The Routledge Companion to Jacques Lecoq

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Lecoq’s influence on UK drama schools

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Jacques Lecoq’s influence on British performance training was shaped by its need to coexist with traditions already in place by the time of its arrival. The most potent amongst these was the emphasis on speech and text, which had dominated much of actor training in Britain for the first half of the 20th century. At the two oldest conservatoires, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) and the Central School of Speech and Drama (Central), voice teachers taught acting; acting could not – should not – be parted from the voice. As late as 1961, Sir Laurence Olivier – the nearest the modern age had to a Leader of the British Theatre – confidently endorsed this approach and extolled its Englishness:

For more than half-a-century, the Central School of Speech and Drama has gone quietly about its valuable work of training a nucleus of actors, actresses and teachers of drama whose work is based on sound principles of speech production. . . . I commend to you this work which helps to maintain the high tradition of English speech – which brings new appreciation of the riches we have inherited in the English language.

(CSSD Prospectus and Brochure 1961–2, An Introduction, p. 1)

Since the Second World War, a growing interest in body-based acting teaching had, however, begun to challenge the domination of the spoken word. Two approaches imported from the Continent offered themselves as key alternatives: expressionist dance, which considered external movement to be in a mutually dependent relationship with inner motivation; and the tradition of playful theatricality regenerated in France by Jacques Copeau and brought to Britain by his nephew, the great reformer of theatre education, Michel Saint-Denis.

On either side of the war, Saint-Denis had established in London two short-lived but highly influential theatre schools: the London Theatre Studio (1935–39) and the Old Vic Theatre School (OVTS; 1947–52). In these, he married the British focus on classical text with the best of the Copeau practices: mask work, animal observation, circus skills and an emphasis on improvisation and play. During the same period, the Viennese Litz Pisk began shaping the teaching of movement-for-actors in the modern sense, first at RADA in the 1930s, then at Saint-Denis's OVTS and finally at Central (Pisk, 1976). These two personalities established, in their own right as well as through the influence of their fellow teachers
and of their graduates, a pattern of body-based training which they placed in the service of exploring and interpreting (mainly classical) texts. This tradition was to become as important to the reception of Lecoq's work as that of voice and verse-speaking.

From the 1950s onwards, Pisk's influence was amplified by two other exponents of the Central European Movement School. Unlike Pisk, who had studied with Isadora Duncan's sister, these younger teachers traced their lineage – both directly and through the work of his influential disciples, the choreographers Kurt Jooss and Sigurd Leeder – to the ideas and work of Rudolf Laban. The Swede Yat Malmgren (who had danced with Jooss's company) taught first at RADA, then at Central, and from 1963, at Drama Centre London, the school he co-founded; while Trish Arnold was, in turn, Head of Movement at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, drawing equally from the methods of Sigurd Leeder (in whose company she had danced) and the Copeau/Saint-Denis tradition.

The specifically British feature of Arnold's approach was the intimate connection she instituted between movement and voice. She also established a distinction – later widely adopted by her numerous admirers – between 'pure movement' ('swings' – Pisk-inspired exercises for the spine; stretching, release, strength and flexibility) and 'expressive movement': animal work, masks and Laban-derived exercises exploring the relationship of the body with space and momentum (intention).

One should therefore note the points of contact which existed at a fundamental level between the Laban/Central European Movement tradition and the teaching approaches Lecoq was developing: the emphasis was placed, for example, on the primacy of the body above the word in artistic expression, as well as on self-knowledge and direct knowledge of the world through physical experience. Attitudes to the observation and analysis of movement were different, however: Laban had analysed expressive movement into its 'component elements', the universals of Weight, Time, Space and Flow (1950/1971: 22) and developed from that analysis a complex edifice of classification, up to and including a classification of personality types based on habitual movement patterns, which he saw as indicative of psychological emphases. Such explicit ties with psychology played no part in Lecoq's thinking, which emphasised intuitive discovery through play and shunned cerebral discourse. One can see, on the other hand, why, in the first three decades after the war, so many British Drama Schools found a Laban-derived approach appealing: a methodology founded on explicit, analytical principles and techniques could be systematised into teaching curricula; moreover, linking movement to psychology dovetailed with an emerging, if still muted, interest in Stanislavski and his American followers.

By the late 1960s, this complex of traditions still formed the core of the teaching of a 'second generation', which counted among its numbers the influential Movement Directors Jane Gibson, Sue Lefton and Shona Morris. All three were Trish Arnold disciples; however, responding to new trends, they also chose to study at Lecoq. They eventually introduced Arnold herself to Lecoq's work, and in the early 1970s, she attended some of his workshops – the first of her generation of movement pioneers to do so. Lecoq's influence remained marginal in Arnold’s own teaching, but as the ‘second generation’ of movement teachers was reaching positions of authority, Lecoq's influence began to establish itself in earnest.

Away from the London developments, however, the earliest institution to adopt a movement curriculum structured around Lecoq practice was the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (RSAMD) in Glasgow. In 1970, Colin Chandler, its Director of Drama, sent Peter Lincoln, a recent acting graduate with a talent for movement, on a bursary to Paris, with the express mission to study with Lecoq before returning to Glasgow to teach.
A personal connection with Lecoq had been established through Fay Lees, a former student of Chandler's in Glasgow. In 1955, Lees had moved to Paris to study mime with Etienne Decroux and had met Jacques Lecoq, with whom she formed a close personal and professional partnership: in 1956 they founded the Lecoq school together, and they were married in 1960. It felt natural for Chandler to send Lincoln to Lecoq and to his former student for the acquisition of a coherent movement methodology.

On his return to RSAMD, Lincoln (at Lecoq, 1970–71) was appointed Lecturer in Movement, Acting and Directing (1971–92), eventually becoming Head of Movement (1992–2008) (Steen & Deans, 2009: 48, n. 29). In the 1970s, Lincoln also chaired the Scottish Arts Council’s Dance and Mime Committee. One of the committee’s tasks was to allocate bursaries, and Lecoq’s school became a destination of choice for actors from Scotland wishing to study mime and movement. In 1990, Lincoln was joined on the staff of the RSAMD by two of these actors, and from that moment on, the RSAMD can be said to have nailed its colours firmly to the Lecoq mast. But what they taught was a very British version of Lecoq.

The movement curriculum Lincoln had devised was structured as follows:

- The first year, which was designed to increase awareness of acquired movement patterns and expand the student’s physical range, covered neutral mask, undulations, (Laban) effort actions, the punt (mime), animal and elements observation and embodiment, and levels of tension.
- The second year was given over to expressive movement: comic and tragic mask, clown, bouffon, an introduction to melodrama, heightened play, and cartoons.

Lincoln grafted Alexander and Laban elements on this work, and Lecoq also cohabited with more traditional pursuits: dance and fencing. When working on third-year public performances, while Lecoq concepts and Lecoq exercises might be recalled, students and tutors alike were at liberty to draw, eclectically, on any source they thought useful. The resulting acting style was essentially realistic, relying as much on Stanislavskian text breakdown, strong voice training and work on classical verse, as on Lecoq. The Lecoq-trained teachers were expected (and willingly acquiesced) to swim with the prevailing current, not least so as to respond to the expectations of their students. What they had learnt in Paris had undoubtedly been revelatory and valuable, but neither they nor their institution considered it to be a springboard for a wholesale re-evaluation of the purpose of training. In so doing, they distanced themselves from Lecoq’s call for theatre schools not to ‘journey in the wake of existing theatre forms . . . [but to] have a visionary aspect, developing new languages of the stage and thus [assist] in the renewal of theatre itself’ (2000: 162). Lecoq’s approach had to find a modus vivendi alongside other, already established, approaches and methodologies.

Nowhere was this accommodation more in evidence than in the London schools. By the 1970s, Jane Gibson, who had been Trish Arnold’s ‘apprentice teacher’ at LAMDA, and Sue Lefton, a student of Litz Pisk’s at Central, had formed a professional partnership; they were seeking, and failing, to persuade the big theatre companies to allow them to direct in the movement-orientated style they had been developing. At the same time, more and more actors were returning from Paris fired up by their experiences at Lecoq. So, first Gibson (at Lecoq 1969–70), then Lefton (at Lecoq, 1976–77) joined the Paris school. There they found three aspects of the teaching particularly innovative: clown, a skill they had not thought would be possible to acquire but which they could now actually teach; mask; and physical improvisations leading to the creation of original material.
Following their return, Gibson taught alongside Trish Arnold at LAMDA, while Guildhall engaged Lefton as Head of Movement (1980–85). There she was meant to do ‘Pisk work’, to which Lefton added commedia and mask work, learnt at Lecoq. Guildhall readily accepted these as elements in the movement curriculum; Lefton was not permitted, however, to teach improvisation. Improvisation came within the ambit of the acting department, and Lecoq ‘belonged to movement’. As in Scotland, these drama schools also expected movement classes to be aligned with a realistic, ‘psychological’ methodology applied to text: intentions, motives, and objectives were just as important as physical expressivity and ‘play’. While still students in Paris, Gibson and Lefton had actually had reservations about the way in which some of the teaching at Lecoq’s school could be taken to imply that his work was incompatible with the interpretation of extant texts. Now, as teachers, the approaches they absorbed at Lecoq remained framed by their earlier Pisk/Arnold outlook. Litz Pisk had once declared: ‘Lecoq people are drunk on movement’, and for her former students, text remained the key-stone of the theatre edifice.

It was left to another member of the ‘second generation’ to broaden the input of Lecoq work into the curriculum. Shona Morris had not trained at a conservatoire but instead chosen to read Drama at Bristol University before taking the road to Paris (at Lecoq, 1976–78). Gibson and Lefton, emerging from a conservatoire tradition, had gone to Lecoq principally to extend their skills. Morris, with a university outlook, felt that at Lecoq she could research, debate and make theatre which was not entirely text-based, in which metaphor, gestus and politics were at the forefront. When, in 1995, Morris joined the staff at Rose Bruford College, soon becoming Head of Movement (1996–2005), she also found herself working within a different academic framework. In the late 1980s, Bruford had been the first institution in the UK to validate a BA in Acting, combining under the umbrella of a single degree four discreet pathways, ranging from text-based drama to a course for actor-musicians and a ‘physical theatre’ course. Morris found herself arguing for the centrality of movement to the ensemble of the teaching and sought to influence curriculum design by introducing core Lecoq features. She therefore proposed a syllabus which included:

- ‘Pure movement’ in the Pisk/Arnold tradition
- Expressive movement, a mixture of Lecoq and Laban: embodying elements, materials, etc.
- Animal study in the Lecoq tradition
- Mask work, both neutral and character
- Chorus work

While her conflation of Lecoq and Arnold was welcomed, chorus work was not. The leadership of the course considered that chorus work would impose a particular style of acting and would thus stray beyond the proper domain of the Movement Department. It was only when Morris became Leader of the BA Acting at Drama Centre London (DCL, 2000–14) that she was in a position to introduce chorus work, both in the studio and in a number of productions. However, the DCL course already boasted a long-established body-based tradition, derived from both Laban and Copeau approaches, and this left little room for major additions to the curriculum. As at LAMDA, Guildhall and Bruford, defining Lecoq work principally as ‘movement’ proved to be a barrier to the adoption of key features of his teaching.

Some of these were, nonetheless, taking root in educational contexts other than those of the traditional drama school. Paradoxically, the main exponent of mask and improvisation-led theatre-making was a man who had not made the journey to Paris. John Wright attended the New College (1969–71), a small, eclectic London drama school, and while still a student...
he had read Copeau. Invited to stay and teach, he sourced some simple, ‘larval’ masks, which fulfilled the purpose of Lecoq’s neutral masks: a means of somatic knowledge, both of self and of the world (Wright in Chamberlain & Yarrow, 2002: 71). When, a few years later, New College merged with the then Middlesex Polytechnic, its acting course morphed into the first BA in Performing Arts in the UK, bringing together dance, drama and music. For Wright, this proved to be a gift: here was an opportunity to break the mould of British actor training, which he saw as having ‘lost touch with the demands of a theatre practice that has been gradually moving away from the “actor as interpreter” to the “actor as creator”’ (Wright in Chamberlain & Yarrow, 2002: 83). The course he helped design at Middlesex was meant to fill that gap. Working with humanities students, Wright developed a curriculum encompassing work with half-masks and commedia masks as well as the earlier larval masks, and he structured his teaching around non-verbal improvisations.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Wright also attended workshops with Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier. These both confirmed and expanded his own insights, and in 1980 his work with masks led to the formation of Trestle, an influential ‘physical theatre’ company, all of whose members had been his students at Middlesex. As always in the British context, the relationship to text became crucial. Early Trestle work had been almost wordless, but very soon text began to play an important role, and the company moved from improvised work to adaptations and interpretations of extant texts. And more: at a workshop in the early 1980s, Wright had watched Lecoq playing *The Jesuit*, a mask many ‘Lecoqians’ disliked because they considered it to be ‘psychological’. For Wright, psychology did not have negative connotations, and starting in 1982, ‘with a group of sensitive students’, he developed at Middlesex a new set of teaching masks, this time based on archetypes. These new masks enabled the actor to create a persona, not in order to establish new characters, but as a means of exploring the personality traits of characters in extant texts. As a result, in the late 1980s Wright was invited to work at the National Theatre Studio, using his archetypal masks to explore classical characters: ‘The Mother’, for instance, morphed into Medea. After leaving Middlesex to run his own school, Wright further extended his training work, conducting workshops in which masks and counter-masks (those ostensibly inappropriate for the character) were used to illuminate characters from unexpected angles and so provide layers of interpretation for certain lines and actions. Throughout, Wright’s relationship to text was founded on conviction, not expediency. He writes:

[Lecoq’s] process . . . is a unique grounding for a theatre maker but as a pathway for an actor it is incomplete. A highly creative individual with an articulate and responsive body is only part of what is required in an actor. To produce a performer without an equally responsive voice and an imaginative response to language is like training a pianist to only use one hand.

(Wright in Chamberlain & Yarrow, 2002: 82)

Away from the concerns of training with explicit professional goals, many universities and colleges also incorporated elements of Lecoq’s work into performance-related academic studies. Here, Lecoq-based teaching also pushed against competing traditions and agendas. As Director of Theatre at Dartington College of Arts (2004–08), the noted Lecoq specialist Simon Murray (trained with Gaulier, 1986–1987) should have been in a position to bring a Lecoq-informed perspective to an institution which foregrounded the performative as well as having a rich history of cross-fertilisation of art forms. Murray introduced key Lecoq concepts – play as generator of dramatic material, neutrality, *complicité, disponibilité* – accompanied by associated
exercises, including some neutral mask work and Feldenkrais movement. These were not considered appropriate, however, for an institution which – starting from a tradition of embodied practices in dance rather than mime – had moved strongly towards Live Art. A vigorous debate ensued around the concepts of ‘role’ and ‘character’, what constituted acting, and the most appropriate way of preparing students for the broadest outlook on performance. Paradoxically, Lecoq – who, as Murray says, ‘was more Bauhaus than boot camp’ – got tarred with the ‘training’ brush, a pejorative term for those adopting a Live Art outlook.

Such arguments bore witness to the fact that since the 1990s, the professional theatre landscape in Britain had changed beyond recognition: the success of companies such as Son et Lumière, Trestle, Told by an Idiot and above all, Theatre de Complicité, as well as the influence of Live Art, had brought into the mainstream forms of theatre which emphasised the physical and the imagistic. The established conservatoires, always priding themselves with ‘serving the profession’, could not but take notice. Emboldened, former Lecoq students – some of whom had come to lead courses – could now design entire learning programmes on Lecoq principles.

As a result of a fundamental review, in Lecoq’s old bastion in Glasgow, the curriculum of the BA Acting was restructured around three main traditions: Lecoq, Stanislavski, and the voice work of Nadine George, whose approach the staff considered to have particular affinities and complementarities with Lecoq’s teaching (Steen & Deans, 2009). In 2009, two long-serving Lecoq-trained lecturers, Joyce Deans and Mark Saunders, were promoted to Head of Acting and Leader of the MA Classical and Contemporary Text courses, respectively. In the same year, the RSAMD, now renamed the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS), appointed two more Lecoq graduates, Lucien Lindsay-MacDougall and Benedicte Seierup (both at Lecoq 1996–98), to strengthen its movement department. The curriculum they taught now closely echoed Lecoq’s own: movement analysis, the main ‘scales’ of tension, passion and reactions, neutral mask, observation of natural elements and animal work – all leading to enhanced awareness of acquired body patterns, and thence to the possibility of transformation.

Despite the explicit importance afforded the Lecoq tradition, the feeling persisted among both staff and students that Lecoq approaches still had to compete for their place in the sun with the might of Stanislavski and the British focus on text. Lindsay-MacDougall uses a phrase borrowed from D.C.P. Pierre17 – ‘the juggernaut and the pram’ – to describe this relationship: psychological and textual analyses constantly threatening to overwhelm Lecoq’s ‘Victorian pram’. Given a choice, Lindsay-MacDougall and Seierup would install a full-blooded Lecoq programme. This, they believe, would enable their graduates to move from interpretation to creation, beyond acting to a wider spectrum of artistic endeavour, rooted in movement. But that choice is not (or not yet) available.

Perhaps closest to the Lecoq model among contemporary acting courses is the BA Acting – Collaborative and Devised Theatre (CDT) course at Central. One of three discreet yet interrelated acting programmes, the CDT course is described by its Leader, Catherine Alexander (at Lecoq, 1997–99), as ‘teaching acting with a strong nod to Lecoq’, in particular to his vision of actors as creators.

The Lecoq methodology defines the acting core of the course and is no longer solely assigned to the movement curriculum (this would have ‘downgraded it’, says Alexander). Instead, the movement curriculum includes yoga, contemporary dance and bio-mechanics alongside limited Lecoq elements (some of the vingt mouvements, mimetic observation). Lecoq acting does not, however, reign alone: the structure of the curriculum dictates that Lecoq work be paralleled each term by canonical plays and by elements of Stanislavski. This juxtaposition in turn led to a reconsideration of certain aspects of Lecoq’s syllabus. Thus, only
one of the final-year public performances is devised; the others are all text-based. Earlier on in the course, however, devising plays an important role: at the end of the first year, animal study leads to an ensemble devising exercise, an evolved version of the enquête – a large group improvisation focused on a location or a theme. This is combined with verbatim techniques, observational research, interviews, re-jeu and creation. In an interesting development, later in the course a Lecoq graduate leads a project in autobiographical devising: devising with a personal and internalised focus. Conversely, while at the end of the second year, students across all three BA Acting programmes perform a classical tragedy; those on CDT, Alexander explains, precede this production with an extended clown workshop, addressing large-scale emotions and eventually coming to Shakespeare from the perspective of clown.

Ultimately, as in other conservatoire contexts, the acting style being promoted remains realistic. While at Lecoq, many British students – raised on an acting diet of restraint and introspection – were excited by his constant criticism, ‘c’est privé, c’est pas pour nous’ (‘this is too private, it is not for us’ (the spectators). They were fascinated by the exigency to give psychological processes external forms, and then play with these through amplification, reduction or multiplication (by means of choral movement) of the gesture (Lecoq, 2006: 110). But as teachers, they came to consider that, as Catherine Alexander puts it pithily, ‘Lecoq training is not good for Chekhov’. In a revealing description of the purpose and place of her course within a wider, text-led context, Alexander argues that staying too close to Lecoq, while heightening clarity of meaning, risks forcing expression to extremes, drawing attention to the performer rather than the character being played.

Central also offers an MA/MFA in Movement: Directing and Teaching course, whose joint leader is Ayse Tashkiran (at Lecoq, 1990–92). This course, which seeks to shape the thinking of future movement teachers, does not follow Lecoq’s structure, yet the teaching is informed by that most important of Lecoq principles: that by activating the body, one triggers imagination – Tout Bouge. A course aiming to ‘teach the teachers’ has to engage with Lecoq’s pedagogy, founded on the principle of the via negativa. This, as John Wright explains, ‘is a strategy where the teacher restricts comment to the negative, namely what is inappropriate and unacceptable, thus forcing the student to discover what is appropriate’ (Wright in Chamberlain & Yarrow, 2002: 72, italics original). Exercises would often be met with a curt dismissal – ‘non, c’est pas ca, asseyez-vous’ – leaving the students to do the thinking, the theorising, either on their own or in heated discussions after the class. The aim of this approach was to keep the spirit of enquiry alive and compel the making of new offers. It taught creative survival, yet there was also cruelty in it, says Joyce Deans.18 Success or failure seemed to depend exclusively on one person’s judgement, yet the vocabulary of the teaching – analyse de mouvement in particular – was both precise and shared among the student group, so that judgements made by Lecoq could be confirmed by the direct observations of the students. These could ‘see’ what was right and what was wrong, developing a sense of the ‘right aesthetic’.

Exciting as this might have been to experience as a student, in their own teaching practice, none of Lecoq’s British followers adopted this approach. Lincoln and Lefton, for example, felt from the earliest days the need to explain and advise. Later, as part of the transition of most acting courses to degree status in the 1990s,19 formal assessment founded on explicit, shared criteria became an academic requirement. Yet the attraction of a pedagogy which places such weight on student creativity remains. Lecoq-trained teachers often feel they are ‘drowning in Learning Outcomes’ and that, as John Wright wisely points out, the ‘safer and more conventional “learn and apply” model of teaching prevalent in British universities is likely to result in a greater orthodoxy than the groping in the dark process of the via negativa’ (Wright in Chamberlain & Yarrow, 2002: 73).
As we have seen, Lecoq-inspired teaching has been gradually incorporated into British theatre education. His practical skills and techniques found a receptive audience among movement teachers. His call for neutrality and simplicity as the foundation of the creative process was readily recognised by acting teachers, as it paralleled concerns with discarding ingrained habits also central to other approaches. And, via negativa notwithstanding, his pedagogy – his emphasis on specificity, rigour and on creating meaning out of impulse and play – has informed the ways in which those coming in his wake structured their own classes and programmes.

The ‘ideological’ challenge of his approach, the creation of original material and forms, has been largely bypassed, however. In some cases it was felt that his methods had been superseded by more radical forms of Live Art; in others, they cut across a devotion to the word as the source of dramatic action, or struggled against the trade winds of realism. In most cases, British actor training, like British theatre as a whole, has resisted the sense of the ‘devaluation and mistrust of language’ (Sanchez in Murray & Keefe, 2007: 22) which characterised avant-garde drama. Unlike their Continental counterparts emerging from Lecoq’s own school, those training and trained in Britain added Lecoq’s ‘heightened language of the body’ to the spoken word. In this, Lecoq’s reception may also have been hampered by Saint-Denis’s defining influence: the latter had stayed closer to Copeau, their common inspiration, in seeking to inject new energy into the classical repertoire, rather than originate a new form of theatre (Murray, 2003: 31).

However, Lecoq’s former students teaching in British institutions do not consider their adaptations to be a betrayal of the Lecoq legacy. He did not expect his graduates to stay faithful to an ideology, they assert; and this openness may account for the relative ease with which his methods – in contradistinction to those of, for example, Brecht, Grotowski or Barba – were inserted into other teaching models. As the banner greeting students to one of Lecoq’s theatrical soirees used to proclaim: ‘Don’t do what I do, do what you do!’

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Notes

1 I use this term in the sense in which it is used by Simon Murray (2003: 4) to distinguish it from text-based acting.

2 Similarities with Lecoq’s teaching are not coincidental: Lecoq had also absorbed key Copeau principles while working at the Comédie de Saint-Étienne with Jean Daste, Copeau’s son-in-law. In their different ways, Saint-Denis, Daste and Lecoq, all emerging from under Copeau’s cloak, strived to keep the latter’s legacy alive as well as to develop it.

3 Pisk’s students at RADA included Colin Chandler, the first Director of the College of Dramatic Art (founded 1949), later the School of Drama of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Dramatic in Glasgow; the actor Harold Lang, a passionate exponent of Stanislavskian methodology and a
major influence on the teaching of acting at Central; and John Blatchley, future Director of the Stage (acting) course at Central (1960–1963), and – following a celebrated split – co-founder with Yat Malmgren of the Drama Centre London, where he was Principal (1963–1972). Saint-Denis's and Pisk's students at the OVTS included Norman Ayrton, future Principal of the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA); George Hall, future Head of the Stage Course at Central; and Virginia Snyders, future Director of Drama at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Before his appointment at Central, John Blatchley had taught at the OVTS for four years, then at Saint-Denis's next school, in Strasbourg. And Litz Pisk replaced Malmgren as Head of Movement at Central (1963–1970).

4 Working alongside the equally influential Head of Voice at LAMDA, Iris Warren, another Saint-Denis adherent. Before the war, Iris Warren had been Head of the Voice Department at Michel Saint-Denis's London Theatre School, and had subscribed to the organic links between voice and movement that the French director sought to establish. Both she and Trish Arnold worked at LAMDA under the leadership of Norman Ayrton (Assistant Principal 1954–1966, then Principal 1966–1972), who had trained at the OVTS.

5 Now known as the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS).


7 The RSAMD also found the means to bring over the master himself: in 1981, Lecoq performed there Tout Bouge, his noted lecture-demonstration, and in 1982 he was given a Fellowship, a public acknowledgment of his importance to the artistic outlook of the Academy. In 1990, he returned to the RSAMD to give a two-week LEM workshop – the RSAMD Lecoq graduates participated throughout the workshop.

8 Lefton, a ‘favourite student’, actually took over Pisk’s classes at Central following the latter’s retirement in 1970, while a few years later Jane Gibson was teaching at LAMDA alongside Arnold.

9 Lecoq was aware of these tensions: ‘With the British I have to strip down their interpretive training. Mine is a school of creativity. I remind actors that they are “auteurs”’ (Hiley, 1988).

10 The passage contains a table of correspondences between Copeau’s and Lecoq’s masks.

11 In the 1980s, Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama had offered a devising-centred course in Community Theatre Arts (CTA). This course had featured some Lecoq influences, but its main pedagogical outlook was founded in the political, Brechtian traditions of the Theatre in Education and the Drama in Educations movements.

12 Philippe Gaulier, a noted clown and bouffon performer and teacher, was a student of the Lecoq school in the mid-1960s and returned to teach there in the late 1970s. In 1980, he left Lecoq and established his own training establishment, the École Philippe Gaulier. Between 1991 and 2002, the school operated in Britain, exerting a certain degree of influence on British actor training. Gaulier’s approach was said to be less anchored in physical techniques than that of Lecoq and more concerned with le jeu (play) and with capturing the carnivalesque, rebellious spirit of certain traditional popular forms of performance.

13 A similar pattern obtained in Wright’s second professional company, Told by an Idiot, which he started in 1990.

14 These were The Fool, The Trickster, The Innocent, The Mother, The Hero and The King. But, Wright says, ‘I am not a Jungian and I have since regretted calling them archetypes’ (interview 3.10.2014).

15 At the National Theatre Studio and the Royal Shakespeare Company. In workshops at the Royal Court Theatre, Wright went one step further, working through mask with emerging writers and ‘provoking’ the writing with inappropriate archetypes.

16 For example, for Michael Boyd’s production of Macbeth.

17 The image is in Ludmila’s Broken English, London, Faber and Faber, 2006.

18 Far from being a Lecoq specialty, similar approaches used to be widely spread in actor teaching. Unlike in other institutions, such as Saint-Denis’s schools (Baldwin, 2003: 126) or Gaulier’s workshops (Wright, interview 3.10.2014), in general, Lecoq managed not to affect his students’ confidence, because his comments said ‘this is not it’, rather than ‘you are not it’. Students had to fail, but they were expected to succeed the next time. And Lecoq’s excellent relationship with his students obviated the need for formal assessment. Tellingly, Lecoq often struggled with his French students, who sought psychological explanations. Many of the Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand,
had travelled to Paris to escape cerebral analysis and psychology; this was especially true of those such as Lefton, Gibson and Morris, who had already acquired strong movement and acting skills.

19 Since the establishment in 1904 of the first modern drama school, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), British drama schools tended to be relatively small, private institutions offering their students nothing more (or less) than a *sui generis* diploma or certificate of studies as proof of completion of their training. For those entering the profession for lifelong careers, this made little difference and was at times even a source of pride, setting them apart from the ‘run-of-the-mill’ graduates of universities and colleges. Others felt the need for qualifications which could be recognised both nationally and internationally for the purposes of further study, teaching, etc. Beginning with the late 1980s, the British Government began to exert considerable pressure, backed by financial measures, for acting (as well as art, design and dance) courses to convert to national qualifications, mainly degrees. By the early 2000s, all but a handful of courses had complied, often in the teeth of strong, vocal opposition from leading members of the profession, who feared a dilution of the vocational emphasis inherent in the traditional ‘training and apprenticeship’ model.

20 ‘What I feel was more important about this work was its emphasis on the performers being artists, the creators of their own work and the potential authors of their own theatre rather than any area of exploring physicality’ (McDermott in Murray and Keefe, 2007: 202–203).

**References**


Central School of Speech-Training and Dramatic Art (1961–2) *Prospectus and Brochure*.


