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IMAG(IN)ING THE POETIC BODY: A DIRECTORIAL APPROACH TO
HEIGHTENING TEXT(URE) IN PERFORMANCE

LARA BYE BYXLAR001

A [minor] dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
award of the degree of Master of Arts (Theatre and Performance)

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2012

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Signed by candidate

Date:

15.10.12

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ABSTRACT

IMAG(IN)ING THE POETIC BODY: A DIRECTORIAL APPROACH TO HEIGHTENING TEXT(URE) IN PERFORMANCE

By Lara Bye

October 2012

This thesis is the enquiry of a Director of text-based work in search of a more heightened physical texture in staging written text. Inspired by Jacques Lecoq's use of the idea of the Poetic Body, this enquiry is the Director's attempt to discover what this 'Poetic Body' might mean, and how imagining the Poetic Body and the country/landscape/territories this body might inhabit or occupy, can be useful to the Director in preparing a rehearsal process, and in the ultimate staging of the text for performance. *Le Corps Poetique* (The Poetic Body) is the title of Lecoq's book, covering the beginnings of his school in Paris and providing a detailed journey through his pedagogical process and vision of performance.

The author studied with Lecoq for two years in Paris, and this (re) search involves a return to those studies as frame for this endeavour. Part one situates the personal context of this research, as well as introducing the Medium Project, (with its focus on the application of Lecoq's techniques to directing text), as catalyst in narrowing the research question of this enquiry. Part two is a review of both literature and practice around Lecoq and the Poetic Body, internationally and within South African theatre practice. Part three provides an introduction to Lecoq's pedagogy and proposes an approach towards moving into performance, based on a selection of exercises and principles of this pedagogy.

Text(ure) refers to the written playtext integrated with a performance text inscribed on and by the bodies of performers in space. The weaving together of threads of Lecoq into this research, both written and practical, has been an on-going process over these two years.

The research is located in the context of the freelance South African theatre industry, where work must be portable and where budget and time constraints affect creative choices. In this context, extensive set and lighting design are not part of the

texture woven into performance: the focus here is on the body and physical presence of the performer, in the theatre space.

The word 'imag(in)ing' in the title is used in the spirit of open-ended research. As this enquiry is part of a process in which the outcome is not pre-determined, this project can but imagine what the Poetic Body might mean as well as use the idea of the Poetic Body that emerges in this study as inspiration in imagining what visual language/images, these bodies might generate in the staging of the final thesis production text: *EURYDYCE*, by young American playwright Sarah Ruhl.

University of Cape Town

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My thanks go to the University of Cape Town Drama Department for financial support during my two years. Thanks to the staff of the department for their generosity and feedback during seminars and after practical projects and in corridor conversations around the research. The first year practical sessions were of great value to me, encouraging the spirit of playfulness without judgment. Coming into the Department fresh from many years in the profession, these helped greatly in allowing me to be a student again and enjoy the privilege of re (search) and experimentation.

To my fellow travelers, Chas Unwin, Amy Jephta and Lesoko Seabe, thanks for much laughter and support, it would have been hard to have taken this journey alone! It has wonderfully enriched me to be part of their process and struggle and celebrate together those elusive moments of research clarity.

My deepest gratitude and thanks to my supervisor, Mark Fleishman, I cannot adequately express how much I value the guidance I have received over these two years. The process is still too fresh to convey in all its richness and fullness, the journey that Mark, with great care and patience, has helped shape and map out with me. Such a wealth of advice, suggestions, challenges which came at just the right moment, when I would best be able to digest, comprehend and use them.

This process has been a very intense and time consuming one and I cannot thank enough my husband, Gaetan Schmid and my son Matteo for all of their love, patience and support. At times when I felt myself going quite mad, they have kept my world sane.

I would also like to remember Jacques Leocq, an extraordinary teacher. He called me L' Africaine, and would laugh and shake his head because I was often the first person to jump up in an improvisation, even if, with my bad French, I hadn't quite understood the task. It has been such a delight and a very moving process to re-visit my journey at the school in Paris.

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

This introduction will situate the context of this research, as well as define the research methodology employed. The Medium project at the end of the first year of study will be introduced as part of the research archive, its value being greater than the results of an exciting rehearsal and successful performance. In trying to narrow my research focus and find the central question of this thesis, it was as a result of the enquiry explored in the Medium project that the form and concept of the Poetic Body emerged.

Background/Personal Context

This research is the culmination of two years study, consisting of both written and practical on-the-floor research. I entered the Department after many years as a freelance theatre practitioner, with a particular focus and passion for directing text. After the pressures of the profession with such limited time available to explore during rehearsal, I was hoping to create a space for myself in which I could explore a more complex and richer visual performance language when working with actors, text and the theatre space. I was hoping to challenge my thinking around the visual and the text, and to develop research strategies of how to mine between the lines and create strong images and gestural language that transcends and compliments the text. Dymphna Callery, in *Through the body*, writes: ‘Thinking visually in theatre does not mean thinking pictorially’ (Callery, 2001: 203). Likewise, I was in search of a physical text which is not just about creating pictures to illustrate the plot and action of the written text; but rather a new visual text inspired by images, moods, undercurrents discovered through the exploration of the written text. As Janine Lewis writes, there is a difference between “performing what literally happened ... or staging what it felt like”. (Lewis, 2010: 177)

This paper is part of developing a rehearsal methodology which asks how a director might “extend her vocabulary by coming to a fresh reading of text, bodies and space which will shift, alter and extend her day-to-day practical work of conceptualising, planning, rehearsing and constructing performance” (Whitmore, 1994: vii).

This enquiry began as a consideration of “how, in (a) production constructed from texts where the word is dominant, other theatrical languages - corporeality,

movement ... work with the spoken word ... examining ... relationships between words and bodies in order to harness and enrich the visual and physical qualities of both staging and acting” (Murray & Keefe, 2007: 8-9). At the beginning of the journey I had not arrived at the word ‘poetic’. It was while preparing for the Medium project that I turned back towards the ideas of Jacques Lecoq as my primary research tool in planning rehearsals and the idea of the ‘poetic’ emerged.

I studied at Lecoq for 2 years and have never consciously returned to that experience as inspiration in my directing practice, trusting that what I had discovered in my investigations in Paris would have somehow settled into my creative consciousness, instinctively at my disposal as problems arise in conception and realisation of new work. In trying to define and narrow my area of research into Directing Practice, I realised the potential value of a more thorough investigation into the Lecoq vision in relation to my practice, particularly with regards to the rehearsal process. As T S Eliot writes at the end of *The Four Quartets*:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time
(Eliot, 1943: 27)

For my Medium Project at the end of the first year, I went back to that seemingly known place (my studies at Lecoq) with the intention of discovering it as though for the first time, and I set myself the following seemingly very straightforward task: How can a director apply the theories/training/vision and techniques of Jacques Lecoq, with regards to the actor’s body and the analysis of movement, to the rehearsal process and staging of a pre- written script? The play text was *Interior* by Belgian Symbolist playwright, Maurice Maeterlinck. A question I was hoping to explore was what happens when you leave a cognitive approach to a text, when you leave psychological work out of rehearsals, and approach a text purely through the body in space, the body in relation to other bodies? What new visual language might emerge? I embraced Lecoq as frame for the Medium project and consciously used his methodology of working with actors as my lens in reading the Maeterlinck text and preparing for rehearsals. I was excited to

discover whether a retrospective exploration and re-discovery of my unforgettable studies in Paris and Lecoq's belief in the artist/performer/creator as poet with the body as primary language (*Le Corps Poétique*), could provide answers to working with a text and with actors and to reading and staging their bodies in space with new vision and energy. I saw *Interior* as a provocation, not just being the name of the text, but as reference to the interior life of the characters and the actors, the interior breath and rhythms of the words and text, and the interior action that is inherent in physical action/inaction/stillness.

Interior/Exteriors

It was in preparing for this project, that the traces outlining my research territory became clearer. Maeterlinck believed in the tragedy of everyday life, in stillness so extreme that moments take on a dream-like quality. In this very short play, a group of people stand in a dark garden, looking into the back window of a brightly lit family home. These outsiders bring the news of the death by drowning of the eldest daughter of the family who at this moment are peacefully and happily going about their very ordinary evening routine. The longer the Stranger, the Old man and the two children spend looking in the window, the less they are able to take action. They become hypnotised by the life they witness.

On a first reading of the text, I was immediately captivated by the notion of staging the interior life of characters engaged in almost frozen inaction, activating the interior of the performers, and staging states of mind and what it means to look into the window of the soul. Lecoq was not only focused on the preparation and creativity of the outer body, as he writes: "We must be architects of the inner life" (Lecoq, 2000: 22).

In the spirit of research, I selected for the performance a space which wasn't a traditional theatre space, which was as light and bright and white and neutral as possible with very little technical support to create mood, atmosphere and place, in order to force myself to explore another way into the text and to focus on really engaging with Lecoq.

The answer was provided in the white open space of the Annexe next door to the Rehearsal Studio on the Hiddingh campus, which we transformed into a performance space with the addition of a raised platform and four lights. The end result of this work was that one word emerged stronger than any other and that was the poetic: a poetic staging, poetic bodies, poetic spaces, a poetic extension of time and rhythms, of breath, of

gesture, of touch, of eye movements, of space inside transposed into the space outside. Once this word had emerged, the way forward for this research became clear.

I went back to re-read Lecoq with this idea of the poetic at the forefront, and it was only then, after many prior readings over the years, that I observed the differences in the French and the English titles of Lecoq's last book. When Lecoq wrote this book, published in 1997, outlining the vision and pedagogy of his school in Paris, of the fruits of 47 years research, he titled this book: *Le Corps Poétique*. He then died in 1999 and a year later the English translation was published with the title *The Moving Body*. David Bradby, the translator, a British academic and theatre writer with a great passion for the French theatre tradition, unfortunately died last year, so I am unable to ask him why this choice of words in the title. This observation about the wording of these two titles helped me greatly in focussing and framing my research. I began to wonder about The Poetic Body and The Moving Body; is there a difference between the two and if there is, might this difference inform my enquiry.

This thesis is the ensuing enquiry of a Director of text-based work in search of a more heightened physical texture in staging text. Inspired by Lecoq's use of the idea of the Poetic Body, this enquiry is the Director's attempt to discover what this Poetic Body might mean, and how imagining the Poetic Body and the country/landscape/territories this body might inhabit or occupy, can be useful to the Director in preparing a rehearsal process, and in the ultimate staging of the text for performance. Bradby does, in a later publication, acknowledge the Poetic Body title: "[Lecoq] was always searching for ways of introducing the imaginative and poetic dimensions. These two aspects, the physical and the poetic, were set side by side in the original title of his book: *Le Corps Poétique*" (Bradby, 2002: 84). I just took the title, *The Moving Body*, for granted, but now having become conscious of Lecoq's choice of title, all I can dream on is this: Lecoq would appear to have embraced the Poetic Body above all else. Let me now set off in search of what that might mean.

(Re) search

An initial struggle was reconciling written research and practice. My physical, tangible site of research has always been that alchemic, organic, unknown territory of the

rehearsal room, with live bodies interacting with each other in a space with a text. The process that has emerged however is not one of conflict, but is rather a continual flow between reading, writing and seminars, and the work on the floor, each informing the other in an interweaving of theory and practical application. The body of knowledge emerging from the theoretical and practical research over the last two years is still coming into being. Therefore the research in this paper is not closed but rather an opening to questions and provocations that will be responded to in rehearsal after this written explication has been submitted.

Warren Hinds proposes that: “research is about 'knowing emerging into being', in other words, knowledge is not a thing, but constantly becoming [...]. The French root of the word 'research' is to see again, seek again” (Hinds, 2008: 18). I acknowledge that my research is engaged in this process of becoming, that I am a traveller drawing up a map as I advance, as opposed to providing answers and tried and tested solutions.

As I am dealing here with theatre practice and a practical theatre problem, my references are primarily from practitioners of theatre. In this practice of (re)search I will be drawing on past experiences and tracing lines backwards, in order to better contextualise my current thinking and premise. I place myself both in the middle place between theory and practice, as well as in the '*milieu*' (the context or the middle) of practitioner as researcher.

What is interesting is never the way in which someone starts or finishes. Of interest is the middle (*le milieu*), what is happening in the middle. It is not by chance the greatest speed is in the middle. People often dream of starting or restarting from zero; and they also fear their arrival, their terminal point. They think in terms of future or past [...]. What counts is the becoming... “I will arrive no-where; I do not want to arrive any-where. There are no arrivals. I am not interested in when someone arrives. One could easily arrive at madness. What would that mean?” It is in the middle that he experiences the becoming, the movement, the speed the vortex [...]. Things sprout from the middle [...]. But the middle does not at all mean to belong to the times, to be of one's time, to be historical [...]. It is the means by which very different times communicate. [...] By which s/he communicates with other times and spaces. (Deleuze, 1997: 242)

The journey of this research has no clear beginning or end, it embraces the middle point, the idea that through this middle the researcher and the research can “communicate with other times and spaces”.

In a note session to workshop participants at the *Theatre Du Soleil*, Ariane Mnouchkine says: “When you enter the stage, the story is already being told”

(Mnouchkine in Feral, 1989: 82). The story of this research is already in movement, and this movement will continue long after this explication has to be handed in. Another note of Mnouchkine applies to the double role of the researcher/practitioner, and is of some comfort during the very difficult time of reflection and analysis in the extreme solitude of an office, away from the life and camaraderie of the rehearsal floor. I can hear her saying to me:

Avoid moving all the time. If you move constantly I don't see you ... the stops give movement ... in order for me to see you must stop. Only one thing at a time. If you jump for joy, good. So jump, then speak, but do not do them at the same time ... complete your gestures, take the time to finish everything. (Mnouchkine in Miller, 2007:83)

Content/Structure

Part 2: **Context** includes a Literature review, acknowledging the body of writing and research which comes before me and to which I refer in distinguishing my own enquiry from others who have written about Lecoq. It also includes a review of practitioners who work in a style which inspires my work. Over the years the school in Paris has welcomed many South African practitioners, and I will place my research within the context of South African Lecoq-inspired practice.

Part 3 forms the bulk of this explication and is made up of two distinct sections:

Section One: Waking the giants¹

- Introduces what Lecoq might have meant by using the expression the 'Poetic Body', as well as the origins of this concept in Lecoq's journey from young gymnastic enthusiast to world-renowned teacher and pedagogue.
- The territory that this body might inhabit is proposed here as emerging out of, drawing from and being born into: '*le fonds Poetique commun*'.²
- The way in which this is accessed for the theatre is through the preparation of the body and spirit of the performer via work with the Neutral Mask/ Neutral State, a

¹ "Waking the giants" refers to an exercise used by Lecoq during exploration in the Neutral mask.

² This concept will be explained in some detail further on.

fundamental part of the foundation phase of Lecoq's teaching. The second route of access is through the mimo-dynamic body and mimesis, which unlocks key laws and internal dynamics of the movements of the world outside the rehearsal room.

- The Poetic Body inhabits and journeys through Lecoq's Grand Theatrical Territories which have their own laws of geometry and movement. The territory introduced for this study, is that of Melodrama.

Section Two: Moving into performance: Exploring text(ure) for the stage

This section is a brief introduction to the second arm of the thesis: the practical application and exploration of the concepts under discussion here. I will not be providing a detailed outline of this here; the production itself must reflect this. I will however hint at a directorial approach inspired by this part of the journey as the research moves from pedagogy to practice. The director (myself) is interested in '**texturing**' performance as a result of an integration of Lecoq 'style' and text. I will use the principles of **devised theatre practice** and **improvisation** in generating material, images, and character, as a process in approaching the playtext on the floor.

Some terminology

At the heart of this research, the initial point of departure has been a quest for greater texturing of the final production. For the purpose of this research, the pre-written script will here be called the 'playtext', the final production as presented to the audience is 'the performance text.'

Eurydice

This is not a Masters by written dissertation, but a Masters by praxis. Alongside the theoretical investigation, is the parallel preparation of a production, which will attempt to put into practice and physical form, the ideas developed here. The text selected is *Eurydice* by American playwright Sarah Ruhl.

In embarking on this theatrical exploration, I have as guides and inspiration for the journey a few voices other than that of Lecoq. Theatre director and anthropologist,

Eugenio Barba, and his work on texture, daily and extra-daily techniques, as well as his work with the pre-expressive state are also useful tools in my theoretical and practical search (Barba, 1991 & 1995). Ariane Mnouchkine's dream of bringing greatness back to theatre and her vision of the theatre space as sacred has been an inspiration in imagining the space in which the Poetic Body can exist. Mnouchkine very passionately asserts:

Theatre for me is the world ritualized, the world turned into poetry. As long as you treat the stage like a cowshed, you'll be like a cow ... the stage is ... first of all it's the space in front of a temple, it depends what you're doing, but it's the deck of a ship, the wing of a bird ... its whatever you can imagine. But it isn't a cowshed. It's not solid earth, terra firma. It's sublime ground. (In Kiernander, 1993: 184)

Artaud writes of the poetry of theatre, and I respond to his provocation that theatre should be allowed to speak its own "concrete language":

I maintain the stage is a tangible, physical place that needs to be filled and it ought to be allowed to speak its own concrete language [...]. There must be a poetry for the senses just as there is for speech, but this physical, tangible language I am referring to is really only theatrical in as far as the thoughts it expresses escape spoken language. (Artaud, 1970: 27-28)

PART TWO: CONTEXT

Literature Review

This research endeavour in pursuit of what might be meant by the Poetic Body as proposed by Jacques Lecoq had, as first provocation, Lecoq's own book on his personal journey, history of the school in Paris, and details of the pedagogy he developed there over the decades: *Le Corps Poétique/ The Moving Body* (2000). His first publication, *La Theatre Du Geste*, translated into English as *Theatre of Movement and Gesture* was translated and edited, amongst others, by David Bradby, translator of *The Moving Body*. *La Theatre Du Geste* was first published in in 1987, the English version in 2006. Written prior to the very personal story told in *Le Corps Poétique*, *La Theatre du Geste* provides a comprehensive background to the theatre styles that influenced Lecoq's teaching and philosophy. Consisting of a series of essays, it provides an in-depth analysis of the tradition of mime and is where Lecoq sets out for the first time his philosophy of movement. It is a collaborative document including conversations with and about, his peers: Copeau, Decroux, Marceau, Barrault and Mnouchkine. The book covers: pantomime, mimicry, the gestures of life, the art of movement and the theatre of gesture and image. It is also very well illustrated with a wealth of photographs and drawings to support the writing.

In 2002, Bradby edited with Maria Delgado, *The Paris Jigsaw: Internationalism and the City's Stages*. The book consists of a collection of essays which explore the contemporary theatre scene in Paris with regards to various international influences, and celebrates the way in which these influences have enriched the creative life of the city. Lecoq and his *Ecole Internationale du theatre*, welcoming students from all parts of the world, is placed alongside Peter Brook, Augusto Boal and Ariane Mnouchkine and in the context of the input and presence of German, Russian, Spanish, Latin American, African and North American theatre traditions and styles being presented in the city during the last thirty years of the 20th Century. Included is a chapter on Lecoq written by Bradby: 'The Legacy of Jacques Lecoq'. Here Bradby gives a brief background history to the school, acknowledging Lecoq's multi-cultural vision and the "significant contribution

[Lecoq] made to establishing Paris as an international centre for theatre” (Bradby, 2002: 83). ‘The Pedagogy of the Poetic Body’, also in this publication, is a conversation between two ex-students of the school, Suzy Wilson and Giovanni Fusetti, about Lecoq’s contribution to theatre practice in the profession, with primary focus on the British theatre landscape. Here they discuss how theatre as a poetic medium and the body as a Poetic Body, are central ideas of Lecoq’s work. Their analysis of the use of space as a dramatic resource through Lecoq’s work with the lines and trajectories of his Grand Theatrical Territories was of value to my enquiry.

Fusetti was a fellow student of mine at Lecoq who has subsequently started a Lecoq ‘style’ school in Italy called *Helikos. International School of Theatre* (originally called *Kiklos*). The school’s pedagogy focuses on the actor-creator, and although influenced by a variety of traditions and practitioners, the fundamental reference is the teachings of Lecoq. On the *Helikos* website are unpublished papers written by Fusetti, who travels the world running mask workshops.

Providing a very comprehensive contemporary context to Lecoq is *Physical Theatres: A critical Introduction* by Simon Murray and John Keefe (2007), which examines physical theatre practice as well as the physical *in* theatre. Lecoq is placed very much at the centre of this study in terms of influence and contribution and references to both him and the school run throughout this book. The authors trace back the roots and origins of contemporary physical theatre through an overview of a wide variety of classical and popular theatre traditions from across the globe. They examine contemporary practices by highlighting a selection of companies and individual artists, as well as provide details of different approaches to actor training and preparation.

Prior to this collaboration with Keefe, Murray as part of a Routledge series on Performance Practitioners, wrote: *Jacques Lecoq* (2003), providing in great detail historical background and beginnings, an analysis of the Lecoq pedagogy, and a study of the work of Lecoq-trained companies and practitioners. It also contains a section on practical exercises based on Lecoq’s approach to actor training.

Also using Lecoq exercises is Dymphna Callery in *Through the body: A practical Guide to Physical Theatre* (2001). Callery is a teacher of physical theatre and in her book she provides a background to the field of physical theatre, introducing key practitioners

such as Artaud, Lecoq, Grotowski, Meyerhold and others. She proposes a series of very practical workshops, using exercises inspired by the work and teachings of these practitioners, focussing particularly on devised work and improvisation.

Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre (2002) edited by Franc Chamberlain and Ralph Yarrow consists of a series of articles written by Lecoq-trained practitioners teaching and making theatre in Britain. *Theatre Du Complicite* is but one company of Lecoq graduates creating work in Britain. Essays on mask work, street theatre, actor training, inter-culturalism are all written by practitioners who either studied under Lecoq or attended workshops with Philippe Gaulier, a student of Lecoq who has set up his own school in London.

South Africa is very much part of this international discussion around physicality in the theatre and *The South African Theatre Journal* published a special issue in 2010 on 'Movement and Physical Theatre in South Africa' (Volume 24: 2010). Included are articles on two Lecoq-trained theatre artists, Ellis Pearson and Sylvaine Strike, as well as acknowledgement of the influence of Lecoq on the emergence of a very particular brand of South African physical performance.

Review of Practice

SW: There is a lack of understanding about the poetic possibilities that a Lecoq trained performer can bring to theatre. In London, Lecoq – trained actors tend to get called when there are parts for animals or monsters, or for multiple parts in a chorus piece...

GF: This is why it is not surprising that many people from Lecoq do not go into straight theatre but form their own companies. And many of them go into creation theatre: mask theatre, puppets, street theatre, pantomime, clown, very physically creative performances. Inventing theatre, rather than playing into existing theatre.

(Fusetti & Wilson 2002: 100)

As discussed in the above quoted conversation, much Lecoq inspired professional work is created within Lecoq-trained companies, with a devised process based on improvisation, to create new and original work. Play creation with text is, in this instance, often around adaptation of a novel or short story, or is an expansion into performance of a photograph, news story, or personal narrative for example.

In contrast, my enquiry is situated in the world of those Lecoq-trained directors

and theatre makers who work with an existing playtext in creating their own particular style of theatre performance. Steven Berkoff is an example, with his solo performances inspired by Shakespeare, as well as his extraordinarily skillful physical performances of his own written work. His is work which is not written as part of a collaborative process and which provides for actors and directors material to shape very strong visual and aural performance. Julie Taymor and her powerful visual work with puppet and large scale spectacle also works with text, primarily Shakespearean plays. Ariane Mnouchkine at the *Theatre Du Soleil* combines original creation with the highly inventive staging of texts, as does Simon McBurney and *Theatre Du Complicite*. All of the above, having studied at Lecoq over the decades, have woven those studies into their own personal vision and style of work with text.

South African Context

South Africans, William Kentridge, Ellis Pearson, Jennie Reznik, Sylvaine Strike, Helen Iskander, James Cunningham and many others have studied with Lecoq in Paris. Individually and in companies, through performance and actor training, they have all made an impact on the South African and international theatre scene over the last twenty years: Kentridge with the Handspring Puppet Company; Reznik with Mark Fleishman and Magnet Theatre (as well as with her Lecoq-based teaching at the UCT drama department); Pearson's work with Bheki Mkhwane; Strike's *Fortune Cookie Company*; and Cunningham and Iskander with their company, *Fresco Theatre*. A common denominator with much of this work, as with Lecoq companies around the world, is that of the devised, created or improvised production, or the adaption of short stories or novels; all very rich with creativity, inventiveness and visual imagery.

The practice of highly physical performance in South African theatre storytelling has long been a vibrant and exciting part of the theatre landscape. From town halls, to school fields, mainstream venues and on the fringe, productions have exploded that have little set and high physicality of performer. Very often, due to a variety of factors, but most frequently due to economic constraints, the spirit that the show must go on applies, as actors use one prop for many things, no props, mimed props, bare stages and, wearing basic costumes, tell rich and densely imagistic stories capturing the imagination of

audiences through the power of their visualisation and the articulateness of their bodies. Baxter and Aitchison (2010), writing an article on Ellis Pearson and Bheki Mkhwane, quote Mark Fleishman from his article on ‘Physical Images in the South African Theatre’:

Mark Fleishman argues that ‘the physical body in South African theatre is a source of primary meaning’ (Fleishman, 1997: 201). Fleishman argues that in South African theatre the body ‘constantly changing and re-inventing itself is a separate stream of text running alongside and interweaving with the words’ (Fleishman, 1997: 201/202). In South African performance the physical text is never subordinate to the written or spoken text. (Baxter & Aitchison. 2010: 63)

They then introduce the idea of “African athleticism [that] undoubtedly derives from physical styles of story-telling, the African integration of dance, drama and song in cultural life” (63). As with much South African devised theatre:

Mkhwane and Pearson rely on their bodies not only to create character, but also use them as props, sets and special and sound effects. More often than not, the stories on which their theatre is based featured large casts of characters, and on many occasions, fantastical elements[...]the actors created all these characters and elements through the use of their bodies and voices. (2010: 64)

Actors playing multiple characters, direct narration by character to the audience, *Fortune Cookie* and *Fresco*’s use of clown techniques and the red nose studied in the final months at Lecoq, the spirit of play (*esprit du jeux*) use of multiple languages as well as made up language (gibberish) and silence are all present in this body of work. The ideal of democracy characterising the devising process, the spirit of collaboration and co-authorship and co-ownership embraced in Lecoq’s pedagogy, have long been an integral part of the South African theatre landscape.

What sets my work apart in this research – particularly as far as Lecoq-trained practitioners in South Africa is concerned - is that of having a playtext as starting point and that it is not the outer athleticism of the actor that is of greatest importance, but rather the exploration of a dynamic of inner movements: the inner journey of the actor which is the source of creativity, inspired by the written word in play form.

PART THREE: WAKING THE GIANTS AND MOVING INTO PERFORMANCE

In this part I explore in some detail the work, writing and ideas of Jacques Lecoq as I try to develop a directorial approach that heightens the text(ure) of performance. In this return to Lecoq, I make a connection between his style of search and enquiry and that of anthropologist Tim Ingold, particularly Ingold's latest collection of essays: *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (2010). Written in the context of a very different world from that experienced by Lecoq in the middle of the twentieth century when he was developing his pedagogic ideas, I find reading Ingold to be a companion piece to *The Poetic Body* in terms of the belief structure underlying and running through their enquiries. In his preface, Ingold writes:

The truth is that the propositions of art and architecture, to the extent that they carry force, must be grounded in a profound understanding of the lived world, and conversely that anthropological accounts of the manifold ways in which life is lived would be of no avail if they were not brought to bear on speculative enquiries into what the possibilities of human life might be. Thus art, architecture and anthropology have in common that they observe, describe and propose. (Ingold, 2010: xi)

Before Lecoq embarked on his life long journey into understanding the world around him and how this might be observed by performers and transformed into theatre proposals, he was a young man with a passion for sport. Let us return to the beginning and to Paris just after the Second World War.

Setting off: the Poetic Body emerges alongside/within the Moving Body

[W]e see ... 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. (Wedderburn, 2008: 43, emphasis in original)

In trying to define what Lecoq might mean by the poetic body, we find a clue very early on his book, *Le Corps Poétique*, his early explorations of the body in movement and what Wedderburn refers to as 'its material presence'. He describes his passion for sports and gymnastics in the period immediately after the Second World War. As a young man he dreamed, he said, of fantastically enormous high jumps and the internal rhythms of

gymnastics, and we see the origins of his passion and lifelong enquiry and research into the movement of bodies in space:

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. (Lecoq, 2000: 3)

What separated this delight in the joy of pure movement from the purely physical action was a consciousness of another dimension - a quality of observed performance, of the dramatic situation in which the running takes place, and the impact of the runner in time and space; the beginnings of an understanding of how the movements of the body could come to be considered theatrical. We discover the beginnings of the ways in which, in performance, 'body and mind, sensation and matter are connected' (Conroy, 2010: 53).

Lecoq writes:

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. (Lecoq, 2000: 3)

The use of the bold font is my own, drawing attention to key concepts that emerge in this seemingly simple and joyous anecdote.

Philosopher Merleau Ponty in his work "attempted to look at ways in which the subject and object of perception were connected in a moment of experience" (In Conroy, 2010: 54). I propose that Lecoq's articulation of the experience of his younger self is the exact embodiment of that desire. The subject and object of perception being connected in a moment of experience could also be a description of the act of performing.

What is specific about Lecoq's approach is not the body, but the body in space. His most defining principle is that the essence of theatre is the body in space. So movement in itself is not the focus. The focus is the movement in space. (Fusetti, 2012: np)

In Lecoq's brief anecdote the body is both conceptual and a real physical presence taking action in the world. Embodied in the movement of the body is the movement of the theatrical body! The runner is aware of a performance dimension: of the context/setting in which movement takes place, of the impact of his body in space as well as an awareness of an aesthetic dimension to the experience. There is a performer (the runner), a setting

(the stadium), and also a quality of light - the shafts of sunlight add to the mood and atmosphere of the action of running. It is only by means of the sun that the shadow is visible. Here the sun is not a passive element, a bystander or mere provider of illumination and warmth, but a very dynamic participant woven into the event- **throwing** shafts of light. The runner and the sun activate the moment of poetry here illustrated by the shadow that only comes to life once the “**rhythm of the running sets in**”. The complete moment of poetry is a combination and weaving together of elements: the moving body, the rhythm of movement, along with the dynamic play of light, in the setting of the stadium. The interaction of all of these elements with the resultant play and life of the shadows- their contraction and expansion - creates a moment of pure physical poetry. This could of course apply to all superb athletes. The world riveted to the television screen for the month of the Olympics is testament to the drama, poetry and extraordinary skill provided by the pure poetry of moving bodies. Lecoq however, did not become a teacher of gym, or start a school of athletic training. His movement was towards theatre performance and creation.

This quote sums up much of what I believe about acting and performance and the reach of this enquiry. In many acting books, acting is described as ‘doing’. I find this very practical approach a useful one, only insofar as it includes access to ‘doing’ that is not limited only to the physical. Theatre permits us to embody the abstract world of qualities of light, music and colours, of feeling and sensation (taste, touch) and mental pictures/states of mind, as well as physical action. For example, phrases such as ‘my heart leapt’ or ‘my heart was in my mouth’ permit us to “explore and ponder the connections between the private thought and the public action” (Conroy, 2010: 52). Not merely to “ponder the connections” but to perform them as well.

I’d like to return to the runner and the shadow. Does the poetic body exist as something we see *on* stage - the poetic gesture, a particular (heightened) quality or image - or does it exist only in the imagination of the actor and director? What does the audience see: the runner or the shadow? Is the poetic body one of balletic, lyrical, sustained movements of grace and poise? Does poetic refer to the quality of the external form?

In the medium project I played with actual shadows on the wall. The shadow of

the actor in motion in most productions is not immediately visible. I propose that it is a resource within the performer. It represents the poetic potential within a movement or moment played on stage. It is the actor, moving with heightened consciousness. Although the poetic can indeed be applied to the quality of a movement, this is a very limited view. Poetry as the interior shadow, played out, articulated, expressed, re(presented) via the outer skin and surface of the performer, reveals that which is usually invisible on the surface, and that which is silent and unheard within the words of the written text. It is a new visual and aural text of action and stillness, of gesture and breath, of presence, of character coming into being.

On presence in the theatre, Elinor Fuchs quotes Thomas Whittaker:

The sense of presence in the theatre has always had two overlapping, but still separable components, the 'double now' of Thomas Whittaker who writes 'one relates to the dramatic narrative as embodied in the total *mise en scene*. Here, the narrative becomes so present as to be happening *now*. The other has to do specifically with the circle of heightened awareness in the theatre flowing from the actor to spectator and back that sustains the dramatic world'. (Fuchs, 1996: 70)

Lecoq was not just running for the pure joy of running, he was acutely conscious of the effect/affect of his action. There is a "circle of heightened awareness", even if he himself was the only spectator of the event. This self-awareness is the starting point of the flow between audience and actor that I too believe "sustains the dramatic world".

This awareness which flows from the inside out helps defines the poetic approach to the movement in space through which the actor traces his or her journey. Space which moves both outside and inside the performer. But awareness and heightened consciousness alone are not enough. The actor needs to bring great resources to the process: the inner resources of imagination, creativity, vision; the 'worlds within' which he/she brings to the part. Helene Cixous talks of the kingdoms inhabited by characters worthy of theatre. She says in an interview:

What makes a character worthy of theatre. For me the extreme example is Shakespeare. All of Shakespeare's characters are like that, every one of them is already his own little theatre. Every one of them gets up on his own little stage. Every one of Shakespeare's individuals has his little kingdom, his micro-kingdom. We could say that each inhabitant (let us not say character) of Shakespeare is exceptional; he is rich, he fascinates us, he is

not a person without a kingdom whom we may cross in the street. There are many people without a kingdom. It must be said that if we put those people in the theatre, the theatre fades away... [They] bring us nothing, because they have no inner universe ... [in life one can see] a person who is worthy of theatre. Put this woman on stage and it is ready. Why? Because she has substance. She knows about life, and she knows how to communicate this knowledge on the scene of language. (Cixous, 1997: 34)

I would like to propose that we could replace the word “character” here with the word actor. However, for the actor to bring her own inner world or kingdom to the stage, as Cixous suggests characters do, is of no value to performance if the actor does not know how to activate this inner kingdom and to *use* it. I propose here using the tools provided and provoked by Lecoq in finding form for the inner world of the actor that can then be communicated to the audience and with other actors.

Expansion and contraction

Two key concepts emerge in Lecoq’s simple story, those of **expansion** and **contraction** of a body in space and time.

To write, like to dance, is to expand yourself through space and time [...] and we should all do more of that (Jenkin, 2012: np)

The contraction and elongation of the shadow introduces the theatrical concept of time and space. Through elongation - time and space are stretched, extended. The world of the stage becomes vast and epic. Through contraction –s pace is reduced, time moves quicker is more fleeting and condensed. The world of the stage becomes tiny and intimate.

External expansion and contraction of the body: of gesture, muscles, eyes, of the throat to release sound controlling breath, exhalation, stuttering, stammering. The expansion of the vowel sound framed by the contraction of consonants and punctuation: the full stop, question mark, dash, colon. The expansion held in the space between words; the ambiguity of the ellipsis. The skin expanding and contracting with the heat and the cold. Just as the skin provides a huge surface container for the body, so too is there a skin (the shadow) just as alive and vital within, through which passes passions, dreams, the inner world which is then made manifest by the outer surface connecting with the space around.

Lecoq-trained director Sylvaine Strike in talking of the skin of the performance says:

[T]o elaborate on what I mean when I say: the skin you're in. That means everything-the actors, the set, the costumes-what are the parameters of that skin? Once this is clearly defined you can work vertically and outwardly within the skin/shell. Our skin is simultaneously our entrapment and our freedom. (In Morkel, 2010: 204)

Eugenio Barba similarly explores this concept of contraction and expansion, but uses the words “extending and withdrawal” and the “dance of oppositions ... danced *in* the body before it is danced *with* the body” (Barba & Savarese, 1991:13). The play between contraction and expansion, extension and withdrawal, is a very useful tool for the director, and forms a fundamental rhythm of both comedy and tragedy: the long howl of King Lear; the contraction of a look in the comedic double-take. I will be exploring the potential play of both in the staging of *Eurydice*, using this dynamic inter-play as both constraint and springboard during improvisations around the text.

The Poetic Body and the Moving Body: Poetry and Prose

The poetic body of the actor is a moving one. In order to evoke the poetic dimension, the performer needs to have a fit, flexible, articulate body and mind. The body under the spotlight here is however articulate not only on the level of muscle and sinew, that super fit body that can transform with high athleticism into multiple characters or objects required by the story. It is in bringing in the shadow side, the dimension held not only in physical muscle or strength and agility, that poetry might also be found. David Bradby writes of the “concrete, physical poetry of bodies in space” (Bradby, 2002: 84). The physical is part of the poetic and the poetic is the combination of inner world and outer image. The challenge for the director and the performer is in understanding that the poetic is not something ephemeral and vague, that it is just as concrete as the outer physical world, with tangible substance, density, volume and weight.

In analysing the concepts of the Poetic Body and the Moving Body, the commonalities and subtle differences between them, I find Pulitzer Prize winning poet, W.S. Merwin's thoughts around poetry and prose and that indefinable something which makes up the poetic, useful. In reading this quote with the theatrical in mind, I insert either the Poetic or Moving Body when he refers to poetry and prose.

I think one of the big differences between poetry [the Poetic Body] and prose [the Moving

Body] is that prose [the Moving Body] is about something, it's got a subject and the subject comes first and it's dealing with the subject. But poetry [the Poetic Body] is something else, and we don't know what it is that comes first. Prose [the Moving Body] is about something, but poetry [the Poetic Body] is about what can't be said. Why do people turn to poetry when all of a sudden the Twin Towers get hit, or when their marriage breaks up, or when the person they love most in the world drops dead in the same room? Because they can't say it. They can't say it at all, and they want something that addresses what can't be said. I think that's the big difference between poetry [the Poetic Body] and prose [the Moving Body]. (Merwin, 2008: np)

I have a faith in language [...]. It's the most flexible articulation of our experience and yet, finally, that experience is something that we cannot really articulate. We can look out and see the sunlight in those trees, but we can't convey the full unique intimacy of that experience. That's the other side, one of those things that makes poetry both exhilarating and painful all the time. It's conveying both the great possibility and the thing that we can't do. (Merwin, 1987: np)

Working with the tools provided and proposed by Lecoq, the poetic takes voice, shape, form and substance. We can as performers “convey the full unique intimacy” of an experience, precisely because we are not limited by language, bound by words and speech. And even when using words and speech, they can take on weight and rhythms unlike those employed in everyday usage.

Playing with the ‘poetic shadow’ in creating the characters of *Eurydice*

The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. (Berger, 1972: 8)

Persons are not beings that move, they *are* their movements ... it is in their very patterns of activity that their presence lies. (Ingold, 2010:168)

Extending and expanding this enquiry into the performance space, I will be using the image of the shadow as a physical (re)presentation of the poetic dimension and will explore the degrees of this shadow present within each character

In *Ways of seeing*, John Berger writes;

Seeing comes before words [...]. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. (1972: 7)

In the interest of knowledge and knowing coming into being, each of the characters will have a different relationship to themselves and the poetic shadow. Some ‘see’, are aware/ conscious of the shadow, others are just caught up in it and do not initially see it at all;

their journey is one of coming into awareness.

The God of the Underworld, is all-knowing; he sees, he knows, he understands. In an almost *buffonesque* style, he can play with the shadow, with the tools at his disposal, with the implications of the poetic. We are aware of the actor walking alongside and within the character, and the character as well is aware of himself and the affect and effect he has on others, the audience, and the air through which he moves. It is the actor and his double as well as the character and *his* double. The Father too is all knowing, he sees and understands the shadow but he lacks the powers of the God of the Underworld, so he has to contain his knowledge deep within. He is stillness, the fixed point. Through him flows the spirit of Neutral Mask as he contemplates death and the human soul while building a room out of string for the daughter (Eurydice) who no longer recognises him. She too is in the Underworld, and thinks he is a porter at a large hotel.

The young lovers, Orpheus and Eurydice, only have eyes for each other. They do not see beyond the love-filled face shining back at them.

When in love, the sight of the beloved has a completeness which no words and no embrace can match; a completeness which only the act of making love can temporarily accommodate. (Berger, 1972: 8)

They *are* the world through which they move, they are the air through which they walk, the sea, the birds, the soil underfoot, the ground comes up to meet them. They do not see beyond the present moment. With these characters we will explore identification with the world of animate and inanimate objects and the transposition of these into performance.

The three person chorus takes the form/meaning of the young Lecoq's shadow in the stadium. This chorus portrays not only the three Stones (characters/figures) in the Underworld, but also are the physical extension of mood and ambience. They create place and setting, they move props and become smoke, menace; they speak the sound of footsteps. They are commentators and observers.

In creating these characters we will also explore the concept of **Mimage**: “a kind of close up on the character's internal dramatic state” and how this can be transposed into performance (Lecoq, 2000: 177). Lecoq proposes the use of Mimage in the form of brief physical asides:

Feelings are never performed or explained, but the actor produces lightning gestures which express, through a different logic, the character's state at a given moment [...] not explanatory gestures describing his state, but much more abstract movements which allows him to exteriorise elements which are naturally hidden in every day behaviour. (2000:109)

All of this work will be rooted in communal research during rehearsal inspired by a belief in Lecoq's *fond Poetique commun* which is accessed via a mimo-dynamic approach. The work and research is then transposed into theatre action and character, which I situate in the Grand Theatrical Territory of Melodrama.

Le fonds Poetique commun

The early stages of our work at the school are not based on text, nor any theatre tradition [...]. Our primary reference point is simply life. (Lecoq, 2000: 47)

I would here like to introduce another Lecoq concept - that of the well of communal poetic consciousness which Lecoq calls our common heritage; from which, I propose, the poetic is born and to which the actor and director can return for inspiration, ideas and guidance.

Why do we acknowledge only our textual sources but not the ground we walk, the ever-changing skies, mountains and rivers, rocks and trees, the houses we inhabit and the tools we use, not to mention the innumerable companions, both non-human animals and fellow humans with whom we share our lives! They are constantly inspiring us, challenging us, telling us things. If our aim is to read the world, as I believe it ought to be, then the purposes of written texts should be to enrich our reading so that we might be better advised by, and responsive to, what the world is telling us. (Ingold, 2010: xii)

Theatre works with vitality, corporeality - in short, life. Its primary accomplishment is not to represent the world but to be a part of it, to reflect a 'transaction' between consciousness and the thickness of experience. (Fortier, 2002: 43)

For Lecoq the student performer embarks on a journey:

[D]own into the depths. It brings us into contact with the essence of life...Here we are dealing with an abstract dimension made up of spaces, lights, colours, materials, sounds which can be found in all of us. (Lecoq, 2000: 47)

The word '*fond*' has a sense of depth and gravity to it – the deepest bottom of things (*le fonds de mon Coeur*/the bottom of my heart) - a deep well or pool which can act as source from which we can all draw energy, life, inspiration. Bim Mason, writing on Lecoq's influence on his own career as a street performer in England, calls this "the well

of possibilities.” (Mason, 2002: 45)

This is not merely a form of contemplation of the exterior world, “but a physical, immediate, muscular and visceral engagement with the wood, grass and soil” (Ingold, 2010: 126). We can engage with movement dynamics of architecture and with those of the written word on paper. Lecoq believed:

that the ability to respond creatively, or poetically, depended on the laying down of a series of sediments through the universally shared experiences of being born, nurtured, developing movement and speech, and discovering a world of movement, objects, colours, sounds and other human beings and animals outside ourselves. For an actor to enter into the necessary state of creative openness, he had to be able to relate afresh to these basic discoveries. (Bradby, 2002: 86)

Inhabiting and evolved from this well, is the body, presence and being of the Neutral Mask.

The Neutral Mask/The Neutral State

When a student has experienced this neutral starting point his body will be freed, like a blank page on which drama can be inscribed. (Lecoq, 2000: 38)

Before looking at blocking, shaping, creation of images, choreography, character work on the Medium Project, we worked on the Lecoq principle of the Neutral Mask. One of Lecoq’s early neutral mask exercises is called the ‘Waking of the Giants’, because of the hugeness of space which opens up within the performer and makes you feel enormous inside your skin. Working with Neutral mask exercises, “removes the excessive biography of the face [...] the neutral mask invites the wearer to activate and sensitise the rest of the body.” (Murray & Keefe, 2007: 145)

This neutral body/state, is the opposite of passive or static, and is in fact vibrating with energy and life, but this life comes from a still place deep within the performer. It is a fixed point from which all movement starts and to which it returns. It is a space of calm, of observation without judgment. It is that moment of just being present on stage or in a scene, walking, sitting or standing, with no distortion or dynamic of line. Lecoq describes the meeting of two neutral masks in an improvisation. He asks: “What could a neutral mask say to another neutral mask? Nothing. All they can do is to find themselves

together, facing an outside event which interests both of them.” (Lecoq, 2000: 42)

A variation of this state was explored in the final performance of *Interior* as the characters become frozen but still in action in front of the window of the family home. We worked on slowing down breathing, as if even the force of air leaving your mouth would create too much disturbance. Lecoq writes: “Having experienced perfect balance, the actor is better equipped to express a character’s imbalance or conflictual states” (Lecoq, 2000: 40). Neutral mask work helps create:

a state of great readiness and energy ... where everything is possible ... an extraordinary world opens of associations, tensions, rhythms; a research where anything and everything is useful to the performer as a point of reference. (Martin, 2002: 61)

The Mimo-Dynamic Body

The Neutral Body starts to move and to transform into the Poetic Body through the encounter with this “extraordinary world”. It is a mimo-dynamic journey of discovery that involves returning to the *fond Poétique commun*; a detailed observation and physical identification with nature, discovering a variety of rhythms, forms, gestures and dynamics. These are then woven into the theatrical experience as a visual, visceral poetic language. With humour, Lecoq writes: “Of course we do not mean total identification, which would be worrying, but rather playing at identification.” (Lecoq, 2000: 43)

Theatre is PLAY. Imitation, transposition and re-invention of the world. [...] It's a space where life is represented, celebrated and transformed - through the body. This is a process that requires observation and curiosity in front of the mystery and wonder of life in movement. (Fusetti, 2012: np)

This mimo-dynamic approach is about re-examining the performer’s somatic relation and identification with the world, so that that these relations, observations and identification can then be used as material in creating the performance text through the process of transposition into a theatrical space. It is a process not of *expression*, but one of *impression*. I see the sea, I observe the sea, I become the sea, I am the sea. It is not about showing what the sea looks like; it is about letting the sea enter into you. It is the world making impressions in and on you, which you (the actor) can then use, transposing these impressions into action, character, and gesture. “*One morning the sea wakes up! The*

wind is combing his hair” (Lecoq, 2000: 46). There is something anthropological about this process of observation and identification. As Ingold writes in the quotation at the beginning of part three, both artists and anthropologists “observe, describe, propose”. For Lecoq and his on-going research into the dynamics and laws of movement, the observation of mime was a form of knowledge. A knowing of the world in a fresh and vital way:

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. (Lecoq, 2000: 22)

The world being mimed by the body is not only the physical world. It is also the world of power and dominance, of loss, love, grief, longing, struggle, expression, freedom, submission, dreams, desires, heartaches, lines and divisions, identity, belonging, territory, home, memory, family and so on.

The main result of this identification work are the traces that remain inscribed in each actor, circuits laid down in the body, through which dramatic emotions also circulate, finding their pathway to expression. These experiences ... remain forever engraved in the body of the actor. They are reactivated in him at the moment of interpretation ... when an actor finds himself with a text to interpret. The text will set up resonances in his body, meeting rich deposits awaiting expressive formulation. The actor can then speak from full physical awareness. For in truth nature is our first language. Our bodies remember! (Lecoq, 2000: 47)

It is by activating with consciousness and skill these ‘traces’ within each performer, weaving them together with traces of character, with physical traces drawn in space, by tracing connections between text and movement, that the Poetic Body becomes most visible. Again Ingold speaks to Lecoq, traces across time, when he writes about storytelling:

Someone who knows well is able to tell. They can tell not only in the sense of being able to recount stories of the world, but also in the sense of having a finely tuned perceptual awareness of their surroundings [...]. To tell, in short, is not to represent the world but to trace a path through it that others can follow. (Ingold, 2010: 163)

Eurydice is a story of traces, some bold and clear, others very faded. In the Underworld,

Eurydice does not recognise her father, who remembers her. He builds her a room out of string, all he can do is to create the trace outline of a home she has no memory of. The God of the Underworld is like a spider, weaving his web, leaving traces over all space and characters. Orpheus re-traces the paths he and Eurydice followed and made together in his urgent searching for her.

Ariane Mnouchkine talks of digging more deeply into life, “theatre should take us to the life obscured by everyday reality... a place that holds life’s forces rather than displaying the products of a materialist culture.” (Mnouchkine in Miller, 2007: 35)

Opening the Map: The Grand Theatrical Territories

The Poetic Body travels through and inhabits what Lecoq refers to as the Grand Theatrical Territories: Tragedy, Commedia d’elle Arte, Melodrama, Buffon and Clown. Each of these territories is defined spatially by one dominant line or direction: the diagonal, the horizontal and the vertical, and the interplay between these lines.

In the space of Tragedy, the **vertical line** dominates. We come into the relationship and struggle and opposition between the low and the high, the above and below, where the human being on the earth (the hero) must deal with destiny, with fate and the gods. What heightens the tragedy of this dynamic, is how high the hero attempts to reach, which only means that he has so much further to fall. On a **horizontal** level, “we move towards clown, the poetry of falling over. [...] It’s the dynamic opposition to the hero who is always trying to stand up” (Fusetti, 2002: 96).

Melodrama (the territory of my practical research) works with the **diagonal** line, the line between the high and the low, which moves across the surface. Melodrama is about love and betrayal, about a social struggle against injustice, about deeply difficult choices very human characters are forced to make. A melodramatic performer has a way of playing the space on the diagonal: oblique movements, the play of opposites - I must leave and go this way, but my heart is pulling in another direction wanting me to stay.

Working on the floor with the play of opposition in these lines, Eugenio Barba provides a useful approach that I explored in blocking and creating a spatial dynamic in *Interior*. I referred to these three movement directions, exploring the tensions and

dynamics to be found in this interplay between them - the distortion of the vertical creating the spiral, the rupture of line. He writes of isolating an action or a line from its context, of simplification of a moment, playing with a point of opposition, amplifying it and then re-assembling it as part of a succession or sequence of movement in order to reveal possible new meanings (Barba, 1991:13). Here we enrich the performance texture as the pure play with line can create drama and tension of its own, alongside the written action of the playtext. Lecoq invented a verb, *essentialiser*, which means to reduce any movement or action to its essential components, distilling down to the essential economy of the movement. This reduction helps to “uncover the dramatic content in the movement or action” (Lecoq, 2000: 175). This research journey with the dynamics and dramatics of geometry and line in space started in the Medium project will be continued in the staging of *Eurydice*.

Moving into Performance

The Lecoq training takes place over two years of full-time study. Many companies form immediately after leaving the school fired to put into practice the theatrical worlds opened up to them. As discussed earlier, a very particular ‘style’ of many of these companies and practitioners is that of highly inventive visual, devised theatre. How might a director integrate this physical training/preparation/world in to the profession in which actors with different backgrounds meet together for a too brief rehearsal process? When faced with text and the desire to honour this text without radical deconstruction of word and structure, how might a director move forward? How can Lecoq’s idea of the Poetic Body be applied by a director to the staging of text?

Proceeding further from this written explication and inspired by all of the above research, the title of the practical project could be:

Eurydice: Mapping a rehearsal process guided by Lecoq’s Grand Theatrical Territories and occupied and inhabited by the Poetic Body of the performer.

Thoughts around the actor and space which provide a frame to the preparation for the journey into rehearsals and staging:

- The Poetic Body lives **in** the space of the theatre - not **on** the flat surface of the

stage, not, framed by the proscenium arch or even by the roof and walls of the theatre building. The moving body would appear to be earth bound, bound by the limits of human movement; a physical body cannot move through walls or defy gravity. For the Poetic Body, there are no walls and there is no gravity.

- The Poetic Body is not “stranded on a closed surface” (Ingold, 2010:121) but is “immersed in the incessant movements of wind and weather, in a zone wherein the substances and medium are brought together in the constitution of beings that, by the way of their activity, participate in stitching the textures of the land [theatre production]” (2010: 120). The character might well be stranded on a closed surface or unable to take action and unaware of the sense of life in which they move. The actor is the one working with this awareness, even if the character is blind to the ‘fullness of life’ moving around them.
- The rehearsals will be set up as a laboratory of experimentation, with the Director organising the resultant work into a production shape which will be presented and shared with an audience. As the production is part of on-going research, and is without a designer attached to the project (set/lighting/costume or sound), the raw materials of the space, the actors and the text become the key foci in the process of creating and of the performance text.

Pedagogy of the constraint

Constraints are necessary for transposing life into representations of life, for creating another life that is stronger. They are born of the demands of poetry. (Lecoq, 2000: 76)

Of great relevance to the independent theatre maker in South Africa is Lecoq’s **pedagogy of the constraint**. Lecoq talks of the importance of limitations and constraints, not only of space and design, but also of working with silence before starting to speak, of starting from a point of stillness before moving. “Constraints are necessary as rules for the game of acting” (Lecoq, 2006: 76). A lack of set, scenery, costumes, limited props are all limits, constraints which “force the actor to create what the eye does not see.” (72)

I have already started experimenting with the ideas of this enquiry in my professional work, most notably in *Oskar en die Pienk Tannie* with Afrikaans actress Sandra Prinsloo

(2012). It is a one woman show in which Prinsloo plays multiple characters including a ten year old boy, and travels to different locations in space, time and in the imagination. Prinsloo is an actress who works primarily with text, often classical, and although she is an extremely fit performer, she has never done so-called physical theatre. She is also now in her 60s.

She was my very willing guinea pig, and together we applied Lecoq and the ideas around the Poetic Body to our process. Three primary areas emerged as of great value: The Pedagogy of Constraint, Contraction and Expansion (previously discussed), and the dynamics of Push and Pull.

The physical constraints of our production, as with much festival touring work, were the constraint of set and space and of costumes and props. Prinsloo and I worked with a small square floor cloth with only a bench on stage, and she wore a pair of blue jeans, sweatshirt and a pair of red sneakers throughout the show, and through gestural suggestion, created all of the props required by the story. Through these constraints she was able to transcend the limits imposed in the original text, to create images of the boy floating through space, through water, we entered his dreamscape as well as his daily reality in his home at a children's hospital. We played with the constraint of time by contraction and elongation that, as Lecoq says: "can allow mutation of language, essentialisation of gesture [...]. The constraint of time by expansion proposes a lengthening rather than a reduction of time: to do in five minutes what in reality would take thirty seconds" (74). Playing with the constraints of time allows for: slow motion, fast forward, frozen moments, and repetition of gesture or movement.

Lecoq believes that the **dynamic of Push and Pull** underpins all movement,

Everything a person does in their life can be reduced to two essential actions: 'to pull' and 'to push'. We do nothing else! These two actions include the passive 'I am pulled' and 'I am pushed' and the reflexive 'I pull myself' and 'I push myself' and can go in many different directions; forwards, top one side or the other, backwards, diagonally, etc. I call this the rose of effort. It comprises a multi-directional space which can be adapted to all human movements, whether physical or psychological, whether a simple movement of the arm or an all-consuming passion, a movement of the head or a profound desire, everything brings us back to push/pull. (Lecoq, 2000: 86)

The push and pull can be motivated by both external and internal forces, and Prinsloo and I played with the extremities of both and the tensions between for example, pushing

towards someone, but being pulled away. Simon Murray writes of the double possibilities of external forces and the outside world creating the push and pull, as well as a push and pull interior to each character:

[The actor] discovers a dramatic situation in an off balance environment. Here, being pushed and pulled by wild elements constantly exposes [the character] to the physical experience of being thrown off balance[...]. [O]n a more psychological level ... in place of external forces, [characters] are pushed and pulled by forces from within; their own passions. (Murray, 2003: 143)

A result of this experimenting with Prinsloo was that using this language of Lecoq with her, provided a solid rehearsal vocabulary which we could use to understand each other.

Understanding Text(ure)

Action is also a text. As is the space, the light, the music, the sound of footsteps, silence and immobility. All should be as articulate and evocative as each other. [...] What people DO must be as clear as what they SAY. (McBurney in Murray & Keefe, 2007: 33)

The performer works with his body the way a painter does his canvas. He explores it, manipulates it, paints it, covers it, uncovers it, freezes it, and moves it, cuts it, isolates it and speaks to it as if it were a foreign object. It is a chameleon body, a foreign body where the subject's desires and repressions surface. (Feral, 1997: 290)

As action is text, as body is text, so too, is text action. "To think of the text itself as a physical entity, brimming with energy, with patterns and colours embedded in it" helps open the route to search for "meaning, story and character, through somatic encounters with the text" (Callery, 2001: 200). The words and action proposed by the writing, contain within them rhymes and patterns which can be separated from the page and developed, scoring an 'actiontext' which is apart from a purely literal playing out or illustrating of the story. The aim here for the director is to move beyond the "merely illustrative" (203). Lecoq writes: "The laws of movement govern all theatrical situations. A piece of writing is a structure in motion" (Lecoq, 2000: 22). The text is not only an indicator of plot, but contains within it rhythms and movement dynamics through the choice of words and style of writing.

As words and text have patterns and colours embedded in them, so too is the body open to dissection of rhythm and habitual patterns. As the text comes to the rehearsals as

an entity apart, a foreign body, so too does the corporeal presence of the performer.

The actor under observation in this enquiry is not only at the service of the playwright and creator of character. This actor is *co-creator*, with the director, of a performance text that will emerge during rehearsals. The actor in this process is not all consumed by the 'me' focus: "My character, my journey, what are my motivations/obstacles?" The focus is on the 'us', the ensemble world to be created together.

Alongside the written character, walks the actor, aware of other worlds colliding around the action of the playtext. Different levels of the 'real'. In real time suggested by the written text and stage directions, a character might walk across the stage to make tea – meanwhile - their heart is in their mouth, fear trickles down their spine, or else they are so happy that they feel as if they are floating through the air. These are possible moments where a new visual text can be written in space via the body. The bodies can also suggest outer forces operating that the character simply on their way to make a cup of tea knows nothing of.³ . Transposition, contrast and rupture of the surface real are all part of theatrical language which can be explored by the Poetic Body colliding, fusing, and playing with other Poetic Bodies. All of this is material which makes up the text(ure) of performance. Text here employed as the sum total of all actions that make up the theatre event; "a particular gathering together or interweaving of materials in movement." (Ingold, 2010: 214)

³ Refer to the earlier use of 'Mimage' in this paper: 27

From Pedagogy to Praxis: A journey through and with certain key concepts of Jacques Lecoq

Here is a summation of other concepts of Lecoq's pedagogy which were explored on the floor in the Medium project and which will be developed further in the staging of *Eurydice*, and that inform this written enquiry.⁴

These are:

- The equilibrium and dis-equilibrium of the stage as a principle tool in blocking the action.
- Transposition and Rupture.
- Most significantly for me as director overwhelmed by the soul destroying logistics of the freelance world, - rekindling during rehearsals the *esprit du jeu!* The playfulness of theatre making, the play of the actor. "Not for us the tortured self-questioning about the best way to walk on stage: it is enough that it is done with pleasure." (Lecoq, 2000: 68)

Tout Bouge: Everything moves!

⁴ Specific exercises around Lecoq's pedagogy may be found in: Callery (2001), Murray (2003) and Lecoq (2000).

CONCLUSION

It is the essence of life that it does not begin here or end there, or connect a point of origin with a final destination, but rather that it keeps on going, finding a way through the myriad of things that form, persist and break up in its current. Life, in short, is a movement of opening, not of closure. (Ingold, 2010: 3-4)

I write this conclusion in the spirit of a “movement of opening, not of closure”.

All theatre is physical, all actors move. Even lying on a death bed or sitting in a wheel chair, the character is in action, however tiny and still. All theatre productions have text, made up of different strands woven together to create a texture of experience, beyond the written playtext. Lecoq writes: “Movement is more than just a matter of covering the distance between points A and B. The important thing is *how* the distance is covered” (Lecoq, 2000: 21). The *how* proposed in this study, is an approach to staging text which weaves together a process of exploring both the action proposed by the text, as well as a more abstract, poetic dimension to be found within and around the words and plot. Heightening text(ure) of a production through imag(in)ing the creative potential of the Poetic Body.

One aspect of the Poetic Body is seen in much Lecoq-inspired theatre creation where the body is part of highly physicalized performance; where we witness the ability of the moving actor to transcend their singular self and create worlds within worlds, play multiple characters, props, furniture, locations, smoke, animals, atmosphere, and the heart beating. This actor is able to generate original visual text and material due to the openness of imagination and body and his/her willingness to play.

These rich physical resources are but one side of the Poetic Body. I propose in this study the image of the shadow as an outward manifestation of this poetic dimension/potential. Of interest to this study is also the body/shadow within the performer. This shadow is the projection of who you are, what you cannot verbally express, of the space that you occupy. This is activated through an anthropological journey of observation and identification, which is also an inward journey that takes the actor into the very centre of his/her being, connecting him/her with the forces of the

phenomena of the world around them. This Poetic Body is not “inscribed upon the surface of the world but woven into its very fabric” (Ingold, 2010:168). The actor moves not from a place of self-centeredness: “Me alone in my struggle, my process, my character, my journey”. Although each performer must do detailed personal research there is an acknowledgment that we as artists are part of the world, “woven into its very fabric”; not merely scratching, inscribing, and moving on the surface. The approach to performance explored here is about an acute observation of the world and our place within it, not just the self of the singular actor. What is required is a sense that we are part of the world and not in conflict with it. The world of the stage reflects this relationship which is not divided into ‘my part’ and ‘your part’, but is rather a co-authorship as an ensemble in an attempt to heighten the texture and visual language of the performance.

The Poetic Body, awakened in that stadium outside Paris just after the Second World War, elongating and contracting over time, over continents, across language and style is here seen as proposing a different lens with which to view the Moving Body. Comparing the Poetic and the Moving Bodies to poetry and prose, we glimpse how the Poetic Body might move beyond the noun and the verb of the actor acting/performing/moving. It can be verb, adjective, alliteration, onomatopoeia, metaphor, it can contract and expand. For the personal purpose of defining a directorial approach, examining this distinction has been of great value.

After this journey of exploration, returning to a familiar place and seeing it as if for the first time, I realise now, however, that for Lecoq there was no such distinction between the moving and the poetic. Murray, writing his book on Lecoq sees a tension and dualism between Lecoq’s preoccupations with Movement and with the Poetic, he suggests these to be “two very different ways of understanding or explaining the world” (Murray, 2002: 156). For Lecoq, I believe, there was no difference. Movement WAS poetry and poetic. A passion for the purity of movement sustained and fed Lecoq’s journey and enquiry for nearly half a century. For him movement is a given - it is a fact of the body and its potential. He didn’t need to use the title Moving Body, because that is what bodies do. Contained within his use and understanding of the word ‘body’ is its movement. I do feel that I better understand Bradby and his choice of title, as Lecoq, across all articles and readings, keeps coming back to Movement - with a ‘capital M’ as

he stipulates. He had an innate understanding of the internal dynamics of movements *and* their inherent poetic qualities.

I have always loved movement. My first introduction to it was in stadiums and swimming pools, where I could enjoy the simple act of moving: the body's extension in throwing the discus ... that moment of suspension just above the bar in the high jump. These actions expanded in my mind. (Lecoq, 1987: 96)

But it is not just the moving body in centre focus, he links this moving to something greater than the movement and the mover: "To talk about movement, about rhythm, about space and about time, is to talk about life and its mysteries" (Lecoq, 1987: 88). I feel that he was guiding the reader away from any limited views we have of movement and the body with his use of the *Corps Poetique* as title. Elevating the body into poetry in motion was his gift to the moving body, to the art of theatre, and a permanent reminder of his vision.

This written explication is but one thread making up the research. It has been, and continues to be, woven together with the practical research. Traces of the practical project are very much being formed and laid down in thought and in imagination. A process now of imagining what languages, what images might emerge by the application of the ideas proposed here. A continuation of research on the floor to explore the questions motivating this study: how does one articulate the unsaid, how can an actor, with the awareness of the potential creativity to be explored by the Poetic Body, use this to write a visual text in space that is not a simple description or reproduction in image of what is in the word text?

Returning to my studies at Lecoq I am reminded of his words to us as we ended our final year. He said that it takes from five to fifteen years for students to start building their own theatre from the foundations laid at the school. In *Le Corps Poetique* he makes this point saying: "One of the schools' unique features is to provide as broad and durable a foundation as possible, since we know that each student will go on to make his own journey using the foundations we provide" (Lecoq, 2000: 16). My gaze now moves from the (re) search of those foundations, as my journey continues, and I move from the position in the middle of theory and writing around the Poetic and the Moving Body, to continue the adventure into the theatre space.

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