PART IV

Voyages and diaspora
INTRODUCTION

Rick Kemp

As the name of his school indicates, Jacques Lecoq sought to make internationalism part of the school's identity from its inception. The school estimates that over 5,000 students from at least eighty-four different countries have attended since its opening in 1956, and the school includes an interactive global map on its website showing the locations of those who are currently active. Most return to their home countries after the training, while some migrate, often to work with other Lecoq graduates. This section of the book, written largely by practitioners, most of whom trained at the school, surveys both the geographical and the conceptual spread of Lecoq's work in the professional contexts of performance and training—two practices that go hand in hand for many of his trainees.

Given the many companies that have been formed by the school's graduates, and the great number of individual practitioners, we cannot be comprehensive in the space that we have. So our strategy has been to provide representative examples of the international range of Lecoq-based companies and practitioners in operation over the last fifty years. We have also sought to avoid duplicating other writing, such as Simon Murray's examination of Mummenschanz (2003). The section includes artists at different phases of their careers, from long-established companies like Théâtre du Soleil and Footsbarn, to more recently founded companies such as Theatre O, Jammy Voo and Ad Infinitum. In addition to the devised theatre that is frequently associated with Lecoq graduates, topics range from opera to clown to teaching to film. The voices that speak in this section include those working in the realm of self-produced, independent theatre as well as internationally recognised practitioners like Julie Taymor, Simon McBurney, Toby Jones and Geoffrey Rush. We solicited contributions from as wide a geographical range as possible—as the book is being published in English, the response came predominantly from Anglophone writers. Nevertheless, the chapters describe activities in countries from the UK to South Africa to Chile, France, Canada and the US. We certainly hope that this volume will stimulate further examination of practitioners whose work evolves from Lecoq's training. Voyage is a core metaphor in Lecoq's approach, and these chapters provide insights into the ways in which his training and his graduates evolve as they travel.

Part IV begins with Helen Richardson's examination of one of the oldest established companies associated with Lecoq's approach. Now celebrating over fifty years of existence, Le
The Théâtre du Soleil was founded by Ariane Mnouchkine, who has often spoken about Lecoq's influence on her directing. Richardson draws on information gained from her participation in workshops, observation of rehearsals, and interviews with company members to define and trace the many enduring applications of Lecoq's work in the company's long history.

Although not as long established as Le Théâtre du Soleil, Complicite is now arguably as influential in world theatre, and connects the next two chapters in this section. In 'The Magic Flute and L'École Jacques Lecoq', Catherine Alexander reports on a conversation between Simon McBurney and William Kentridge. A Lecoq graduate, Alexander is an Associate Artist with Complicite and leads an innovative training programme at London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. McBurney, one of the founders of Complicite and now its Artistic Director, trained at L'École Jacques Lecoq in the early 1980s. South African visual artist William Kentridge also studied there in the same period, and each of them have recently directed productions of Mozart's opera The Magic Flute. This experience provides the focus for a conversation between them about how their training at Lecoq's school still influences their creative processes. Richard Cuming's chapter on Lecoq and Complicite widens the focus from directorial practice to look at how Lecoq's teaching is visible in the company's ensemble work. In particular, he focuses on Lecoq's emphasis on play, and how this and elements from his various 'Dramatic Territories' can be identified in shows such as Out of A House Walked A Man (1994), The Elephant Vanishes (2003), A Disappearing Number (2007) and The Master and Margarita (2012).

Vanessa Ackerman takes a look at another company that is also based in the UK, but at a significantly earlier stage of its development than Complicite. Ad Infinitum was founded in London in 2007 by Lecoq graduates George Mann and Nir Paldi, whose creative processes are strongly informed by the principles and methods of the Lecoq School. While the form and content of the company's work varies from production to production, internationalism is a constant feature, both of the company's personnel and of Mann and Paldi's individual work. In contrast to Mnouchkine and members of Complicite, Mann and Paldi studied at the school after Lecoq's death in 1999, so Ackerman's chapter demonstrates how his training continues to influence the creation of new work. This is also a feature of Emily Kreider's chapter, which surveys different generations of Lecoq-trained practitioners who have worked in the UK. As she points out, this criterion of location doesn't provide a great deal of fixity. Many of these artists (like herself) are from other countries, or have moved to other countries after working in the UK. In the case of one of her interviewees, Paddy Hayter, this move involves a whole company. Hayter is the Artistic Director of Footsbarn, a company that was founded in the UK in 1977 and which now bases itself in central France. The international mobility of many Lecoq-trained performers reinforces a notion that is frequently iterated in this volume: that the principles of performance that one learns at the school are foundational, and can be transferred from one language to another as well as from one style to another. These principles can be seen informing both the diversities of style and the commonalities of approach among Lecoq graduates who represent different periods, genres or stages of development in Kreider's interviews.

In another chapter that surveys the work of multiple artists, Susan Wright Thompson takes a retrospective look at three ensemble companies formed or influenced by Lecoq graduates in the US: UMO, Theatre de la Jeune Lune and Touchstone. In addition to discussing the appeal of ensemble for Lecoq graduates, Thompson considers some of the practical and logistical challenges that face American theatre artists who self-produce their work. Despite the successes of all three of the companies about which she writes, some of her chapter makes...
for cautionary reading for the actor/creator seeking to produce work in a country with limited state funding for the arts.

One American company that has managed to thrive in these circumstances is the Philadelphia-based Pig Iron. In his chapter, Gabriel Quinn Bauriedel, one of the company’s founding members, describes how their creative ethos has been influenced by two key concepts of Lecoq’s pedagogy – ‘disponibilité’ and observation. In the senses in which Lecoq uses the word, ‘disponibilité’ does not have a satisfactory singular equivalent in English. While ‘availability’ is the common translation, the term ‘receptiveness’ is more apt when describing a state of being. In Lecoq’s usage, the word also suggests a mental orientation and perceptual state of flexibility, readiness, responsiveness and openess, and it is this latter term that Bauriedel uses to communicate the bundle of potential meanings. In a similar way, Lecoq’s concept of observation is more full and rigorous than the everyday usage of the word might suggest. For instance, my recent experience of participating in the ‘Transversâles’ pedagogy course at the Lecoq School included not only the intense examination of phenomena such as sugar lumps dissolving in water and the movement of crumpled paper, but also the physical recreation of the rhythm of these processes. So in Lecoq’s training, ‘observation’ is an embodied activity, not purely visual. I hope these examples will help readers appreciate Bauriedel’s statement that observation takes place ‘through movement’ and that Lecoq’s training has left an ‘indelible mark’ on him and his colleagues.

The next two chapters in this section move north and then south of Pig Iron’s home in Philadelphia, traveling to Canada and then Chile. Martin Julien focuses on Toronto, describing the influence of Lecoq’s training on several generations of artists who have gained national, and in some cases international, reputations. Drawing on interviews with performers, directors and writers based in the city, Julien considers the unique moment in Canada’s cultural history that followed its popular centennial celebrations in 1967. This creates the context for the significance of Lecoq’s auto-cours as a model for collaborative creation at a nascent point in the development of a Canadian Anglophone drama. Julien proposes that this work helped to define Toronto’s ‘performance climate’ while remaining true to the rigour of its European roots.

Given that Julien’s focus is on Anglophone drama in Canada, it seems appropriate to give some mention of Lecoq’s impact on Francophone drama in Canada. Lecoq’s pedagogy has been a consistent feature at the Conservatoire de Musique et d’art dramatique de Québec (CMQ) since at least the 1970s. Notable graduates of the CMQ include Robert Lepage, who studied there from 1975–78 with Lecoq graduate Marc Doré as one of his teachers. The Lecoq-trained Michel Nadeau (Artistic Director of Théâtre Niveau Parking) has taught subjects such as clown, bouffon, mask and commedia at CMQ since 1986 and was the Conservatoire’s Director from 1996–2004. Lepage has become well-known internationally for his work as a creator, performer and director of multimedia work and was appointed the Artistic Director of the French Theatre of Canada’s National Arts Centre in 1989, a position now held by Brigitte Haentjens, who trained at the Lecoq School in the early 1970s. There are, of course, many more Francophone Canadians who have been influenced by Lecoq’s work, and we hope that this publication will stimulate further investigation of this field.

In her chapter on the La Mancha Theatre Company and School, Ellie Nixon describes how she started the company in 1989 with Rodrigo Malbrán, who was completing the teaching diploma at the Lecoq School while Nixon was in her second year there. The couple set up a permanent base in Santiago, Chile, in 1992 and established The La Mancha International School of Image and Gesture with the support and encouragement of Jacques and Fay Lecoq. Nixon discusses the challenges of introducing an innovative approach to theatre-making in
post-dictatorial Chile and relates La Mancha’s story to the concept of Enactivism proposed by Chilean biologist and neuroscientist Francisco Varela. Enactivism suggests that cognition arises from dynamic interaction with the social and physical environment – a proposition that resonates with the ‘mimodynamisme’ that Lecoq developed from Marcel Jousse’s philosophy. The influence of these two schools of thought link the content and approach of the school’s pedagogy with the ways in which its curriculum has responded to the evolving cultural, social and political context in which it is immersed.

This type of evolution in response to social context is also a significant feature of the next chapter on Magnet Theatre. Jennie Reznek gives the reader a fascinating insight into the practice of the company that she founded in Cape Town, South Africa, with co-artistic director Mark Fleishman after her return from the Lecoq School in 1987. Since then, they have engaged their performance and teaching with the complex and challenging social context of South Africa as the country dismantled the apartheid regime and deals with its legacy of violence and injustice. The two main influences on both their production work and their educational projects have been Lecoq’s pedagogy and the specific features of South Africa’s situation. As Reznek puts it, ‘Magnet Theatre’s work is the site for a conversation and a meeting between these two influences’.

The last two chapters in this section deal with topics that sprawl across many different locations: clown and the application of Lecoq’s teaching to film work. In the chapter on theatrical clown, I’ve drawn on my own experience of performing and teaching this style over a period of thirty years to identify some of its key features in the work of various practitioners. The sites for this work range from street performance through rock concerts to West End and Broadway theatre. In the process of writing the chapter, I came to realize that this style, like bouffons, can be considered a distinct form of comedy – one that has been defined by the principles that Lecoq developed and which remains identifiable within other genres and a variety of contexts. The principles are both technical and thematic – stupidity and low status are important, for instance.

Co-editor Mark Evans closes this section, writing about the way that some graduates have successfully applied Lecoq’s training to film. This transition is not an obvious one; although Lecoq produced a series of short comic films for French TV in the 1960s, it was always clear that his training was designed primarily for live performance. However, as is evident throughout this volume, he was adept at stimulating creativity in multiple ways, and prompting students to find their own paths. Evans draws on personal interviews with director Julie Taymor, and actors Geoffrey Rush, Toby Jones and Sergi López to explore how these very successful practitioners have used Lecoq’s training in the medium of film. Evans also points out how Lecoq’s concept of ‘mim du fond’ and the heightened awareness of movement and space developed by his training dovetails with the gestural communication and visual composition that is so significant in film.

Note

I was at the Jacques Lecoq School, who was already at that time, among the young people who wanted to do theatre—in any case who wanted to do it in a certain way—he already had a great reputation. We knew that with him we weren’t simply going to recite words, we weren’t going to find a theatre that was only black symbols on a white piece of paper. We knew there would be masks, the commedia dell’arte, in effect it was like something that I had glimpsed in the East. So I didn’t ‘meet him,’ I went as one goes to meet a professor, and then afterwards a master.

(Mnouchkine in Lecoq, Carasso, Lallias & Roy, 2006)

In 1959, as a student at the Sorbonne, Ariane Mnouchkine helped form the Association Théâtrale des Etudiants de Paris (ATEP), serving as its first president and organizing courses taught by teachers from the Dullin and Lecoq schools. In 1966, preparing for the physically rigorous demands of the Théâtre du Soleil’s third production, La Cuisine (The Kitchen) by Arnold Wesker, Mnouchkine sought training at the Lecoq school in the daytime, imparting what she had learned to the rest of the company in the evening (Freixe, 2014: 151). Mnouchkine was only able to pursue the first year of study, but this time spent at the Lecoq school was foundational in her training as a theatre maker, providing a method for working with the actors, including maskwork, and a model for developing new theatre pieces through collaborative creation. Her studies with Lecoq led to an ongoing investigation into the nature of theatricality as she envisioned a populist theatre, compelling in form and socially engaged in content.

The Théâtre du Soleil and the investigation of form

Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, founded in 1964, have, over the past fifty years, achieved an international reputation, theatricalizing politically charged events of historical and social significance—collaboratively created among director, actors, designers, playwright, and composer. Among subjects treated are the French Revolution of 1789, the genocide by the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia in the 1970s, the partition of India, the global mass migration of political and economic refugees during the latter part of the twentieth century, and other events that put the plight of the disenfranchised at the forefront.
Adhering to a strong social agenda, the Théâtre du Soleil troupe participates in various political actions and nurtures a sense of community in their relations with the public. Their venue, the Cartoucherie, a former ammunitions factory at the periphery of Paris, has become a place of pilgrimage for the many ardent admirers of their work. Mnouchkine is present at each performance to greet the public, show them to their seats, and otherwise attend to their needs. Members of the troupe serve meals to the public before the show and during intermission in the vast foyer of the theatre, and the audience can watch performers prepare their makeup and costumes before the show in a specially designated space adjacent to the performance area.

Productions are characterized by a highly theatrical aesthetic, an athleticism and corporeal expressivity, striking costumes and set pieces within a beautiful empty space – often architectural and emblematic of civic spaces – accompanied by musical underscoring, performed with an extensive array of instruments designed by the composer, Jean-Jacques Lemêtre, or gathered from various parts of the world. The acting tends to be presentational, with actors facing towards the audience as they speak their text, and the overall style is a mixture of aesthetic formality associated with classical theatre and high-energy physicality characteristic of popular theatre.

Many productions of the Théâtre du Soleil have been inspired by traditional Asian theatre practices, as well as European popular forms such as Commedia dell’arte, puppetry, and clowning. Mnouchkine has been challenged for her tendency to borrow from Asian theatre. She eschews realism: ‘Naturalism is a good word for a bad idea. Art is to do with transformation’ (Dickson, 2012); and she has quoted Artaud as saying that ‘Theatre is oriental’ (Costaz, 1984: 23). This statement has elicited criticism, from charges of naiveté to cultural appropriation. For
Lecoq, Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil

Mnouchkine, theatre is rooted in community and provides a sense of ‘ceremony’ or ‘ritual’ that revivifies the audience. Asian theatre provides a model for what she describes as a ‘specificity of theatre that is a perpetual metaphor’ (Costaz, 1984: 23) that works both on the human and metaphysical level. The predominance of Western realism as a style and method of training for the stage, emphasizing individual psychology and ‘what is not said’ (Costaz, 1984: 23) or subtext, motivated Mnouchkine to seek instruction elsewhere. She found the basis for her theatre practice both in her schooling with Lecoq and through an investigation of Western and non-Western forms that could provide the actor with methods for theatricalizing/transposing the work.

Training for the theatre

We need ears to say a text—it’s the body that listens, the body that suffers, it’s the body that submits before acting. These are the universal laws of the theatre, but there are few who remind us of them and Lecoq was one of them. These laws exist, he didn’t invent them. They exist before all of us. But he knows how to show them to us, to say either you obey these laws and perhaps you’ll do theatre or you ignore them and you want apply them, in which case you’ll do literature in costumes, at best, ‘at best.’

(Mnouchkine in Lecoq, Carasso, Lallias & Roy, 2006)

Seeking to understand the skills and values underlying theater as a discipline, Mnouchkine has shared an interest with Lecoq in defining the essence of theatre: what makes theatre, theatre? This notion of ‘universal laws’ of the theatre has been challenged by a postmodern perspective emphasizing the relativity/subjectivity of interpretation and understanding. However, in the work of Lecoq and Mnouchkine, rather than singular laws to be applied to all theatre, one observes a diversity of principles. Lecoq specifies: ‘Universality is not the same as uniformity’ (Lecoq, 2001: 40). Approaches by Lecoq and Mnouchkine range from an emphasis on authenticity – associated with realism and its concern for believability – to an insistence on transposition in which the authentic is made theatrical; the real is transformed into poetic metaphor on stage. Lecoq notes: ‘We aim for a level of aesthetic reality which would not be recognizable in real life in order to demonstrate how theatre prolongs life by transposing it’ (Lecoq, 2001: 34). Mnouchkine echoes this: ‘When one advances in the work of transposition, one falls back into life, one falls back into the essentiality of life: all of sudden, it becomes more real than the real’ (Mnouchkine, 1984).

Mnouchkine requires that the actors of the Théâtre du Soleil discover – through improvisation on concrete ideas, themes, events, character, stories, and actions – a transposition of these elements into meaning beyond what is immediately visible, becoming not only an action on the stage but a symbol of the human condition. Her rigorous approach denies a simple imitation of life or style of theatre, and calls for in-depth research on the part of the whole troupe into the dramaturgy of the mise-en-scène: form receives equal consideration to content as an essential factor in an effective, meaningful articulation of the story. For Mnouchkine, form relies in good measure on the physical expressivity of the actor. With Lecoq’s body-centered approach, Mnouchkine found a method for focusing on the dramaturgy of corporeal language and how physical expression could transform an idea or a dramatic text into poetic action. One approach Lecoq suggests towards achieving theatrical transposition is to ‘...begin with a human character and gradually, at particular moments of the performance, the elements or
animals in which it is grounded show through’ (Lecoq, 2001: 45), thus embodying the human with archetypal qualities that go beyond personality.

For the 2013–15 performance of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* by the Théâtre du Soleil, Serge Nicolaï, the actor creating the role of Macbeth, studied the physicality of an ape to render the character of Macbeth, suggesting a man who is aping a ruler, who is pushed by instinct to pursue power without the moral conscience necessary to regulate his own actions. Nicolaï would dangle his arms and look about, unsure of his next action, projecting a vacant expression and a body poised for violence as his instincts dominated his capacity for thought. Macbeth was no longer just a war hero overly eager to please his wife and achieve power; rather, he became a poor and ultimately failed imitation of his own aspirations – a reflection by Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil on the failed leaders of our times. The specificity and rigor of Nicolaï’s physicality underscored Mnouchkine’s focus on the significance of corporeal expression in the work.

**Methods and practices**

Mnouchkine’s training with Lecoq offered practical tools to conceptualize the dramaturgical requirements of the work: to diagnose the struggles of the actor in the quest for form and metaphor as well as providing prompts and exercises to help the performer in achieving theatricality. There are several Lecoq terms or concepts that are frequently used by Mnouchkine in her workshops, rehearsals, or in discussing the work:

- **Transposition.** Transformation of the real into the theatrical, already discussed in some detail.
- **L’état de disponibilité.** ‘A state of discovery, of openness, free to receive’ (Murray, 2003: 70). Mnouchkine often counsels actors, ‘sois disponible’, alerting the actor to be open to
receive what is given. She also exhorts the actor to be like a child, able to discover life with fresh eyes, and to play.7

• **Preparation.** The actor in a state of readiness to engage, using imagination and creativity (Murray, 2003: 103). Mnouchkine reminds the actor to ‘prépare-toi’ as he/she gets ready to enter a scene, implying the need to prime his/her creative abilities before going onto the stage. If the actor enters without his/her passion for imaginative play and creativity engaged, there is nothing, as far as Mnouchkine is concerned, that she can do to help the actor achieve a moment of theatre.

• **States.** The main orientation of the character (Lecoq, 2001: 168). Mnouchkine often asks the actor about his/her ‘état:’ the condition of the character that justifies his/her presence on the stage. This ‘état’ prepares the transposition: instead of the character entering a scene holding in his/her emotions – only letting feelings be revealed through a series of encounters over time – the character will enter in a full emotional state, for example, of love or anger, fear or astonishment, putting the emphasis on revealing the situation that caused the condition. In the production *L’Indiade* about the partition of India and Pakistan, Nehru entered in full anger and physically pummeled the editors of a newspaper whose reporting had incited violence between Muslims and Hindus. This commedia-like scene – both comical and horrifying – emphasized the political act of the editors and its consequence rather than the emotional suffering of Nehru over the situation: a real-life event is transposed, and the focus becomes the absurdity of violence. This moment was followed by a street scene showing the aftermath of the violence in which the bodies of a Muslim and Hindu are retrieved and placed, one in the lap of the other, in a rickshaw-style cart. Their intertwined bodies formed a pieta of shared destiny, highlighting the pathos underlying the conflict.

• **Parasitism.** Jacques Lecoq observes: ‘There should be no sense of the body “getting in the way,” nor of it feeding parasitically off what it should be conveying. Its foundation is dramatic gymnastic, in which every gesture, every attitude or movement is justified’ (Lecoq, 2001: 67). Mnouchkine reminds actors to ‘ne parasite pas’ when the performer feeds on the actions of others, such as relying on direct imitation of another or leaning on the other in order to achieve a connection.

• **Auto-cours.** The use of improvisation to develop group-devised material based on a given theme (Lecoq, 2001: 164). Mnouchkine uses this format as part of the training in the workshops she offers periodically. She proposes a general theme to the participants, such as Occupation or Exile, and the group divides into smaller cohorts of approximately five to eight members in order to develop improvisations on the theme, which are then presented to the whole group. The Théâtre du Soleil troupe, whether developing their own text or working on an established text, uses this model to develop the mise-en-scène. In their work on *1789*, they improvised on various events of the French Revolution leading up to the taking of the infamous prison, the Bastille, and its aftermath, in order to create text and action. In the development of the mise-en-scène for already-established texts, the troupe breaks into smaller groups in order to work on various scenes, in which the actor, regardless of age or gender, can attempt any role. The groups go off, create their own costumes with great care – using fabrics and remnants of costume items from past shows – and work through their improvisations, presenting their different versions of the scene at the end of the session. Through these improvisations, issues of articulation of the roles become visible, such as: How does a king move? How does he sit? In the case of rehearsals on *Richard II*, the initial efforts led to tired rehashes of cliché portrayals of Shakespeare – until Mnouchkine saw the film *Kagemusha* by Kurasawa and found an
approach to share with the actors that could help them rediscover the medieval world of feudal knights in Richard II through studying the comportment of an Asian equivalent, the samurai (Miller, 2007: 77).

- Les Enquêtes (Investigations). This is an active research, which takes place at the end of the first year of auto-cours at the Lecoq school, in which students spend time involved in the actual work/action to be explored theatrically, i.e. the Lecoq student will engage in some form of work or volunteer activity, such as assisting in a hospital, in preparation for creating improvisations and a final performance (Lecoq, 2001: 92). In developing La Cuisine – a play by Arnold Wesker about émigrés workers in a large hotel restaurant – in 1967, just following Mnouchkine’s training with Lecoq, the actors took on jobs in restaurants in order to fully understand the experience before translating it onto the stage. Over the years, devised original work of the Théâtre du Soleil, such as 1789, has begun with extensive research, in this case of the French Revolution, including lectures by experts, as well as research on and active exploration of theatrical forms that could best tell the story. Commedia, clowning, silent film acting (in response to the viewing of various silent film classics depicting French history), puppetry, and juggling were among the forms incorporated into 1789.

- Réjou and Jeu (Replay and Play). In The Moving Body, Lecoq describes this:

We approach improvisation through psychological replay, which is silent. Replay involves reviving lived experience in the simplest possible way. . . . Play acting comes later at the point when aware of the theatrical dimension, the actor can shape an improvisation for spectators using rhythm, tempo, space, or form.

(Lecoq, 2001: 29)

Figure 34.3 La Cuisine, 1967, theatricalized the hectic world of a busy kitchen staff juggling work and personal life, transposing the day-to-day into a poetic expression of a workplace out of control. Martine Franck/Magnum Photos.
Reflecting on the process engaged in with *La Cuisine*, Mnouchkine encapsulates the work of Rejeu (recreation of lived activities) and Le Jeu (transposition of these activities through play): 'It is the dialectic between total realism and the poetry of physical action that impas-sions me' (Bablet & Babley, 1979: 23).

Mnouchkine describes part of the process:

> We always worked through recreating the situation; to warm us up in the beginning, I created exercises: for example, I had a pile of dishes that I would break. I would throw them at the waitresses, saying to them: ‘it’s burning’ or ‘it’s cracked, you will cut yourself.’ The waitresses were almost on the verge of becoming jugglers. (Bablet & Babley, 1979: 23)

Reduced to rehearsing in an unheated space during midwinter, Mnouchkine reminisces: ‘We improvised on the sensations of heat, of grease . . . In the middle of winter, minus five degrees, in an unheated space, we did improvisations on heat! A marvel!’ (Bablet & Babley, 1979: 23).

Improvisation by the ensemble became the basis upon which the staging was then developed, transposing the kitchen into a metaphor for the pressures of a contemporary society where the human being is pushed beyond tolerance. Through improvisations on increasing the rhythm and tempo of the actor’s activities to a point of intense physical engagement at breakneck speed, climaxing with the physical and emotional breakdown of one of the kitchen staff, the Théâtre du Soleil achieved a synthesis of the reality of kitchen work and its metaphorical implications.8

• **Maskwork.** Lecoq describes maskwork:

> The expressive mask shows a character in its broad outline. It structures and sim-plifies the playing style by delegating to the body the job of expressing essential attitudes. It purifies the performance, filtering out the complexities of psychological viewpoint, and imposing guiding attitudes on the whole body. (Lecoq, 2001: 53)

Mnouchkine admits that she struggled with Lecoq’s work with neutral masks, and was never able to embrace that aspect of the training (Lecoq et al., 2006); however, she works extensively with character masks, specifically Commedia dell’arte and Balinese Topeng masks. Mnouchkine’s workshops offer exceptionally crafted masks, constructed by Erhard Stiefel, who studied for five years with Lecoq in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and who trained with Sartori, the Italian master of mask-making. A mask must be fully realized if it is to offer the actor the possibility for transposition, providing a clear articulation of a specific character, while remaining open to transformation through creative embodiment by the actor. The mask is an important diagnostic tool for Mnouchkine in observing the actor’s work. The expectation is that the actor be able to give him/herself over to the spirit of the mask and find an authentic physical articulation: a transposition from a realistic portrayal of human actions towards the poetic, in which movement in space, rhythm, tempo, and form are essential elements. The mask provides not only an immediate disguise – Mnouchkine is adamant about the need of the actor to disguise/transform him/herself in order to create the other onstage, which includes an insistence that the actors always rehearse in costumes – but also an aesthetic that compels the actor to let go of his/her own more naturalistic behaviour patterns in order to fulfill the demands of the mask. She is acutely aware of the corporeal design offered by
the actor as he/she enters the stage, and she will encourage the actor to ‘désigne-toi’ (design yourself), asking him/her – through the use of costume, movement, and creative interaction with others on stage – to realize a complete and integrated image of the character.

Several productions have relied on masks in performance, such as L’Age d’Or, a work in the tradition of Commedia dell’arte, using the archetype of the master, Pantalone, and the servant, Arlecchino, to portray the social mechanisms of modern-day life and the aspirations of immigrants in the face of a hostile exploitative society. In other works, such as the Shakespeares and L’histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi de Cambodge, the actors playing older characters also used masks, so that the focus was on the presence of an elder, rather than on a young actor incarnating an older character. When not sporting masks, the actors still see themselves as metaphorically masked, as Mnouchkine notes, ‘in theatre, the entire body is a mask’ (Williams, 1999: 110).

**Workshops and rehearsals**

Simon Murray describes, in his book on Jacques Lecoq, witnessing a presentation of the auto-cours at the Lecoq school in 2002 and being surprised at how closely they were observed by the instructors – with, in fact, some of the auto-cours being stopped before completion because they were ‘poorly conceived’ (Murray, 2003: 61). This aptly describes Mnouchkine’s approach to such improvisations done in Théâtre du Soleil workshops and rehearsals. In the workshops, few of the improvisations get past the first thirty seconds before Mnouchkine utters a resounding ‘Stop!’ because what the group has proposed lacks the potential for theatricality. Mnouchkine insists ‘Je veux du théâtre’ (‘I want theatre’). Mnouchkine requests the actors to ‘critique-toi’, giving them the opportunity to reflect specifically on the various practices and principles she has articulated throughout the workshop and why the practices and principles were missing from the improvisations.

**Conclusion**

Mnouchkine is a great believer in the value of an apprenticeship between master and student, having benefited herself from a formative period of study with Jacques Lecoq, whose in-depth work on the training of the actor helped shape her accomplishments in the theatre. Lecoq served as a role model not only in his methods, but in the quality of his presence, as a dedicated, vigilant observer. Mnouchkine embodies this presence, referring to herself as an attentive ‘midwife’ facilitating moments of potential theatre. Through her work with an ensemble of dedicated theatre artists at the Théâtre du Soleil – imbued with a respect for the craft of the theatre and its masters – Ariane Mnouchkine has provided, for over half a century, exceptional work, internationally recognized for its inspired exploration of the art of theatre.

**Notes**


2 Mnouchkine, in an interview with Andrew Dickson of The Guardian, said ‘. . . I hate the word “production”: it’s not produced, it’s a ceremony, it’s a ritual, it is something which is very important for your mental strength, and you should go out of the theatre stronger and more human than when you went in.’
3. Mnouchkine: 'If there had only ever been psychological-realist work, the theatre would have been swept away in ten years by cinema. Our survival consists in putting into theatre what can only exist in the theatre (Williams, 1999: 95).'

4. Translated from the French: 'Quand on avance dans le travail de transposition, on 'retombe' dans la vie, on retombe dans l’essentiel de la vie: tout d’un coup, cela devient plus vrai que le vrai.'

5. In conversation with Duccio Bellugi, who played Malcolm in the production, he confirmed what was readily apparent in the performance, that Nicolai had based Macbeth’s physicality on an ape (July 2014).

6. Magazines, with former French president Sarkozy on the cover, were highlighted in the Théâtre du Soleil bookshop during the run of the show to emphasize the production’s allusions to contemporary politics.

7. Unless otherwise noted, references to Mnouchkine’s comments in workshop or rehearsal settings are based on notes I took during workshops and rehearsals I attended. As well, examples of Théâtre du Soleil practices are based on interviews and conversations with members of the company. I have had the opportunity to observe the work of the Théâtre du Soleil since 1988, attending rehearsals for L’Indiade, ou l’Inde de leurs rêves and Les Atrides, participating in Théâtre du Soleil workshops in 1988 and 1993, led by Mnouchkine and company actor Georges Bigot (in 1988), and workshops by Duccio Bellugi and Maurice Durozier in 2009, as well as engaging in conversations over the years with various members of the Théâtre du Soleil.

8. For a video clip of this transposition of the kitchen scene, see http://www.ina.fr/video/I05318458.

References


