the student, or crucially, demand that the student bring a whole and focused attention to the body-in-practice. Lecoq's work, therefore, rigorously located that which was theatrical a sense of engagement with the body; exercises that addressed the body only indirectly (via, as in this case, a sense of relaxation or 'personal harmony') simply did not constitute appropriate practice.

There are other, perhaps more surprising, exclusions from the curriculum of the International Theatre School; surprising not only because of the ubiquity of their appearance in other theatre practice contexts but also because of the reputation of the work of Lecoq and those associated with him. For example, when examining the curriculum, it becomes clear that Lecoq had his students work in groups for the majority of the time: his exercises in improvisation were mostly group based, and the students worked in groups for the *auto-cours*. Even in clown and mask work, - activities that in Lecoq's practice required performers very specifically to attend to their *individual* relationships to the mask or to clowning, - the work invariably involved the ultimate exploration of that relationship within a group. Further, the strength and importance of group work in the school has often been considered as one of the distinguishing features of Lecoq's teaching; 'complicity' is listed on the back of *The Moving Body* as one of 'the famous Lecoq techniques'[27] - a claim borne out by a consideration of the work of the school's alumni - which has often been notable for its emphasis on collaboration.[28] And yet, though his teaching required almost constant group work, and the school's students would seemingly graduate with an extraordinary capacity for collaborative work, Lecoq is scathing about the use of exercises designed purely to foster positive group relationships:

[...E]xercises in group dynamics are very nice and helpful for the group. But not for a company of professional actors. [...] (I have heard that in Australia actors have their 'guru', that in the United States they are attended by a 'shrink'.) In Italy they go on stage and play. That's my idea, too. (Lecoq 1997: 73)

Again, what was rejected about such group work – as with the dismissal of 'relaxation techniques' - would seem to be the students' sense of well-being; their sense of happiness with themselves as members of a group. In this, Lecoq was in fact asserting that the only salient relationship was to the lived present. In calling their consistent attention to the materiality of their play, he simultaneously asked that they not involve themselves in an imaginary or projected sense of the other students around them; rather they should pay attention only to the embodied present. Coupled with his notions of mime – as a means of understanding on an experiential level, - this posits an understanding of *intercorporeality* based on embodiment which seemingly engenders an extraordinary capacity for 'complicity' between his students. That the body or embodiment can lead to collaboration, co-operation and mutual understanding here is a pragmatic outcome of a rigorous process of attention to the present. This offers an interesting perspective on intercorporeality in the negotiation of relationships between self and other, which usually constitute a special order of problem in the analytic tradition. Self and other usually mapped onto the onto-valuational structures of dualism and conceived of as irreducibly separate. Again, through operating as if the structure of dualism is not the relevant

conceptual structuring, an alternative is produced. Complicity is *not* a loss of boundaries, nor does it produce in its participants a set of indistinct reproductions. Instead, it offers the possibility of the creation of dialogue that is constituted collectively without subsuming individual identities within the centralising agenda of compromise. This fundamentally heterogeneous modality of practice foreshadows the work of the Theatre du Soliel in terms both of their theatrical practice and political positioning.

Lecoq also rejected the use of non-theatrical physical forms, such as horse-riding or fencing, again, because he saw no direct relationship between such activities and the students' appearance in theatrical space. While he conceded that such forms might be used in performance, students engaged in those forms were not engaged in the problem of how to act *on the stage*; they were engaged in the problem of how to fence, or how to ride a horse. The *only* problem that Lecoq's theatrical practice recognised and sought to address was the corporeal problem of the practice itself.

What arises, then, from this list of exclusions from his School's curriculum, is the understanding that for Lecoq theatrical practice was bounded very specifically to the theatrical field; appearance in the theatrical field was the definitional quality of theatrical practice. The theatrical field itself was, for Lecoq, defined by the relationship of the actor to the act; his students bodied forth theatre through their focused attention to the material present. The feelings of his students before they got on to the stage, or how well they could fence or ride a horse did not directly educate the students in the summoning forth of the theatrical field. Such things were at best immaterial in theatrical space and potentially disruptive, as a dispersed attention threatens to collapse the fundamental 'relationship to acting': 'go on stage and play', he had said, 'That's my idea'.

### **Theatrical Practice – Theatrical Space**

At the point at which I insert myself as [a] spectator in the auditorium this field is immediately focalized through a specific perspective [...] As soon as an actor steps onto the stage [...] a fundamental shift takes place with phenomenological consequences different from those artistic genres in which the body fails to make an actual appearance. [...] On stage, what was orientated in relation to the gaze is now orientated in relation to the body that inhabits its boundaries.

*Stanton B. Garner (1994: 46)*

When he transferred from the sports field to the theatre in the 1940's, Lecoq said that he had 'hardly noticed the difference' between theatre training and sporting practice. In doing so, he signalled a complex and ambiguous relationship between theatre and movement that persisted throughout the whole of his career. This was characterised by a central tension in his understanding of how the movements of the body could come to be considered theatrical.

The ambiguity of Lecoq's perception of the relationship between sports, movement and theatre arises, first of all, because of his position that theatre practice was a specialised kind of movement practice and moreover, that this particular kind of movement practice was based, not in a specialised form (i.e. the theatre), but in the non-specialised movements of the everyday world. From this perspective, there was for Lecoq, a fundamental equivalence between movement and theatre and no distinction to be made between the movements of the body and the movements of the theatrical body.

On the other hand, however, Lecoq's definition of theatrical activities often functioned at a level that was extraordinarily focused and discriminating. He rejected some of the mainstay exercises of contemporary rehearsal rooms as irrelevant to students and practitioners of theatre,

and in doing so made the assertion that such activities were not theatrical. In these cases then, movements of the bodies performing those exercises, for Lecoq, fell outside of the category of theatrical.

In fact, in Lecoq's work, it was not in the movement of the actor *in itself* that the theatrical body was born and distinguished itself from the non-theatrical body. Rather, the body moved and that movement was only given theatrical status if and when it was brought to *presence*. This bringing to present is constituted specifically a thematic attention to the corporeality of experience. In contrast to the notion that theatre practice was a wholly corporeal concern, Lecoq's work identified theatrical space as a conceptual space; it was not drawn along the lines of a building or a stage. Theatrical space was constructed, and it was constructed first of all through the vanquishing of phenomenal absence of the body. The theatrical field is a *public* field, in which the subjective and thematically discriminative perspective of everyday experience is replaced by an attention to the material present. Of course, as Garner attests above, the actor is not the only source of such attention; the theatrical field can be brought into being by the 'focalized perspective' of the spectator, for whom the body is a particular kind of theatrical object.

Lecoq's understanding that the subject body of the actor was simultaneously an object in theatrical field in many ways underpinned the whole of his conceptions of movement practice and theatre practice. As a lifelong spectator and observer of movement, he instinctively considered the experience of the audience as the goal of theatrical activity; the players were there *for the audience*:

... a person expressing himself is not necessarily being creative. [...] many people enjoy expressing themselves [...] forgetting that they must not be the only ones to get pleasure from it: spectators must receive pleasure, too. [...]

The difference between the act of expression and the act of creation is this: in the act of expression one plays for oneself alone rather than for any spectators. [...]

In my method of teaching I have always given priority to the external world over inner experience. (Lecoq 1997: 16-17)

Lecoq's ability to see the theatrical potential in the movements of the world around him, therefore, spoke most of all of his ability to adopt the attentive gaze of an audience. He did not argue, however, that the act of watching *necessarily* was met by a subjugation of the actor's subjectivity; the actors of the world around, after all, continue in their actions for their own ends and not for the benefit of the sudden attention of an observer. But for his students to become accomplished theatre practitioners, he contended, they must understand this process wherein their subject body had an existence on the stage as an object body and moreover, it was to this object body that they must attend: 'In the theatre making a movement is never a mechanical act, but must always be a gesture' (ibid: 69) he explained. He argued, then, not for the replacement or removal of the actors' subjectivity, but for the expansion of that through the focalized perspective of an audience; an audience that was to include the actors themselves.

Theatrical space was therefore *shared* space constituted by both the active gaze of the audience, and the actor's acceptance of that gaze. In theatrical space, dramatic meaning was inscribed upon the movements of the body of the actor, by both the actor and the audience:

#### *Giving meaning to movement*

The study of human anatomy enabled me to develop an analytic method of physical preparation [...] getting a feel for the dramatic potential of each [part of the body] in turn. I have discovered, for instance, that when I move my head in ways dictated purely by geometry (side, forward, back) the

result is: 'I listen', 'I look', 'I'm frightened'. (ibid 69)

Crucially, for Lecoq, theatrical meaning did not exist before the movements that generated them and moreover, never became the focus of his students' work. Instead, he required that the students attended only and always to movement and not become distracted by what he called the 'psychology' of the act. The movements of the body, then, in Lecoq's work did not simply constitute the basis of a theatrical practice or describe a dramatic approach; movement was the generator of theatrical meaning and the moving body was the site upon which the notional fields of theatre became manifest. In the gaze of Lecoq the professional spectator, movement, the body and theatre occupied, in the moment of performance, the same conceptual space.

Little by little, the theme is rediscovered [...] but only in its structure. There is no imagery or background given [...], simply a dramatic motor which can be taken apart and analysed. [...] Reduced to this motor, psychological themes lose their anecdotal elements and reach a status of heightened play. (Ibid: 34)

Lecoq's suggestion – that the movements of the body are *given* meaning by the 'focalized attention' that constructs theatrical space – is remarkable in its inclusion of the actor in that process. He was careful not to suggest that the meanings of his geometric movements were only apparent to the observer: "I listen', 'I look'" he said, his own discovery coinciding with that of the spectator. The bringing to attention of heretofore absent regions of the body proposes a specific mode of inter-subjectivity, based on this shared set of discoveries. This intersubjectivity forms the very basis of the project of the Theatre du Soleil, whose political agendas have been embedded in the enterprise from its inception, and whose idealism finds foundation in the practices of Lecoq. Idealism in this context is not a 'head downwards' phenomenon; it is bodied forth through a specific, attentive practice. With memorable dexterity [sic] Rush Rehm has elsewhere described the gestalt origin of this work as a "theatrical imagination [that] seems to spring from the ground up, or – perhaps more accurately – up from the grounded body."(q. Harvie 2005:142)



## Chapter 3

## Ariane Mnouchkine

### Ariane Mnouchkine and the Theatre du Soleil

The Theatre du Soleil is one of France's best-known and acclaimed performance ensembles, famously directed by the 'forthright, articulate, passionate, demanding and dissident' (Williams 1999: *xiii*) Ariane Mnouchkine. Mnouchkine's theatrical project, and most especially her distinct and developmental work as a director, has been inseparable from her place in the Theatre du Soleil, the company that she co-founded in the revolutionary atmosphere that characterised Paris in 1964. She had first experienced theatre making during a period of (uncompleted) study at the Sorbonne, where she co-founded *L'Association Theatre des Etudiants de Paris*. During her three years as President of the organisation, she participated in productions as a designer, before turning to direction, the role that she would eventually settle upon. However, in 1962, she abandoned her study, left the ATEP and spent the next two years working on an Italian film and travelling extensively. She had returned to France by 1964, where with a group of nine others she co-founded the Theatre du Soleil. From the outset, her title was 'director'. (Ibid: 224)

The company enjoyed some success between 1964 and 1966, producing and then touring two shows, which took as their basis pre-existing texts. At this stage, however, Mnouchkine's only training had been in her practical (though non-professional) work with the ATEP. Her studies had been in psychology and there is no mention of her attending so much as a drama group as a child. In 1966, though, already two years into her professional career, and seven since the beginning of her theatrical practice, she enrolled in the Lecoq school in Paris, following the course that all drama students – performers, writers, designers and directors – undertook at the school. She apparently undertook the course on behalf of all of the Soleil; the group would gather in the evenings for her to pass on the day's lessons.

The effect that this training had on Mnouchkine and the Soleil was both immediate and far-reaching. In the first instance, the group's reputation and audiences grew enormously; their first production of the post training phase, *La Cuisine*, by Arnold Wesker, reached audiences in excess of 60,000, compared with the 4000 that had seen any of their other shows. It also toured Europe, beyond any of the early productions, (which had remained largely in Paris and the surrounding area) winning a number of awards. The company performed the show between 1967 and 1970, when it was shown alongside their first collectively devised piece, *Les Clowns*.

Perhaps more important, however, was the legacy of the Lecoq training upon the Soleil's practice of theatre as both a task to be accomplished and an artistic endeavour (a factor that doubtless contributed to the growing audience figures). In general terms, the training transformed the Soleil as an artistic enterprise in a number of ways. First of all, the Lecoq work became the basis for a shared theatrical language - a collective resource of techniques and common terms in which to discuss them. David Williams summarises this 'shorthand vocabulary of acting processes and laws' (Ibid *xiii*) thus:

[...] *le psychologisme* (psychological-naturalistic acting, to be avoided at all costs in theatre), *le jeu* (game, play, acting, energy shared by complicit performers) *la creation* (the generative, preparatory process as a whole, rather than simply the end product) *les evidences* (things that 'work' in a self-evident way), *l'etat* (the primary state of a character), *la passion* (emotional state, drive – a term Lecoq uses for both *commedia* and melodrama), *la disponibilite* (a disposition of availability, openness, readiness), 'convex and concave' (action and receptivity, maximal exteriority and interiority), *l'ecoute* (a quality of listening, a related-ness), *le paysage interieur* ('inner landscape' [*sic*]), *la transposition* (metamorphic transposition of an inner state in external space), 'autopsy' (the spatialising of interiority), *l'écriture corporelle* ('bodily writing'), and so on. Many of these stem from

Copeau's and then Lecoq's endeavours to dismantle the legacies of Cartesian dualism. (Ibid xvii)

It is again interesting to note the positioning by (UK) commentators of this inheritance of theatre in relation to the Cartesian project. Williams' particular formulation – that the project has been one of *dismantling* rather than an all out war – is useful here, because it does not suggest a simplistic opposition to the fundamentals of Cartesian thought, which would itself be a dualistic structuring. Nevertheless, there is a suggestion that both Copeau and Lecoq – and potentially Mnouchkine as their inheritor – have been engaged with the Cartesian model, if only in order to contribute to its demise. In fact, though both men at times talk in terms that could be read within Cartesian dualistic conceptual frameworks, to do so often produces limited and contradictory readings. In Lecoq's work particularly, there is a sense that the model is simply not a grounding structure onto which the 'usual suspects' of dualistic pairings are mapped. Nevertheless, this shared vocabulary does contain ideas that challenge the Cartesian project, overtly challenging the authority of the activities of mind, for example, through the distrust of psychological naturalism; and the assertion of the body and its associations as both a technical and authoritative foundation for the processes of theatre, for example through the notions of *la passion* and *l'écriture corporeale*.

Further, this collection of procedural and philosophical principles places the Soleil's terms of practice within the legacy of Copeau and Lecoq, but more significantly, signalled the Soleil's inheritance of key notional structures that continue to inform their understanding of theatre practice. Most specifically, Lecoq's insistent focus upon the body of the actor as both the site and resource of theatre has become fundamental to the Soleil's extraordinarily reflexive theatrical practice, in terms both of its structuring structures (acting, directing and so forth), but also of the group's understanding of the nature of the theatrical construct itself. As a result, the Soleil's understanding of the relationships between practitioners and their practices, and their conceptions of the space - ideological and material - in which theatre takes place, have developed along lines conceptually consistent with Lecoq's work. The Soleil's project, however, has also been characterised by the group's political ideologies, in which the Soleil have continually given attention to and drawn significance from the social space surrounding their theatre practices.

## **Political ideology/ theatrical practice**

In the terms of the Company's history, the introduction of Lecoq's work, with its concordant emphasis on *action* as the basis of theatrical practice latched onto an already established practice oriented political ideology – Mnouchkine was and remains sympathetic to a materialist reading of history. In many ways, this aspect of the Soleil's ideological identity has facilitated their absorption of the fundamentals of Lecoq's work. Given the group's relative lack of theatrical training, and the politically charged atmosphere of France at the time of the Soleil's conception, it is perhaps unremarkable that Mnouchkine and her nine co-founders took as the basis of their company political, rather than theatrical ideologies. What was remarkable, however, was that the group's instinct for *practice*, which finds its theatrical expression in Lecoq's work, was already evident. Calling themselves 'The Theatre of the Sun: A Workers' Cooperative,' the group incorporated their political ideology into the administrative functioning of their company by making the 'cooperative' its legal as well as nominative title. Moreover, the company continues to function in this way; Mnouchkine, for example, continues to draw a salary equal to even the newest members, and though there is room for the specialisations of actor, director, designer and so forth, those specialists are required to participate in the general activities necessary to the function of a large company and the maintenance of the Cartoucherie, the Soleil's home since 1970.

These ethics of practice, that extend into both the artistic *and* administrative core of the Company, have been for Mnouchkine and her collaborators every bit as important as the politicised

critiques that they offer in their productions. Mnouchkine has been scathing about other companies whose repertoire is subversive, but whose working methodologies and administrative parameters are constructed along the traditional terms of operational and economic hierarchies:

I'm exasperated by 'left thinking' productions that are produced in conditions of total imbrication with the system. They are alibi-productions.... We prefer the production created by the group to be what the group wants it to be, not what the system of production wants. (q. Williams 1999: 19)

Moreover, the group's instinctive recognition of the terms of their practice as perhaps even more significant than the ideological subject and content of their work has been confirmed by the group's often problematic encounters with bureaucracy. This echoes the understanding that is not only the subject *but structure* of discourse that is responsible for its effects and entailments. If Mnouchkine and the Soleil were involved in the refutation of a dualistic metaphysics, it is clear that they would not position themselves in simple opposition to such a structure; their experiences of cultural production have demonstrated that both content and form constitute discourse. Mnouchkine, for example, relates instances where funding bodies have objected to the company's cooperative and collaborative structure, rather than the public critiques of authoritative structures that the company's shows are famed for:

[...] someone at the Ministry [said,] 'There's no question of you continuing in this way. ... We never intervene politically,' he said, 'you can do what you want. But you must understand you and your company constitute a very awkward case.' I didn't understand at all. Then suddenly I understood. I can stage a production that seems totally opposed to them, they couldn't care less. But the way in which the company functions and produces its shows, the simple fact that we don't fit ourselves into a pre-existing framework – this throws them and worries them. (ibid: 22)

The group's politicised discourse and administrative structure, however, have not prevented observers from proposing that Mnouchkine holds the reins of her directorship too tightly for the Soleil genuinely to function in a cooperative, collaborative manner. Denis Bablet, for example, in an interview with Mnouchkine suggested:

[...] people have often talked of the problem of the relations between the actors and you, between the group and you. [...] this question is about a traditional theatre where the actors are *interpreters* directed by a director. Some people will go so far as to deny more or less explicitly the group, and to consider the Theatre du Soleil to be Mnouchkine.(Ibid: 57)

The perception that the Soleil is Mnouchkine's exclusive property and project has only been strengthened by the company's sometimes-tempestuous history, which has seen a constantly evolving membership. Aside from Mnouchkine, all of the founder members have left, and some of them amid acrimony. Mnouchkine herself has certainly been at the centre of these storms, perhaps understandably given her central role in the company.

For her own part, Mnouchkine has framed the issue of the changing membership within the context of a process of change that is, to her, 'the very essence of the undertaking. To create theatre is also to work relentlessly at changing oneself.' (Ibid: *xiii*) However, the critique itself is based

upon a fundamental failure to apprehend the possibilities of working without hierarchical structures; its entailments include a distrust of Mnouchkine as an individual and of the political processes of the Soleil as a collective. Mnouchkine's presence throughout the company's continual process of change, has, David Williams suggests, been 'one of the most resilient and dynamic continuities of all,' adding that the Soleil 'is inconceivable without her.' (Ibid *xiii*). Whatever the personal dynamics of the relationships between their controversial director and particular members of the group, however, there has been an additional continuity expressed in the endurance of the Company – the functioning, administrative structure and artistic collective. Despite the cynicism of some observers, the relationship between Mnouchkine and the Company might be more accurately described as synergistic rather than proprietorial. The Company has functioned both as a situational continuity for Mnouchkine's practice as a director, as well as an ideological space in which the development of the Soleil as a collaborative theatrical project has taken place, and in these terms, the abiding presence of the Company as a structure should not be overlooked. Mnouchkine herself has been explicit and unapologetic about her own dependence on the Company's structures:

When I go and watch a rehearsal somewhere else, when we see how other people work, I'm really staggered. If the Theatre du Soleil closes up shop, I will switch to another profession. Because I would not tolerate entering the theatre world . . . .

... People tell us: You take refuge in a mini society that you try to make ideal. Why not? (Ibid: 25)

More than this, though, its organisational construction provides an insight into Mnouchkine and the group's understanding of theatre as a *political* practice and, indeed, their political identity as a function of actions taken in social space, rather than an ideological imagining of an alternative social context. For Mnouchkine and the Soleil, the activity of theatre making is at once a practice and a set of beliefs; an enactment of ideology that appears in public space. This sense of both-and in relation to practice and belief maps particularly congruently onto Lecoq's demand for *attentive movement*; a notion of theatrical practice that is at once corporeal and utterly mindful. It is a principle of practice that the group has consistently taken with the utmost seriousness:

All human activity is interconnected with [the aspiration to justice]! I obviously think that when, in addition, one's profession is to communicate stories, human History, one must make one of two choices: either we are false witnesses, or we are witnesses. The fact of making theatre, of simply being an artist, increases the responsibility tenfold, one hundredfold, one thousand . . . (Ibid: 125)

Despite the many criticisms levelled at Mnouchkine herself, she has been perhaps the most vocal and proactive member of the Soleil in pursuit of the ideologies embraced by the group, and her critiques of alternative modes of practice have never been at the expense of her own 'relentless' work upon her own modes of practice:

Like any group, obviously we experience conflicts and difficulties. Certain members of the company reproached me for monopolising information, only making it available to a few privileged colleagues around me. One of us was chosen specifically to communicate information.

Leftist theatres don't care what's going on in their actors' heads. [...] I find it appalling that after years of activity they continue to engage actors [...] who don't participate at all in the collective enterprise. We haven't yet created a society of equals, but that's what we're aiming for. (Ibid 131)

These statements were made in October 1970 and it is worth noting that the kind of problems of collaboration to which they allude – associated more with administrative, rather than theatrical issues - have gradually passed from the Soleil's public discourse, replaced more and more by a description of a successful mode of collaboration, achieved through a specific focus upon the terms of theatrical practice, rather than the structures of administration. The Soleil have increasingly asserted that it is within the particular terms of their theatre practice that they seek to enact their own 'aspirations to justice'. In doing so, they affirm that the structures of that theatre practice function as expressions of their ideology, and the cooperative, societal unity that they seek is to be found within the work itself. In this way, the Soleil's political project does not function for its members as an idealised, romantic structure; rather it is the lived reality of a consciously constructed working life:

We are often told: 'when we see the performance we sense that you are a group.' We're neither a contemplative community nor a group of 'different' people; our only communal life is in the work itself. We share the same aims, we pursue the same interests, and we've chosen the same kind of life, but this in no way cuts into the private lives of each of us. (Ibid: 31)

## Directing Collaboration

The Soleil's increasing emphasis upon the terms of their *theatrical* practice, rather than administrative functioning, as the basis of their ideological struggle for egalitarian working relationships has been paralleled by the group's absorption and development of the work of Jacques Lecoq. The Soleil's political ideology - that demands practice as a fundament of discourse - has been a remarkably apt theoretical framework within which to explore the fundamentals of Lecoq's theatrical legacy, in which an emphasis on practice and action exists. Mnouchkine has been at the centre of the Soleil's development of Lecoq's theatrical principles and working methods in pursuit of collaboration, not least because as Lecoq's student she has functioned as the group's primary point of access to Lecoq's teaching. However, it is by means of her role as the group's director that her studentship with Lecoq has most influenced the Soleil's work, though not because of the implication of leadership that her title would suggest. Rather, it is the terms and conduct of her directorship, marked indelibly by her time with Lecoq, which have been foundational to the group's working identity and practices.

Remember that the director has already achieved the greatest degree of power he has ever had in history. And our aim is to move beyond that situation by creating a form of theatre where it will be possible for everyone to collaborate without there being directors, technicians and so on, in the old sense. (q. Williams 1999: 1)

Since the inception of the Theatre du Soleil as a 'workers cooperative' the company and Mnouchkine have consistently sought to develop their practice of theatre along the ideological lines of collaboration. Central to their exploration of the apparent paradoxes of differing roles among a company of equals has been their understanding that traditionally assumed power relations – between actor, director, technician and so forth – are not in fact necessitated by the roles *per se*. In this way, for the Soleil, the alternating assignment of roles within the membership have become a function of (rather than a barrier to) collaborative work:

... it's a mistake to say that collective work implies the suppression of the specific place of each individual. I'm not talking about hierarchy, but about *function*. ...

... creation can be collective, and absolutely collective, *precisely* if everyone is in his or her place, ensures maximum creativity in each function, and if there's someone who centralises. This does not imply any hierarchical vision. (Ibid: 57; emphasis added)

Mnouchkine's role as director is in some senses then a function of centralising. However, she is additionally an active presence during the creative processes of those around her; directing improvisation, discussing design, music and scenographic elements and so on. The precise nature of her involvement in these processes is, she suggests, difficult to pin down:

I don't think I've ever managed to explain this well, and anyway it varies from production to production. [...] The director is the only person in a group who doesn't produce anything in the physical sense of the word. (Ibid: 219)

Nevertheless, it is in the extent and nature of Mnouchkine's participation in the processes of the creative professionals around her that has become the basis for an extraordinary and complex understanding of what 'directing' might mean when it does not mean 'instruction' Typical of the Soleil, this understanding has its roots in both political ideology as well as Lecoq's performance practices. The group's left-wing politics, first of all, demand that *all* of the workers in the collective own both the means of production (their own creative processes) and a controlling stake in the product (the final piece). Though ownership of the product is ultimately achievable through administrative channels, co-ownership of the process can only be realised if the practice is collaborative. In the first place, this precludes any notion of the visionary director cajoling a group of individuals into the realisation of an imagined theatrical production – a model of practice that Mnouchkine has repeatedly rejected. 'I think a lot of directors write what they want *before* the actual directing. In my case I write afterwards,' (Ibid: 20) she has said.

However though the ethics of collaboration have been politically motivated for the Soleil, the means by which collaboration has been realised as a theatrical practice and most specifically, an egalitarian practice in which a director is nevertheless present, has been enabled by the group's incorporation of Lecoq's practices. In many ways, Lecoq's terms of practice as a pedagogue have served as a model for Mnouchkine's practice as a director. In the first place, at the core of both practices is a notion that the teacher/ director's most important function is as an informed, critical and appreciative audience. To teach, Lecoq maintained, one must be able to see:

My first response to any performer's improvisation or exercise is to make observations, which are not to be confused with opinions. When a car tyre bursts, that's not an opinion, it's a fact. I observe. Opinions can only be formulated afterwards, based on this observation of reality. Observations are made by the teacher surrounded by students. [...] My job is to articulate the observation ... . But for an observation to be made one must pay close attention to the living process ... .(Lecoq 1997: 17-21)

Mnouchkine's presence in workshops is similarly characterised by an active and attentive gaze. It is the intensity of the gaze – which Josette Feral describes as 'merciless' – that begins to express the process by which Mnouchkine is *involved* in the work that she is observing; she is not merely watching, she is watching *for*:

... she follows all of the improvisations – even the most pitiful ones – with total attention and a great listening power, searching with determination for a sparkle of theatre. If the improvisations go on without genius, Mnouchkine does not show any less respect for an actor's work [...] [H]er judgement is always right, without complacency. Her gaze is

precise, her attention intense. She is in search of theatre in all of the bits of improvisation ... . (q. Williams 1999: 163-164)

Feral notes that Mnouchkine's searching attention can be intimidating for the uninitiated, despite Mnouchkine's respectful treatment of even uninspired work. Mnouchkine's attitude speaks of her own pleasure[29] in her work, which is located not just in the *discovery* of theatrically successful work, but in the process of *searching* for it. The active, attentive watchfulness, is both the foundation and motivation for her exploration of directing:

... 'listening'. I believe that I know how to do that well. I love to listen, and I love to watch the actors – with a passion. I think that's already a way of assisting them. They know that I never tire of listening to them, of watching them ... .(Ibid: 171)

Mnouchkine inherited not only the practice and ability to watch performers with a discriminating gaze, but also a 'love' of the task, from Lecoq. Now a fundamental pillar of her practice, it was certainly an explicit aim of his pedagogy. Lecoq's students, Mnouchkine among them of course, developed this particular and acute mode of *seeing* through the example of the teacher:

The challenge for the teacher is to observe with a practised eye that can distinguish among the different gestures made [...] Gradually, the students themselves begin to acquire subtlety in observing gestural nuances. [...] To train people's ability to look and see is as important as to train creative artists (Lecoq 1997: 54)

In this sense, the school could also be seen as providing an education in seeing. Anyone can suggest a theme for an improvisation; it is far more difficult to comment on it afterwards. (Ibid: 9)

In addition to Mnouchkine's adoption of Lecoq's fundamental attention to the act, the Soleil's workshops are now similarly structured to Lecoq's classes. In the presence of the company, who are expected to be as attentive as Lecoq's students during class[30], Mnouchkine watches and then makes a commentary upon the improvisations and work in front of her. That the work takes place in the attentive presence of others is of critical importance to both practices. For Lecoq, of course, the exercise was a pedagogical one, designed to demonstrate the difference between 'opinion'/ 'observation' and 'reality'/ 'fact':

The critical comments one makes about the work do not attempt to distinguish the good from the bad, but rather to separate what is accurate and true from what is too long or too brief, what is interesting from what is not. [...] All these aesthetic elements can be found in any durable work of art [...] They can be sensed by anyone and an audience always knows perfectly well when something is accurate and true. They may not know why, but it is up to us to know, because we are, after all, specialists. (Ibid: 20)

In the Soleil, the fact that direction takes place in the presence of the whole company is the process by which Mnouchkine's commentary is transformed into what the company has come to term '*les evidences*'. Within their practice, the notion of '*les evidences*' is analogous to Lecoq's notions of 'opinion' and 'fact', which are based on the supposition that everyone watching will agree with comments

made:

While I am observing, I sense the students anticipating what I shall say. My job is to articulate the observation, but it must be shared by all. There is not much point, after seeing an improvisation, in a teacher saying 'that gave me pleasure', or 'I liked that a lot'. Different people will like different things. [...] (ibid: 17-20)

In the Soleil a similar process is supposed to take place; the whole group watch and are able to identify *les evidences* within the work. Mnouchkine's job is to articulate them, but her comments are understood not as personal judgements but as observations upon aspects of the work that are assumed to be 'self evident':

Your phrase 'the 'last word' suggests incessant conflict. In fact, if anyone has to have the last word, it's a bit of a shame. Normally you shouldn't need to, things should be sufficiently self-evident to all that it won't be necessary. [...] if your working practice is based on creation, [...] there's no need for any 'last word'. What we call 'the evidence' is characterised by the fact that it is collectively recognised. (q. Williams 1999: 219)

Though in Lecoq's school, this process is confined to the specific circumstance of the performance workshop, the Soleil and Mnouchkine have developed the notion of *les evidences* as a process and practice that extends beyond the performance work into many of the areas that are assumed to be within the directorial remit. For example, decisions about staging, casting, costume and so forth follow, as much as possible, the line of *les evidences*. Observers have commented on the passage of the term into the Soleil's everyday vernacular:

[...] the term *evidence* [...] Relationships that are established, discoveries, advances – you call these *evidences*, even in everyday exchanges. An actor will say, 'So-and-so found such and such a role, because it was *evident*'. (ibid: 119)

In addition to extending the notion of where the process of establishing *les evidences* might be applicable, the Soleil have developed a complex understanding of what, specifically, might be understood to be 'self-evident' about the judgements and decisions that are made under the auspices of *les evidences*. Most notably, ideas and concepts that are seen as 'self-evidently' correct are not fixed or inherent 'facts' waiting in an objective sense to be 'discovered'. *Les evidences* are created in the moment of their identification and thereafter remain negotiable. Mnouchkine explains:

The performer didn't find it 'because it was *evident*', but everyone saw it and accepted it *because it was evident*. [...]

When we're looking for a scene, when we set out on the adventure of a scene, either we have found the right path all at once, and it's evident, or we lose our way. It seems evident, and a week later, it no longer is at all. [...] (ibid: 119)

The Soleil's complex notion of *les evidences* is fundamental to the group's understanding of how a director functions within a collaborative structure. The pedagogical task of Lecoq's practice 'to articulate the observation' has in the Soleil's work become searching for *les evidences*, itself the primary directorial task of Mnouchkine's practice. Though the group are present and assumed to 'see' with her those issues that she then articulates to the actor(s) working, as director she is a specialist in the process:



[...] the relative freedom of [the director's] qualities of perception and discrimination may be more developed because they don't have the constraints of the 'instrumentalists' (actors with their bodies, scenographers and their structures and materials). (Ibid: 219)

Mnouchkine's qualities of perception and discrimination are certainly regarded by those who work with her as highly developed; Josette Feral, after all, even claimed 'her judgement is always right, without complacency'. Nevertheless, her critical commentary and the decisions that she makes can only be made with the consent of the group. Therefore, though Mnouchkine may indeed appear to be wielding the hierarchical powers traditionally associated with directing (during workshops she appears, for example, to be editing, work, and in addition, her role is at the centre of the collaborative decision-making regarding design, administration, and so forth) within the Soleil, and most pertinently to Mnouchkine herself, these functions are in fact perceived as expressions of collaboration - by reason of their determination via *les evidences*:

One of the central anxieties for the actors is the question of who will perform what. It's normal. [...] It's a moment of tension for the group as a whole and for each individual. When we say 'Georges plays Richard because it's evident that he's the best Richard', it is everyone, and not only me. (Ibid 119)

Moreover, despite the appearance of an individual directing the creative work, the work that *les evidences* generates is understood to be collectively generated. Mnouchkine has suggested that in her function as director, her rejection of the model of the 'visionary director' is not limited to the overall outcome of a piece of work, but extends to the detail of the workshop. In a manner reminiscent of Lecoq she is working to remove from the performance or improvisation what she has called its 'inessential qualities'; that which distracts from or otherwise obscures *les evidences*:

We're guided more by what we don't want than what we want. What we want still remains unclear. Directing is always like that, twenty nine times out of thirty, I don't tell an actor: do this, but rather don't do that. As a director I reject certain things. (Ibid: 20)

Of course, though she may identify *les evidences* they are understood to have been found by the actor in the act and in this way, Mnouchkine can be seen to be guiding, rather than leading improvisation. This notion again bears the hallmarks of Mnouchkine's studentship with Lecoq, who similarly favoured a process in which he eliminated material from the students' work, rather than instructed them to specific actions:

The pedagogical task is to isolate digressive movement without ever indicating what should be done instead. I have to create a state of uncertainty: it's up to the student to discover what the teacher already knows. (Lecoq 1997: 49)

A striking difference between Mnouchkine's director and Lecoq's teacher is that the teacher, of course, is assumed to have knowledge of 'what should be done instead.' Mnouchkine makes no such claim; the exploratory part of the process is conducted in unknown territory for her as much as for her actors. She explained the effect of this shared uncertainty when working, for example, on the creation of a chorus:

[...] one must not forget the months and sometimes years of doubt [...] At such times I think I'm wrong, that we shouldn't work like this [...] that I would do better to say to the chorus: 'line up single-file, enter slowly, stop there, say your text and then sit down.' [...] [...] one must say that it takes real actors, who accept doubt, darkness, the black hole, who accept that the director says: 'I don't know what a chorus is like, I want to know, but I don't. All I know is what it isn't.' (q. Williams 1999: 215)

In this way, the spirit of uncertainty that Lecoq cultivated in his students has been carried through to Mnouchkine's directorship, motivating the collective exploration (and on occasion, intimidating newcomers, as Josette Feral has observed). Through their shared *lack* of pre-supposed knowledge Mnouchkine and the actors work toward the co-creation of a piece of work:

How will it turn out? What will be the level of satisfaction? I have no idea; however I do know that we'll learn other things.

[...]

Every time we prepare a new production, we start again from zero. People say to us, 'That's not true: you know things.' Yes, perhaps we know a little better how to search. (Ibid: 123)

Mnouchkine's insistence that she remains open to the process as much as the actors is a critical part of the Soleil's realisation of a collaborative process that involves, rather than is led by a director. It has its roots in Lecoq's 'state of uncertainty'; a pedagogical technique that the Soleil have developed into a fundamental aspect of their practice. This exploratory spirit was precisely the point of Lecoq's reticence to direct his students; although he did suppose some 'knowledge' on the part of the teacher/ observer, it is clear that this knowledge was understood to be a function of their experience of the role of observer. Any insights articulated by the teacher, he maintained, were created with and through the students:

Rather than handing on a set body of knowledge, it is a question of reaching a common understanding. Master and student must both reach an enhanced level of insight. The master articulates for his students something which he would never have been able to formulate without them [...] (Lecoq 1997: 20)

In the same way, then, Mnouchkine is understood to be searching *with* the actors for *les evidences* of characters, scenes, text, scenography. Philippe Caubere (one of the Soleil's most noted performers) explains:

As I describe all of these discoveries, one might well wonder who made them, how they appeared and how they were conveyed. It would be as wrong to believe that the actors could have found them out by themselves, as to think that Ariane plucked them out of a magic box for us – a box to which, miraculously, she possessed the key. (q. Williams 1999: 73-75)

Caubere's account of this process reveals his conception of the collaborative work as working primarily with Mnouchkine in a manner dependant upon a particular and reciprocal relationship between his work, and her focused and directing commentary upon it. Her role, based upon that extraordinary quality of *attention to the act* that she brings to the studio, is therefore understood to be both collaborative and creative:

At the best of times, it takes us through reciprocal stimulation, amazement, the complicitous mobilisation of memory and intuition; and at the worst, through confrontation, my own inability to translate what she wants to have me perform, her impotence in releasing the spring in me that would lead me to that point. [...]

[... When] contact was re-established, the journey which had been stopped for lack of ideas got underway again, and once more we trembled with the intense pleasure stemming from that acute and violent relationship between us (creating through performance, and her (creating through her gaze). (Ibid: 73-75)

This notion of a creative gaze resonates with Lecoq's sense of the creation of theatrical space through the directed attention of, in this case, a spectator; and it is this gaze that demands the rigorous call to presence of the actor's body within their own thematic attentions. As Caubere attests, for the individual actor in the spotlight of Mnouchkine's relentless attention, her presence may be conceived of as an individual presence. Performers who have worked with and then left the Soleil in acrimony certainly focus their attention on this quality of the direction that she gives. Nevertheless, for Mnouchkine, the work is *always* a collaborative effort; she feels very keenly the presence of the other group members in the space, watching the work alongside her, just as Lecoq sensed his students 'anticipating what I shall say'. *Les evidences* are not her personal testimony, they are 'self-evident'; and every moment of the final performance is, as far as she is concerned, thick with the presence of the whole group. Discussing a particularly strong individual performance, she explains her conception of it as a collective performance:

Orestes' dance is indeed one of the most flamboyant, dazzling and trying moments, for both actor and audience. But it is a collective moment – which doesn't take anything away from [the actor who performed it] Simon, for it's also a great acting moment. It's totally collective because this dance brings everything together [...] At that moment, clearly you only look at Simon, and Simon merits your looking only at him [...] But I think Orestes' dance really is a 'collective work of art'. Otherwise it's a bit like if you said that the one who arrives at Olympia with the flame brought it by himself. [...] *If one accepts that there are 'collective works of art', then it exists at every instant, whether a single actor is on-stage or they all are.* [...] (Ibid: 217)

## **Act/ Action**

The observation and analysis of the actor's work has formed the fundament to both Lecoq's pedagogy and Mnouchkine's collaborative mode of directing. However, in addition to inheriting the manner and terms of analysis, Mnouchkine and the Soleil share Lecoq's and indeed, Copeau's understanding of what specifically constitutes 'the actor's work.' In all three practices, the act itself is understood to be the location, temporal and material, of the construction of theatrical realities. For the Soleil, this is expressed in their notion of the actors' bodies as *authoring* theatrical space, *l'écriture corporelle*:

We have authors, we are all authors [...] I do not see why one only has the right to be

called an author if one has a pen. An improvising actor is an author in the broadest sense of the term [...] (q. Williams 1999: 65)

Though Mnouchkine made these comments in specific reference to 1789 – a collectively devised piece – the notion of the actors' authorship of a performance is maintained even in the presence of a text written by a *non*-actor author. In this way, the bodies of the Soleil's actors have come to displace the logocentric authority of text and author. Helene Cixous, who has written with and for the company, describes this process from her perspective as writer:

[...] You write the play, which is something quite personal and subjective, it's your own emotions. And then when it's performed, it becomes the work of others. This is different. [...] There's a new kind of freedom in the new interpretation. When my feelings change, I'm not the writer any more. [...] I don't care any more about what I've written, what I really enjoy is the work of the actors.

[...] I write so much on the actors because I know they have to take the same route that I take as a playwright. [...] with the actors I can trace the very strange and deep itinerary they follow, because it's my own, except that they don't write. They write with their bodies. (ibid: 155)

Concurrent with the notion of *l'écriture corporelle*, the work of the actor in the Soleil is specifically understood to be a physical, bodied work; and the task of acting is the task of 'transposing' (a term that they inherited from Lecoq) the notional structures of characters, events and ideas into embodied materiality – theatrical signs:

We are trying to create a theatre of representation in which each gesture, each word, each intonation has its own importance and is a sign that is immediately perceptible by the spectator. (ibid: 50)

Such a detailed attention to movement entails a similarly detailed attention to physical technique – an aspect of practice that the Soleil have inherited through Lecoq. In addition, the Soleil continue to exploit many of the techniques that Lecoq employed that were intended to bring his students' attention to the bodily, gestural detail of the acting task – mask work, an interest in and use of the techniques of the *commedia* as well as non-Western theatre techniques such as *Noh* and Balinese dance, for example, are present in both practices. However, where for Lecoq, these techniques functioned largely as pedagogical exercises, the Soleil have appropriated them for use in their public performances. This is related to the fact that the group have no separate 'training' phase of the work; *all* of the work that the actors undertake is understood to be a form of what Mnouchkine has repeatedly referred to as an 'apprenticeship' to the theatrical task, whilst simultaneously directed toward specific performance projects. [31] However, the Soleil's use of performance techniques is additionally in search of an alternative mode of interacting with social 'realities':

[...] theatrical forms enable us to treat contemporary reality as we want – without it becoming derisory, caricatural, psychological of course, parodic, or a sort of tract and placard, etc (ibid: 50)

The apprenticeship of actors in the Soleil similarly makes use of many key theoretical perspectives on the task of the acting. The foundational emphasis on the body is coupled in both practices with an explicit rejection of any aspect deemed not to fit within the analytical parameters of the actions of the body. This rejection begins with what both the Soleil and Lecoq refer to as 'psychological' acting. In Lecoq's

work, this term applied to performance that draws its creative source and authority from the individual narration of experience, rather than the movements of the body and the actors' subsequent appearance in theatrical space:

In my method of teaching I have always given priority to the external world over inner experience. [...] It is more important to observe how beings and objects move, and how they find a reflection in us. [...] I do not search for deep sources of creativity in psychological memories [...] Lecoq (1997: 17)

In Lecoq's practice, this led to his guiding his students to analyse theatrical situations and problems in terms of their material structures – rhythm, spatial configuration, movement – which he called 'the structures of play':

After we have worked through [a] theme once, we return to a stripped-down version of the exercise. Ignoring its anecdotal interest, we turn the theme inside out in order to discover the motor which drives it. [...]

Little by little, the theme is rediscovered by accumulation, but only in its structure. There is no imagery or background given in advance, simply a dramatic motor which can be taken apart and analysed. [...] Reduced to this motor, psychological themes lose their anecdotal elements and reach a status of heightened play. (ibid: 33-34)

This emphasis on the material structures of theatrical 'play' rather than the psychologically determined narrative was in pursuit of a precision in analysis that would equally lead to precisely judged performances. Lecoq's suggestion, therefore, was that appearance in theatrical space is a material, observable appearance; any aspect of the work that remained solely in the realm of 'inner experience' could only distract students from observing with clarity that which appeared before them. Describing exercises in which the students improvised scenes of departure, he explained:

Here the motor is not linked to a particular context or character [...and] one can reach the underlying dynamics of the situation. This farewell is not an idea, it is a phenomenon which can be observed with almost scientific precision. (Ibid 40-41)

In the Soleil, this rejection of 'psychological' acting has become almost a point of principle. Unlike Lecoq's carefully measured statements of 'preference,' the Soleil have repeatedly and wholeheartedly declared their belief that 'psychological acting' is not so much an alternative approach; it is an inferior one:

In the Theatre du Soleil, psychology has negative connotations; 'psychological' acting is a criticism. It means a performance does not reach truth; it is slow, complicated, narcissistic.

Contrary to what we believe, psychology does not pull toward the interior, but toward the interior mask. (q. Williams 1999: 172)

In rejecting 'psychological acting', however, the Soleil do not deny the existence of 'a psychology' that could be associated with actors and characters, nor the role that individual psychologies have in either theatrical performances or events. Rather, they critique the notion that individual psychology (Lecoq's 'inner experience') is an inherently authoritative and stable reference from which to start a theatrical analysis of the problems of acting. Philippe Caubere explains:

The psychological characteristics could only be of use to me if I transposed them into theatrical signs. On the level of reality, they no longer meant anything. (ibid: 71)

However, concordant with the Soleil's political identity is a keen awareness that the actor's appearance in theatrical space is at once a significant appearance in *social* space. In this way, the act of transposition that Caubere describes is not contained wholly in theatrical space and the Soleil's rejection of 'psychological acting' has become a rejection of a psychological, narrative driven analysis of the actions not only of the actor in the act, but also of the character in the play, and ultimately, events in the world:

We do not talk of psychology, but rather of the characters' souls. But they still have emotions, sensations; they are cold, hungry, proud, they want power, they don't want it, they're stubborn. Each one of them has their own way of being, their own world. Nicholas Boileau said, 'The truth is not always verisimilitude' – and verisimilitude is not necessarily true. This can be understood precisely in a historical play: that is, what happens, happens. These characters experienced it, oriented it, or made it happen. It was with their 'psychology' as you say, that the events took place.

But, and there's no question about it, the theatre is not supposed to represent psychology but *passions*- which is something totally different. Theatre's role is to represent the soul's different emotional states, and those of the mind, the world, history. (ibid 172)

Mnouchkine's statement that 'what happens, happens' begins to describe the way in which the shared, body focused approach to the problem of performing is the means by which the moving, acting body of the actor grounds and gives expression to the Soleil's political ideologies. 'What happens' of course - in a theatrical performance but also in 'history' - are events that are given material appearance *by reason of being enacted*. For the Soleil, then, the body of the actor not only functions, as in Lecoq's work, as the site upon which performance realities are constructed, but through its simultaneous appearance in social space the body both authors and is authored by social reality. As such, in the Soleil's practice the boundaries between theatre space and social space are blurred, with the body of the actor serving as the location and means for their unification. Sarah Bryant-Bertail, (discussing *Les Atrides* in particular), describes this process by which the actor's bodies serve as a point of unity for theatrical and social realities:

The historical responsibility taken on by Mnouchkine is an elucidation through theatrical means, above all that of *l'écriture corporelle*, or writing by the actors' bodies, of the fateful intersection between the discourses [...] setting forth power relations that remain in force [...] (ibid: 179)

The writing of theatre by the bodily movement of actors is in the first place a perspective

upon the problems of performance for the actor that the Soleil inherited from the legacies of Lecoq and Copeau. However, the company have extended this notion in their treatment of theatre as a mode of history, and the actions of bodies have become the basis upon which they make their analysis of not only acting, but also of social history. In this way, where Lecoq suggested that individual acting tasks 'are not an idea, but a phenomenon which can be observed' Mnouchkine and the Soleil have come to understand both the structures of performance and the analysis of history not as *ideas*, but as phenomena – actions taken by individuals – that can be observed:

The danger is universality, anonymity. I think that a mass event, such as a demonstration, can only be shown through individuals. The question we ask ourselves is how to perform the masses. [...]

[...] Processes are only visible through behaviour. [...] facts and personalities are what's important, not abstractions. (Ibid: 63)

Lecoq's notion that the movements of the body are the site and resource for theatrical meaning has therefore been extended in the Soleil's practice to an understanding of action as the basis for social analysis. When researching *L'Age d'Or*, for example, the Soleil's questions to the people they interviewed focused very specifically not on the *idea* that those individuals had of an event or 'phenomenon' (its psychological, anecdotal quality) but on the phenomenon itself:

[...] we have tried to get groups of workers from particular factories [...] to come tell us not what we already know about them [...] but what we don't know. [...] For the first hour, at the beginning, the people we meet give *general opinion*. [...] So after a while, we say: Yes, we know all that [...] But what we want to know is the other side of all of this. Repression with a capital R doesn't exist; what does exist is one person repressing another. *How does that happen? how is it manifested?* [...] (Ibid: 54; emphasis added)

The function of the Soleil's reflective (re)enactment of theatre/ history has similarly been grounded and informed by the focal attention to the body that underpinned Lecoq's practice. In his pedagogy, mime was a fundamental component of the physical education of the body and the *notion* of mime was fundamental to any creative act:

To mime is a fundamental action, the foundation of dramatic creation, not only for the actor, but also for writing and for performance. For me, mime is central to theatre: being able to play at being someone else and to summon illusory presences constitutes the very body of theatre. [...]

To mime is literally to embody and therefore to understand. [...] The action of miming becomes a form of knowledge. (Lecoq 1997: 22)

In the Soleil, this idea of understanding through embodiment is taken beyond the isolation of the actor and the act. The small personal horizons of theatrical practice that Lecoq dealt with are extended beyond the individual performer interacting with the immediate theatrical space, into the 'social realities' and context of the performance space itself. In this way, the Soleil's performers are embodying knowledges that are at once theatrical and social, and their performative enactments are offered as points of access to the insights that would otherwise remain impregnable:

[...] social reality [...] seems to us like a mosaic of worlds that are unequal and impermeable between themselves and whose workings are concealed from us. To describe it, to make its motivating forces understood, we chose to recreate it with the means of theatre.

[...] We want to reinvent rules of acting which uncover everyday reality, showing it to be not familiar and immutable, but surprising and transformable. We are trying to create a theatre of representation in which each gesture, each word, each intonation has its own importance, and is a sign that is immediately perceptible by the spectator.

[...] Our goal is a theatre that is directly engaged with social reality, not a simple report, but an encouragement to change the conditions in which we live. We want to recount our History to take it forward – if this can be the role of theatre. (q. Williams 1999: 50)

Written in 1975 as a 'statement of intent' this text in many ways encapsulates the Soleil's project, which has been characterised by a conception of the theatre as a tool and context for social analysis. The Soleil's work posits a resultant encounter between the individual and history that is made manifest and accessible to the spectator through inscriptions written in space by the authoring body of the actor. In this way, the political identity for which the company are famed is grounded in a notion of theatre in which the embodiment of the actor is both resource and source of theatrical meaning. Through their ideological of theatrical techniques and principles, the Soleil's work adds a reflective layer of social and contextual relevance to Copeau's 1930 assertion: 'No matter how we approach the problem of theatre, we come back to the problem of the actor as the instrument and perfect realiser of a dramatic idea'. (q. Rudlin and Paul 1990: 81)



[sic]

*Any articulation of the messiness, the contingencies, the uncertainties, and of this failure to know everything somehow resonates productively and truthfully [...] with the construction of theatre. Too often the telling of how a particular piece of performance was made and performed suggests a confident and seamless linearity to the process....*  
Murray and Keefe 2007: 75

Murray and Keefe, when writing about the 'writing about' of (physical) theatre practice draw attention to the 'omissions' of the 'experiences of chance, coincidence and intuition: the rows, disputes, sulking, exhaustion, boredom, mistakes, failures, misunderstandings and collapses of concentration and focus [...] from performance history in countless conference papers, lectures to students, essays and books such as this.' (2007a: 75) The impetus for this study – a desire to contextualise cognise and account for an encounter with my own corporeality in theatre practice – was a prolonged event whose disorder and lack of narrative logic seemed at times to threaten many of the fundamental narratives of my being-in-relation to the world. As such, the attempt to install those experiences within the frameworks of discourse suggested to me that such an undertaking would be a means of *restoring* order. Therefore, that this process has incurred several seismic shifts of its own was as astonishing and destabilising as those original earthquakes in the studio. Rethinking thinking-in-relation-to-body in front of a computer screen has turned out to be as shattering and extraordinary an experience as rethinking body-in-relation-to-thought was as an undergraduate in the rehearsal space. I am thus moved, once more, to disavow the orderliness of the narrative in which I present that experience and its consequences. The particular orderliness of this narrative has been subject to two competing sense of coherences that have the qualities, once more, of bodies/texts, practices/discourses, *res cogitas /res extensa*. In writing an account there is a particular kind of 'truth claim' implicit in the orderliness and structure of the text, which connotes a coherence of experience and thought. This, however, is an effect of (academic) discourse, whose demand for logic is at odds with its 'truth claim' of an orderliness in experience; the 'seamless linearity' of the such texts belies 'the messiness, the contingencies, the uncertainties' of the processes of discourse. What follows is an attempt to acknowledge the contingencies of my own process; but it is also an attempt to embrace the ordering effects of (academic) discourse.

However, even as I head towards a process of embracing the outcomes of processing the work of the study in the terms of an academic account, it is appropriate to point to those developments in my thinking and practice that have accompanied this study. I hesitate to claim a causal relationship partially as a mark of the development in my approach to discourse/ practice; and partially because this result is an outcome not of the successful 'discovery' of a means of relating the body/ practice to the word/ discourse, but because the attempt to do so within the terms that I conceived at the beginning of this work was bound, in some senses, to fail. Reflecting back to the position that I began working from, and its relationship with the inspiration for this study, I retrospectively can recognise that I had harboured an impulse to claim an authority for the body that was somehow final in the way that I wished to refute for logos. That I would no longer seek to do so is a partial recognition of the limitations the enquiry that I set out to conduct

### **Movement**

"The end of history? That amuses me. Saying this one risks the loss of language and the loss of the possibility of thinking. One risks becoming more and more passive, able to be bought and sold... The theatre is doubtless the most fragile of the arts... but the theatre keeps reminding us of the possibility to collectively seek the histories of people and to tell them... The contradictions, the battles of power and the split in ourselves will always exist. I think that the theatre best tells us of the enemy within ourselves. Yes, theatre is a grain of sand in the works."

Ariane Mnouchkine q. Williams 1999: x

This statement of Mnouchkine's has been with me since the beginning of this work. Written in part across the back of *The Theatre Du Soleil Sourcebook*, and used as Williams to contextualise this edited archive of the Soleil, it was amongst the first that I picked up and browsed in the first flush of determination to 'solve' the problem of bodies and discourses. I recall it here now, because in tracing evolution and adaptations of the relational synchronicities between Mnouchkine's statement and my own project offers a means by which I can trace the development of my thinking; which has moved significantly since my search began.

The first time that I read this statement in the context of my study, I was both inspired and concerned by what it seemed to suggest. I felt its tenor of resistance to be in absolute sympathy with my own sense of working in defiance of a set of traditions and processes which seemed to threaten to consume – through demanding a mastery of my unruly body – my own capacities for response. At that time, I considered the 'enemy within ourselves' that Mnouchkine spoke of clearly to be the body in the rehearsal room, refusing to quietly accommodate the projects of my cognised responses to theatre and text. That Mnouchkine seemed to be championing this resistance seemed both affirmative of my experience and a signal that I had indeed found a discourse which would not efface but embrace embodiment as the core value of theatre making.

At the same time, I was alarmed by notions of 'telling' and of 'history'; both ideas were firmly ensconced, as far as I was concerned, within the project of logos. I had no sense of *History* as a material process constituting the lived present, as Mnouchkine's materialist politics would suggest, and instead read the word 'history' as coming out of a *belief* in the authority of logos and the written narratives of history. That Mnouchkine seemed to be motivated to refute the 'death of history' as the 'loss of potential thinking' suggested to me that she was aligned with the Cartesian refusal to appreciate the embodiment of thinking, and of language. Moreover, I was convinced not only that the body was the site that facilitated language, meaning giving and identity; I was as convinced that the body was the totality of meaning giving and identity and saw language arising, mono-directionally, from that. In the midst of the disruption of the logocentric project for myself, I initially was unable to recognise the role of language in marking the limits – and potentials – of meaning and identity.

I point to this because it itself points to the context in which I formulated the terms of this study, which inevitably has led to a set of limitations around the discussion itself. Before considering these limitations I can offer from my practice a clear example of my personal movement. In my working life I am a student and a teacher of Praying Mantis Kung Fu; a student and a teacher of critical theory; and a student of Capoeira. The systematic entailments of those three roles are in at times diametric opposition from one another across a number of different dimensions. For example, the pedagogical structures in Kung Fu sit antagonistically with the principles that inform teaching in the academy – in one success is predicated on students' willingness to ask questions and in the other, progress is actively impeded if one asks questions (especially if they are *answered*) because such a strategy precludes an active and whole engagement with the process of *doing*. The philosophical foundations of Capoeira are most especially invested in individual freedom and self-expression, where Kung Fu demands a rigorous attention to form. Notions of student-teacher/ student-form/ and student-practice vary enormously across the disciplines. In these and other ways, the discourses of all three practices seem to make truth claims about their individual perspectives on the processes of learning, performing, doing, and practice (though the post-modern Academy must, as a matter of principle, acknowledge the cultural contingencies of its position). The simultaneous *incorporation* of three such competing discourses is almost inconceivable in the terms of thought and practice in which I began this study. This observation signals points to the relative successes and failures in the context of this work which I attempt to consider below.

### ***Limits/limitations*** .

A core limitation with this project has been a problem of approach. Fundamentally, I had conceived of myself and my position within *physical theatre* as an active resistance; and the model of thought that I applied to this resistance was the oppositional, hierarchical duality that I considered myself to be dismantling. This was in some ways a failure on my part to recognise that it was not simply the *content* of

mind/body dualism which I needed to supersede but its conceptual structuring within my own approaches to thought. There was a degree to which I recognised this as a danger – indeed Zarrilli is moved to warn his students not to simply re-inscribe duality from its oppositional point of view (Zarrilli 1995: 2-8). The limit of this recognition, though, was that in attempting to rediscover the body as an object of discourse I did not fully account for the need to reconsider the structure of the object – its relationship in systems of *differance* – which formed a constituent part of its significations.

On the corollary, the accounts for practice in which I sought an object/ system relation for the body, and within which I had hoped that I might recognise my own sometimes troubled experience of the body-in-practice, were not constructed with such a clear sense of distinct modalities of being-in-performance (practice *or* theory; emotion *or* reason; body *or* word). In this way, there was no possibility of discovering a solution for the problem of bringing the body into discourses hidden somewhere within the accounts of Copeau, Lecoq and Mnouchkine - because it is the answer to a question that those practices and discourses have not asked. Precisely: there is no need for such practice to solve a problem it does not recognise. There is a systematic relation between the appearance of the body as a problem in Anglo-Saxon theatre discourse, through which it becomes a site of resistance, and its position in French conceptual structuring which positions the practices of Lecoq, Mnouchkine and Copeau squarely within French contemporary theatre orthodoxy, even as, for example, Mnouchkine apparently conspires to offer cultural resistances to any number of projects[32].

However, reflecting on the refusal of these discourses to render answers to problems that never been asked produces perspectives which do not solve the problem as I had conceived it, so much as point - perhaps more usefully – to the limitations of thinking which produced my question – my demand for *an* authority, a means of accounting – systematically – for theatre making in all its fleshy livedness. In the same way that I had experienced my body as *refusing*, despite my best efforts, the paradigmatic demands of the 'uniquely literal' (Harvie, 2005:14) British theatre tradition, I found French theatre discourse refusing the paradigmatic demands of a uniquely authoritative 'body'. Noting the refusal in both instances, one is moved to conclude that it is the paradigmatic demands – rather than posited paradigm – that produces the problem.

The systematic entailments of searching for 'an' account, asking a specific set of practices and discourses to speak to a paradigmatic problem arising in an alternative sign-system, include the problem that such a demand effaces the (arbitrarily arising) points of divergence between the conceptual systems in question. At the beginning of this study, one aspect of the exploration that I proposed to conduct which I conceived of as coming under the rubric of 'chance, coincidence and intuition' was the choice to explore the work of practitioners who primarily work or worked in France. In the first place, I did not see the location of the practices of Copeau, Lecoq and Mnouchkine as (a) specifically French and (b) substantially different than my own. Such an observation reveals the homogenising dangers of linguistic frameworks; without conscious attention, the fact of translation (from French into English) remained, in the words of Karen Juers-Munby, 'invisible':

Translation is a curious activity of moving from one 'way of meaning' to another – with inevitable gains and losses. The translation itself tends to become 'invisible', not unlike the performance dimension in a Naturalist play. (2006: 15)

If, following Pavis, we consider that 'culture is system of significations which allows a society or group to understand itself in its relationships with the world' (1996: 2) then the translation of material from one system of signs into another is not a transparent act, much as Juers-Munby indicates when she hints at the 'gains and losses' of the activity of translation. If the product of discourse is related to its structure, then owing to the structural differences in the systems of signification inevitably produce evasions, omissions and inadvertent additions. On the corollary, if we are to grant that translation is a potentially (if serendipitously) meaningful act, then we also must grant the potential significance of the shared linguistic

inheritance of the three practitioners in question.

That such significances are not discussed as a matter of course in part reflects the way in which explorations of these practices have been heretofore conducted. In the existing English language discussions of Copeau, Mnouchkine and Lecoq, the specificity of their cultural background is commented upon in a largely fragmentary and un-associated way. For example there are some commentaries which situate certain aspects of Mnouchkine's work within the revolutionary contexts of 1960s France [33] or discuss the ethics of Copeau's acceptance of the directorship of the national *Comedie-Francaise* [34]. There is even a spirited, if wayward, attempt to claim *Resistance* status for Jacques Lecoq, following on from his 'joke' that he helped 'de-Nazify' Germany by teaching some German students 'to loosen up' when lifting their arms[35]. Additionally, there are ample references to the inheritance of *theatrical* traditions – discussions of the revival of the *Commedia*, for example, and the notion of a politically engaged popular theatre. However, because it is usual to consider practitioners predominantly in isolation, referring to their contemporaries, progenitors and inheritors as influences, rather than in the context of a continuous line of a cultural discourse, the dominance and influence of these French theatrical performance practitioners is usually located in the particular brilliance of individuals involved in the practices.

I would here like to question this assumption. To do so is in part to claim a kind of victory for the ordering-ness of narrative; it is the very demands for structure within the parameters of an account such as this that produces or suggests the possibility that the work be considered in this way. However, the chancing and unruly nature of lived experience played its role; I did not make my selection with an awareness of all of the potential readings and reconfiguring that would arise from considering their work from this perspective of their collectively.

However, the narrative strategy of drawing together Mnouchkine, Lecoq and Copeau through their shared linguistic/ cultural heritage and its entailments is both a temptation of constructing a narrative and its possible downfall. To observe that all three live(d) and practice(d) theatrical production primarily in France/ French is only value neutral so long as I resist the suggestive invitations of narrative logic and order to construct this as any kind of definitional identity or significant quality. To make such a statement, with its implicit claims for coherent national or cultural identity can be highly problematic in current academic climates. To speak of a cultural context in the terms of its differences and similarities from one's own is politicised act, because such differences appear through the lens of socially, economically and historically produced perspectives.

Though undoubtedly a necessary practice, contemporary, postmodern critical reflexes have conspired to make the possibility of commentaries 'on,' 'about,' or, in the case of theatre 'using' a *specific* culture's discourses a potentially incendiary act. If a cultural product such as theatre, or discourses 'about' theatre attempts to describe – or more accurately, in their making processes use a description of – another culture, the very audacity of the attempt in such politically sensitive times almost inevitably frustrates engagement with the discoursing object (the performance/ this essay) as scholars rush instead to comment on the potentially suspect politics of production. David Williams, in his work around both Mnouchkine and others working in France has been frustrated by exactly this process of applying an oppositional dualistic structure to intercultural debate. He offers by way of strategy, a drawn attention to the site of performance – the specificity of the moment at which the tensions of competing discourses must find their (momentary and contingent) resolution:

... some theatre scholars seemed intent on overlooking the embodied *detail* of live events and their dynamics, or on rehearsing discourses of embodiment that seemed to suggest they had left their bodies behind in some evolutionary leap to an idealist domain of thought detached from phenomenal events and lived experience. Too often the detail of the messy and serendipitous

histories of exchanges of cultural practices, and the complexities of circuits and flows, were overlooked or re-written in terms of a narrative of appropriative 'one-way-traffic'. ( Murray and Keefe 2007b: 242)

It is my intention here to fill in some of the overlooked details that Williams laments, but to do so I must edge cautiously towards the contested notion of a coherent - if not necessarily stable - cultural identity. However, I do so with an eye to *differance* working as a critical strategy through which self-consciously we might construct metaphoric/ linguistic structures that not so much account for that which cannot fully be brought to language but instead nod to the contingencies of the construction. One methodologically 'useful metaphor' is might be a notion of French-ness; which if, following Barthes one were tempted to neologisms, might also be called *Gallicity*:

Now what I need most often is ephemeral concepts, in connection with limited contingencies: neologism is then inevitable. China is one thing, the idea which a French petit-bourgeois could have of it not so long ago is another: for this peculiar mixture of bells, rickshaws and opium-dens, no other word possible but *Sininess*. Unlovely? One should at least get some consolation from the fact that conceptual neologisms are never arbitrary: they are built according to a highly sensible proportional rule. (Barthes 1957: 121).

Such a notion is not intended to speak for or about some essential or even referentially stable aspect of being *of* or *from* France. Instead, it can be employed as an imaginary and self-consciously constructed sign, which does not claim to speak for 'the French' or any Other. Instead, it is an attempt to imagine *what is not* within its own system of significations and allow the imaginative interaction with the very possibility of alternative systems invite and suggest alternative structures of thought. It is not to speak about France that I summon the notion of differing cultural contexts. In asking in what way notions of the body enter 'French' theatrical discourse, I am, in another way of speaking, asking what aspects of UK discourse have blocked the use of the body as a primary organising metaphor for theatrical discourse. It seems especially pressing to consider alternative structures offered by *Gallicity* given that the practitioners whose work I have explored are without doubt associated, in UK terminology, within the trope of the 'physical theatres' and yet within their own cultural context can not be named as such – primarily because a notion of a 'physical theatre' genealogy has not been an organising category in French discourse.

## **Ordering and accounting**

When first I began this enquiry, I posed a fundamental question of the accounts that I had chosen to explore; by what means can the body enter accounts about theatre? I was aware at that time that the very possibility of posing such a question signalled the partiality of the body's representation in language; and a consideration of the grounded embodiment of language itself revealed the oblique complexity of that relation.

[W]e have regularly come up against difficulties and shortcomings in the strategies to describe and delineate ... physical practices... [W]e feel there is no closure or resolution to this state of affairs, rather an uneasy preparedness to live with such messiness and uncertainty....  
(Murray and Keefe 2007a: 74)

When first I began working on this study, I was particularly engaged and concerned by the resistance of the/a/my body to accounts. I was fully invested with a sense of suspicion about the capacity of language to give useful accounts of bodies and theatre practices, a position which finds ample support in the discipline as a whole. Murray and Keefe (ibid) ask: "How 'accurate' can such accounts be, however assiduously researched and observed? [...] How can the academic writer's analytical toolkit help – or hinder – the *knowing* of the work, the practice and the performance?" I had very much assumed that the 'academic

toolkit' might be employed to communicate an already-existent *knowing*, (a bodily knowing) and that any difficulties in this would be located in the specific shortcomings of language. It is with a certain kind of painful delight, then, that as I come to consider the work of Mnouchkine, Lecoq and Copeau in the light of my concerns about bringing the body into discourse, I recognise that some of the effacements that produce the partial, contestable and problematic body in discourse are my own effacements *of* – rather than inherent qualities in – certain constructions of language.

Noting this has been an aspect of bringing to consciousness the entrenchment of my own thinking in dualistic structures. In the first place, my assumptions further reveal the either/ or condition in relation to body/ or language as a source of 'realisation'. Since language and conceptual structures work systematically rather than discreetly, however, it is unsurprising that this entrenchment has produced further contingencies which I seek here to address. However, it also reveals the productive possibilities of embracing the orderliness of narratives and discourse, as such reconsiderations, prompted and directed towards languages deployed about and in theatre practice, nevertheless prompt and facilitate new possibilities and configurations of the/my body in theatre practice.

A significant contingency in the formulation of conclusions about this has been in the reconfiguration of the modalities in which I see the question operating. My hopeful intention had been to find a way of bringing 'the body' into account; to apprehend more fully (I was prepared to concede the impossibility of wholly) the relationship between practice/ and its account/; bodies/ language; action / thought. It has been helpful, first of all, to see the relationship between bodies-in-practice and the languages- of-accounts as a *discursive* relation; that is, the relationship between practice and its accounts is a relationship between discourses. The temptation is then to assume that there is a stable *locus* of that relationship which somehow seeks expression in both discourses. Performance, because of its constitution in the combination of both languages and bodies (as well as other systems of signification), suggests itself as a potential site for such a locus. In the practice of theatre, bodies and languages are brought together to constitute the particular system of signification or discourse that is performance. As a result of its heterogeneous constitution, it is a system of signification in which the paradoxes and conflicts, as well as the synchronicities, between its component discourses, potentially can be reified or undermined. Using this formulation, the body, and language can be seen as cultural systems of signification in themselves; whose borders with other such systems need not necessarily overlap along stable or mutually reinforcing lines. The internal and relational synchronicity and correspondence between them is therefore complex, contingent and fundamentally unstable as each system or its adherents evolves and adapts, loses favour and becomes fashionable.

Spilled butter

**Vou dizer a meu senhor**  
Que a manteiga derramou  
*I will tell my master*  
That the butter spilled

Linguistic theories widely and readily acknowledge the relational and contextual contingencies the meanings generated by words; the process of examining the contextual, relational meanings is a common linguistic procedure.[36] For example, the song above is a traditional Capoeira coro, sang during the roda while two capoeiristas play their game. Singing continues throughout all of the games and is used to maintain the energy of the roda but also, at times, to comment on the game. A *manteiga derramou* can be used in this way; if a capoeirista has been tripped the cantor (usually a senior capoeirista) can use the song to suggest that the trip was a lucky one; alternatively the suggestion can be that the fallen capoeirista should have a good excuse to have been tripped in this manner or by someone so young. That is to say, the song can be understood in different ways in different contexts and a knowledge of Brazilian Portuguese will not necessarily grant access to the multiple possible meanings that it can have. Instead a knowledge of the game of capoeira, its etiquette and even a knowledge of the individual players is necessary to understand for whom 'the butter has spilled'

This is a salient consideration when we approach the appearance or otherwise of the body in the constituent discourses that have conspired to a notion of physical theatre in British contexts. However, there are further details that I wish to bring attention to here which are details of language that evade even internal systemic meaning structures at play in such examples. They are also details which in the grand scheme of this narrative are only tiny points of attention, themselves only tangentially related to the subjects of the body, and of theatre, and of language. Nevertheless they signal, if obliquely, towards a multiple potential points of divergence and conceptual mismatch between systems of signification, which can be overlooked in the rush to make what Williams has called an 'evolutionary leap into an idealist domain of thought'. Such leaps are of too great a scale to consider these diminutive details because the leaps are engaged in attempts to transverse the large scale distances of Howie's reactionary 'desire for a reassuring narrative of genealogy' or in the refutation of such agendas through Williams' 'narrative[s] of appropriative 'one-way traffic'. And yet they are necessarily considered contingencies of discussions conducted across Juers-Munby's 'usually invisible' linguistic borders. T.P Kasulis, in his translator's note to *The Body* reminds us:

Human understanding uses categories and analysis. To understand a phenomenon, we superimpose a conceptual grid by which we relate it to the known and define what must be investigated further. But the grid itself always conceals a bit of reality. (YUASA and Kasulis 1987: 1)

Though it may not be possible to consider the whole of either of the linguistic/ conceptual grids of *Gallic* discourse, a consideration of some of the areas in which different aspects of 'the thing described' are emphasised or obscured is a potential site for analysis which does not depend upon the application of that problematic structure of dualism.

It is necessary, first of all, to consider the manners in which the translation of words might not be enough to transpose the constituent systematic relationships which vitally inspire the author. In his article *How to Say What to See in French*, Thomas J. Cox describes French as an 'aspectual language permeated by a type of visualization not readily grasped by learners whose first languages are not similarly organised.' (1994: 204) This is in contrast to English, which he describes as a 'tense language,' and accounts for the difficulty Anglophone speakers have in selecting the appropriate tense or aspect when attempting to describe events, differentiated by French speakers between those which are complete; and those which are completed. Tracing the conceptual construction of such linguistic structures, he concludes that '[e]ven when English speakers learn to say what the French say, they may not really see what they are saying'. (ibid: 208). We must therefore acknowledge that systems of signification do not only potentially regard their objects differently, but also construct the whole means by which they regard them in contrasting ways. In the context of translation, then, it may be necessary to extend Bathes' metaphor: it is not only that the death of the author occurs, but is caused by the translator whose own subsequent demise is the consequence of the birth of the reader - who had in any case mistaken the victim for someone else. Given such multiple contingencies of translation, what kind of sense can we make of cross-bordered discourses?

The contingencies of the word 'body' - as well as its corporeal relation to discourse - is acknowledged in *Gallic* contexts more readily than in British. In a discussion of his work on text with his students, Jacques Lecoq describes an exercise in which he asks the students to search for 'the body of words' as part of the development of what he describes as 'the universal poetic awareness' (1997: 47-50). It is clear when he does so that though he is employing what in translation is critically inflammable terminology, (which seems problematically to be suggesting a *definitive* bodily relationship to words within a referentially stable *universe*,) he is speaking with an acute awareness of the contingencies of such ideas.

According to the language being used, words will not all have the same relation to the body. ... With the word '*prendre*' {to take}, for example, the French students embody the thing they are

taking, closing their arms around the upper part of their bodies. They are not trying to take this or that object, but to take in a general way, to take everything, to take themselves. Germans, with '*Ich nehme*', pick something up. The English, with 'I take', snatch. Of course, this raises the problem of translating ...

In French *le beurre* is already spread, whereas in English 'butter' is always in a packet. In its way of naming, each language picks out a particular element ... (ibid:50- 51)

In a similar fashion, we might trace out the effects of such a contingent understanding of the body when considering other aspects of French (*Gallic*) discourse. The notion of *l'écriture corporelle*, for example, when removed from the problematic dichotomy of body/ logic and simultaneously relieved of its essentialising qualities through a recognition of the fundamental relational contingencies of the bodies that write. Such an invitation is reinforced when we consider that French constructs an apparently arbitrary (Moorjani 1996 679-680) list of objects as masculine, feminine or neutral; in the face of which Anglophone speakers are reminded of the potential for even the most naturalised of categories as constructed through language.

In addition, notions of body, within French discourse, for example, are nourished by an intellectual tradition which argues extensively – via Foucault, Bordieu and de Certeau, for example, that the body and its activities *are* culture, rather than internally coherent and discreet natural objects operating within cultures:

The modelling of the body produces a knowledge of the individual, the apprenticeship of the techniques induces modes of behaviour and the acquisition of skills is inextricably linked with the establishment of power relations.... [D]isciplinary technique exercised upon the body [has] a double effect: a 'soul' to be known and a subjection to be maintained... (Foucault 1977: 294-295)

The notion of a socially constructed body is much less clearly accepted in the dominant narratives of Anglo-American culture. Though it is an increasingly acceptable argument in academic discourse (see for example in Reinelt and Roach) it is a position that specifically must be argued for *before* a discourse founded on such assumptions can begin. This effect finds its expression in the UK practice of labelling of theatres consciously engaging the embodiments of the form as 'physical theatre'; a trope that signals its sympathies with the *Gallic* body even if at times it lacks the language to describe the basis of this sympathy.

It is also notable that such a notion of body lends itself to a materialist analysis – and we most readily see this as the socially engaged aesthetic of Mnouchkine's *Theatre du Soleil*. Mnouchkine herself has famously declared that "Theatre is a grain of sand in the works" (Williams 1999: x). This declaration speaks to the bodied resistance and critique of social processes that Mnouchkine's theatre produces; an analysis facilitated by an intellectual climate which encourages the members of the Soleil to understand their own bodies as socially constructed. Such a climate also demands the company recognise and account for its own role in the constitution of history: "Theatre tells us of the enemy in ourselves" (Ibid: x). In such a recognition, the (socially constructed) body and its potential for *material* resistance – through its ability to enact possibilities that explicitly reject its own social conditioning (or disciplining) becomes a vital part of the enterprise.

The notion of a physically engaged theatre as a site of bodily resistance to the subjugating forces of History begins to articulate the sense that such practices in a UK context are an 'alternative'. It also gives a particular materialist grounding to Raymond Williams' suggestion that drama, as it was practiced and understood in English literature departments, was 'hostile' to 'sociological approaches and especially Marxism'. (Wallis and Shepherd 2004: 46). This articulates a conceptual coherence in the structures of dualism which denies the vitality of the material realm of the body; it is irrelevant in both artistic and political discourses. In this sense, then, there are potential political entailments of bringing into UK discourse a



notion of 'the body' which are not sympathetic to dominant discourses about how political processes distribute power. British political discourse has been hostile not only to Marxist analysis but also to its methodologies in a way that *Gallic* politics, with its revolutionary heritage, is not.

In the final analysis, then, there are critical aspects impacting both the structure as well as content of *Gallic* propositional structures – or at least, when they are translated into English – which allow for the entry of notions of the body into the language about theatre. First of all, the appearance of body in *Gallic* language must be seen in the context of a discursive mode which does not so readily resort to conceptual dualisms to frame its debates. This is not necessarily to suggest that Cartesian conceptual structurings and their associations with the body do not have currency within the systems of signification at work in *Gallic* contexts; after all, French feminist discourse is amongst the most celebrated critiques of the process of Othering that dualism produces. However within this system such associations do not preclude cultural engagements through and with the idea of body. In British contexts, to call forth the body into the metaphorical structuring of theatre practice is to challenge the dominance of the word and, by extension the text. This is problematic indeed when we recall the self-identity of British theatre to be so heavily invested in its *literariness*. Such a self identity not only potentially precludes the notion of the body in discourse, but additionally discourages those not actively engaged in resistance to dominant cultural narratives from addressing themselves to the bodies of actors in studios.

Nevertheless, a (provisional and contingent) body has been asserted in recent British theatre history as a primary category for making theatre. As practitioners look to contexts in which such assertions are already well established, there are then cautionary tales about the practice of such transpositions which on one hand counsel that such an activity entails what Juers-Munby has described as 'inevitable' losses. However, in that same formulation, there is the suggestion, too, of inevitable *gains* and it seems appropriate to conclude by offering, by means of speculation on such possibilities, *hope*.

Discourses in translation, first of all, invite us to consider *all* languages of experience as a form of translation and thus invite us to apply the possibilities that translation affords – the potential that the speaker is offering not only an alternative perspective on the objects of translation, but an alternative conceptual structure in which to imagine it – to all discourse. In this formulation, though we may not be able to prevent the death of the author, we may at least have a moment of reflective silence at the passing. Discourses in translation, additionally, offer the suggestive possibility of alternative conceptual structuring than that to which we usually resort when conceptualising the objects of the discussion. Further, such unfamiliar structures reflect back and forth between the discourses in translation to open both to the possibility that conceptual structures serving subjects beyond those considered within the accounts themselves (as if there were not a limit to History) might be reconsidered. Consider those structures of French (*Gallicity*), for example that construct subjects as feminine / masculine / neutral, the observation of which is an opportunity to observe the linguistic construction of seemingly natural categories.

Perhaps most the most interesting and pressing entailment of the set of transpositions considered here, though, is the potential reconfiguration of 'the' body in relation to language, the text, selfhood, otherness and identity. New fields of possibility open up when we 'refuse and supersede' the usual resort to dualism which frames such issues in Anglo-American contexts; rendered in exemplary fashion in the vivid, hyper-theatricality of the *Theatre du Soleil*. In the midst of the *Soleil's* inspired praxis, a culmination and embodiment of an alternative system of significations, we are invited to consider the possibility that even if we can not wholly speak Being, we might at least imagine a discourse that does not set its constituent modalities in oppositional and mutually exclusive relation.

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[1] These contexts include, but are not limited to, the British education system which regularly and blithely employs literature graduates to fill performing arts teaching posts

[2] For example feminisms; structural and post-structuralism; theories of inter/ multiculture; post-colonial theory and phenomenology.

[3] See Fortier (2002) 17-81; Murray and Keefe (2007a: 2); Zarrilli (1995: 16)

[4] See, for example, Zarrilli (1996): 8-16; Huston (2003) Barthes (1977: 33-37)

[5] See, for example Leder (1990) esp. 144-156; Lakoff and Johnson (1999)

[6] The seemingness of this arbitrary quality is dealt with in some detail by George Lakoff in his book *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Tell Us about the Human Mind* (Lakoff 1987).

[7] See for example Harvie (2005); Murray and Keefe (2007a/b)

[8] 'In the Theatre du Soleil, psychology has negative connotations: 'psychological' acting is a criticism. [...] Contrary to what we believe, psychology does not pull toward the interior, but toward the interior mask.' Mnouchkine in Williams (1999: 172).

[9] In 1911, Copeau had been involved in a non-professional sense in an adaptation staged by *Theatre des Arts*. (Whitton 1997: 57)

[10] Rudlin and Paul suggest: 'Copeau's choice of title can be traced to his great admiration for Molière' (Rudlin and Paul 1990:250)

[11] A chronology appears in Rudlin (1986) 125- 129.

[12] Rudlin and Paul (1990): p. 3 The education available was roundly criticized and classes were not structured to teach students of performance approaches to acting; students would, for example, be taught 'elocution' rather than vocal technique.

[13] Programmes for the school's activities when it became operational show that the courses for performers were indeed free of charge. The school did however generate some income through charging interested outside parties for access to courses reserved solely for members of the public (as opposed to students of the school and members of the company), which Copeau and other staff of the school offered. (Copeau in Rudlin and Paul 1990: 45)

[14] I use 'text' here in the looser sense, understanding that in some performances it may refer not to a particular script or play, but rather the map to action, or itinerary of events, in a particular performance.

[15] It must be stated at this point that while company members all took a general interest in actor training and no doubt all contributed to the development of the programmes, his most constant collaborator and valuable input came from Suzanne Bing, who had been with the company since its inception in 1913. Bing took a huge amount of responsibility in the various incarnations of the Schools; it was often she who was responsible for conducting class and making the detailed notes from which Copeau would develop his ideas. It was her concerns about eurhythmics, for example, that led to their eventual removal from the training schedules. Copeau often expressed regret that he was not able to be more personally involved in the training classes, as he was often away, giving lectures and drumming up financial support for the projects, but regarded Bing's presence in the workshop as being as close to being there himself as possible. He unquestionably believed that her guidance of the work was completely within the remit of his own beliefs and aspirations.

[16] Copeau quoted by Louis Jouviet in Rudlin and Paul (1990) p. 144 Such admonishments no doubt contribute to Copeau's reputation as a "champion of the text" (Rudlin (2000): p. 56)

[17] Copeau was able to work with the Copais – the group of actors that fled Paris with him following his decision to close the Vieux Colombier. As his lecture and other work took him away from the group, another writer Andre Gide worked with them in this dynamic and collaborative manner.

[18] This collection is held by a library in the Marais in Paris, the 'Bibliothèque Historique de la ville de Paris'

[19] Richard Langham Smith, personal communication.

[20] Such a list might include: Dullin, Etienne Decroux, the Dastés and Michel Saint-Denis, all of whom founded successful schools and companies, continuing the pedagogical/ performance line that began with Copeau and the Vieux Colombier.

[21] See above note.

[22] The 'auto-cours' is self directed student work, which since its inception during the 1968 student-led civil unrest in Paris, has formed an important part of the Theatre School's curriculum

[23] The idea that cognitive leaps – even those constructed whilst the body is apparently absolutely still – can be separated from the body (in its stillness) of course overlooks the organic nature of cognitive functions. It is not my intention here to reify that notion of separation and the congruent construction of cognitive function and observable physical movement as somehow oppositional and/or mutually exclusive. I merely mean to point out that in some models of practice – Copeau is a notable example – the *idea* of what practice was or should be often preceded the realisation of that practice. Lecoq's abstractions were generated in and through practice.

*The Moving Body*, of course, as a text necessitates a certain disembodiment, from both the exercises and the theoretical constructions that it discusses. Nevertheless, that disembodiment is minimised inasmuch as the text is very specifically a work of documentation; it is not a manifesto and its theoretical discussions do not stray beyond the boundaries of the exercises it discusses

[24] Lecoq used the word 'playing' in a multifaceted way in his work. It at once speaks of 'playing at' – acting; the thing *done* – enacted; as well as resonating with the sense of joy that he felt was so important to his work.

[25] Lecoq here is possibly drawing attention to the difference between his theatrical practice and the theatrical practices of other famous figures of the French theatre. Copeau was famed for his attempts to 'return' to the theatrical traditions of Molière and Racine; Artaud (renowned as a visionary by the time that Lecoq was writing,) was inspired by his experience of Balinese performance, and Lecoq's objection to the almost ubiquitous appearance of oriental practices on theatre courses was something that he had alluded to elsewhere in his work.

[26] It is worth noting, at this point, that the movements that the students 'observed' included the movements that they made themselves during exploratory work.

[27] Text appears on back cover of the paperback copy of *The Moving Body*

[28] Such a list might include: Theatre de Complicité, The Footsbarn Travelling Theatre, and Mnouchkine's work with Theatre du Soleil

[29] It is worth noting that the pleasure of the participants is deemed essential to the theatrical enterprise in both the Soleil and Lecoq's practice: Phillippe Cauberre of the Soleil, for example: 'that mysterious clarity and self evidence that nothing [can] replace: the inventive state, the desire to have fun, pleasure.' q. in Williams (1999): p.76. Lecoq: It is essential to have fun and our school is a happy school. [...T]he best way to walk on stage [...] that it be done with pleasure. Lecoq (1997) p. 68

[30] Josette Feral: '[R]ules are imposed very quickly: [...] absolute silence in the hall, attentive observation of everything that happens on stage (apprenticeship involves looking as much as acting, Mnouchkine sharply reminds us at various moments).

[31] Paradoxically, this lack of a separate 'training' space is itself an inheritance from Lecoq, whose own practice took place in exactly such a space. However, he notoriously excluded from his students' education any 'extraneous' activity that did not have a direct relationship to performance: 'they can never replace the true physical education of the body of an actor who lives in the world of illusion' he said. By having no separate and delineated training, the Soleil are in many ways merely expressing this principle.

[32] history/ History, contemporary theatre practice, government, globalisation, American cultural imperialism, rightwing politics, leftist theatre makers, city planners, town clerks and so forth

[33] See for example Miller 2006 8-10

[34] See for example Evans 2006 29-30

[35] (Harvie 2006: 142) it is hard to tell whether or not this is a genuine, if somewhat tenuous reading of Lecoq's rather flippant and politically suspect 'joke' or an attempt to dignify the comment with intentions

less problematic for a contemporary, politically sensitive audience.  
[36] See, for example Lakoff and Johnson 1980